## *Sermon ~ Bible Reading Luke 2:1-21*

### Expected

Mary had no doubt that she was expecting – it's hard to avoid when you're that close to giving birth.

There was a wider sense of expectation. The angelic announcement: "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Saviour was born – Christ the Lord!" ushers in the fulfilment of the age-old promise to Abraham and to David – a promise that was renewed by the prophets. The language is full of significance – this is a Saviour, not from the oppressive yoke of Rome but from the all-pervasive shackles of sin and death. This is the promised Messiah, the chosen and anointed Heir of David, the Ruler who will bring God to his people in a new way. This is 'the Lord' – this title carries all the overtones of the Old Testament language used for God himself and has an underlying challenge to the power of earthly rulers who claim lordship for themselves. This announcement opens the door to hope for humanity. It has been expected and longed-for by God's people, throughout their years of oppression and injustice.

### Unexpected

But what is less expected is the nature of the recipients of the message. In general terms, shepherds were not highly regarded. The religious hierarchy, the political powers, and the wealthy are all bypassed, as the good news comes to the poor and the marginalised. Luke will return to this theme as he describes the Jesus who is the friend of the outcasts and sinners, the women and foreigners. This is the marvellous truth of the Christmas story – which captivated Luke and transformed the early followers of Jesus. Perhaps familiarity has made us blasé. So let us spare no effort to recapture the wonder and awe that the shepherds would have experienced, as they were surrounded by the vast choir of angels, and were confronted with a baby who shaped the destiny of the human race.

## *Food For Thought*

'Joseph Damien was a missionary in the nineteenth century who ministered to people with leprosy on the island of Molokai, Hawaii. Those suffering grew to love him and revered the sacrificial life he lived out before them. One morning, before Joseph was to lead them in their daily worship, he

was pouring some hot water into a cup when the water swirled out and fell onto his bare foot. It took him a moment to realise that he had not felt any sensation. Gripped by the sudden fear of what this could mean, he poured more hot water on the same spot. No feeling whatsoever. Damien immediately knew what had happened. As he walked tearfully to deliver his sermon, no one at first noticed the difference in his opening line. He normally began every sermon with, "My fellow believers." But this morning he began with, "My fellow lepers."

In a greater measure Jesus came into this world knowing what it would cost him. He bore in his pure being the marks of evil that we might be made pure. "For this I came into the world," he said (John. 18:37).'

(Ravi Zacharias, Deliver us from Evil quoted in 'Leadership Magazine', Spring 1997)

## *Going deeper*

Questions on the Bible passage and sermon for you to think about during the week, either on your own or in a small group:

1. How would you describe Luke's storytelling in Luke 2:1-21? What does this tell you about his intentions?
2. Summarise in your own words the message of the angels in Luke 1:11, 12.
3. Discuss how you could use your summaries of Luke 1:11, 12 to follow the shepherds' example of telling others what they'd heard.