

As we immersed ourselves in the histories of Rome and 1st century Palestine, how comforting to know God was silently, simultaneously moving the Kingdom of Heaven into the kingdoms of Earth...

...how God is moving in each of our lives, nudging and prodding us to know God deeper, and to trust God will have final say...

...moving heaven and earth to tell God's story of a rebirth of hope for a future where there will be no injustice, no war, and no more tears.

Amen. May it be so.



<sup>[1]</sup> "The First Christmas: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus' Birth" © 2007 by Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan. HarperCollins Publishers, NY.p. 232

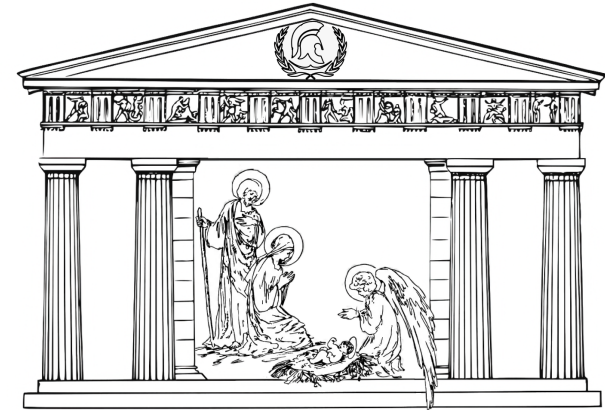
<sup>[2]</sup> p. 220

<sup>[3 & 4]</sup> C. Clifton Black, Otto A. Piper Professor of Biblical Theology. Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ.<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/christmas-day-nativity-of-our-lord-ii/commentary-on-luke-21-7-8-20-4>

<sup>[5]</sup> Borg and Crossan.p. 238

<sup>[6]</sup> p. 237

# A CHRISTMAS CAROL



## OVERTURES FROM THE (HOLY) GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE

### SESSION SIX "LUKE'S OVERTURE" PART III AND CONCLUSIONS

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS OR SO WHAT?

LUKE 2

FOCUS SCRIPTURE:

Luke 2:14

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth  
peace among humankind in whom God delights."

It is fitting to have studied Matthew and Luke's overtures as we are entering the season of Advent. Past, present, and future are realized during Advent. As Dickens' A Christmas Carol unfolds, Ebenezer Scrooge is reminded of his past and happier times. He is made to contemplate how he is living his own life in the present, and he looks with fear and foreboding to a sad future. During Advent we tell and retell the stories of John and Jesus. Our daily lives get wrapped around the axel preparing for the Christmas celebration (not without angst and stress), and we are fearful of what our future holds. We not only worry about our own families, but the future of our nation and our world. We hear ancient words of prophecy, not only about Jesus' birth, but about the time when God's plan for ultimate salvation will come to pass. Just like Scrooge, Advent offers opportunities for change and for hope. "It is a season of expectant anticipation, of anticipatory joy. It is also a season of repentant preparation for a future that is yet to come."<sup>[1]</sup>

### I. CHRISTMAS PAST:

The hope for justice and the promise of peace had not come to pass. In this setting, the stories of the first Christmas have extraordinary power. Both Matthew and Luke proclaim: Jesus is the means through which God's promises are, and will be, fulfilled.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### Read Luke 2:1-20

Note, on our supplemental timeline, the dates of Jesus' birth and Quirinius' reign of governorship. Note, also, (Matt. 1:18-2:1) Matthew places Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, not Nazareth. There is no story of registration or an over crowded hotel, no lowly shepherds, no angel choruses. Keep in mind we are more interested in what Luke is trying to tell us, rather than reading an historically literal account.

1. Were they married by this time? (v.5)
2. What might Luke be desiring to say about these two young "parents-to-be" living under an authoritative government?
3. In normal circumstances, to whom and where should an announcement like this have been delivered?
4. What is Luke saying about a God who comes to those without political, religious, or economic power?
5. Look at verses 10-11; who is being given what?

### II. CHRISTMAS PRESENT:

"God's news is incomprehensibly good: "great joy for all the people." This day there is not one shred of judgment, wrath, anger, or punishment — for us or anyone else. Do we want freedom from that which shackles us? This day, and all the days to come, it is ours for the asking. Do we really want peace?

"This day, and all the days that follow, God's peace — whole, sound, irrepressible, permanent — is available 'on earth to those whom he favors' or 'who know God's good pleasure.' That promise carries more than one connotation: God has chosen those with the capacity to embrace his goodness to receive it."<sup>[3]</sup>

1. Consider what the "actors" in this passage are doing, what activities could be labeled tedious, dreary, monotonous?
2. Of what is Jesus capable at this time?
3. What breaks in?
4. What are the various responses?

*"BOOM! Not only one angel but an entire celestial chorus electrifies the night sky before a handful of outliers who know nothing of what happened in Luke 1:5-80. The difference is that between a lonely candle in the dark and a light that blows out the motherboard of Consolidated Edison. God has decided to invade our tired, banal lives with a vision and message so spectacular as to be incredible — unless, like those shepherds, we are ready to seize and believe it."*<sup>[4]</sup>

5. If Advent is a time for introspection and "repentance" [thinking differently] What might be our responses?

### III. CHRISTMAS FUTURE:

Once you see the political meaning of Advent and Christmas, it seems so obvious. Not to see, it seems a kind of blindness, whether habituated or willful.<sup>[5]</sup> American Christianity has aligned itself with Empire, to its detriment. Empire is about the use of superior power – military, political, and economic – to shape the world as the empire sees fit. In this sense, we are the new Rome.<sup>[6]</sup> Just as Scrooge was able to change the course of his future, we, too, are meant to be changed by Advent and Christmas.

Note the actions of the shepherds

1. What are they doing? vs. 8
2. What do they receive? vs. 9-14
3. What are the responses/actions?  
vs. 15-16  
vs. 17  
vs. 18 (response of all who heard)  
vs. 19 (Mary's response)  
vs. 20
4. How does God give us hope by what was given to the shepherds?
5. How might we gain hope for our future by acting as the shepherds?