

Christmas Eve – 2019
Announcements

I was invited to the Combined Women's' Circle lunch last week and, while I was already in process of thinking about a Message for tonight, part of our conversation inspired me. And the inspiration was this rock I'm holding. One of the women was talking about her father's gift for creating pet rocks and you might be wondering what a pet rock has to do with Christmas Eve?

We've already heard the announcement from the prophet Isaiah:

a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

The reason for us being here this afternoon was already given roughly 500 years before it happened.

The announcement is not given to the powerful and mighty, but to the seemingly small and insignificant. It is even given to the smallest of the villages of Judah as we heard from the prophet Micah.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are only a small village among all the people of Judah.
Yet a ruler of Israel,
whose origins are in the distant past,
will come from you on my behalf.
And he will stand to lead his flock with the Lord's strength,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. (Micah 5:2,4)

First Isaiah, and then Micah, made the announcement we hear today. It was a difficult time for God's people and they needed to hear a word of hope. It is in the most difficult and challenging times that God's Word is often heard most clearly.

The announcement was made to Mary: an unlikely person for such an important announcement. Then, Joseph, already uncertain and confused about what to do, heard a message of confirmation and hope and certainty. And these announcements were again before it happened.

Finally, the great day had arrived and angels trumpeted the news:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

All the hosts of heaven proclaimed the birth of a Savior.

Those who heard could not help to be affected. The shepherds who heard the news left their jobs, left their sheep. "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us," they said. They came, they saw and they left, "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen."

And it wasn't just the local, months or years later, the gospel of Matthew will tell us that magi, wise men, will come from the east, having seen the announcement by starlight, to find the newborn king of the Jews, not only of the Jews, but of all the world – for all time. "When they saw the star," over the place where Jesus was, "they were filled with joy!" (Matthew 2.10) They found what they had been looking for those many years.

So, what does all this have to do with a pet rock?

If we fast forward years, we come to another announcement. Jesus will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowd will greet Him with another announcement,

"Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the LORD!
Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!" (Luke 19.38)

Others tried to silence the announcement by saying, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!" (Luke 19.39)

And now, finally, we get to the pet rock. He [Jesus] replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!" (Luke 19.40)

Nothing, not even rocks, can help but be changed when they have an encounter with Jesus. No one who comes to Jesus, experiences His glory and feels His love for us, cannot leave without being changed. The world is transformed by knowing Jesus.

If you have come today having already met Jesus, leave announcing the glory of God – leave with joy because the star has led you to this place. If you have come, still searching, my prayer is that that you have experienced the peace that passes all understanding and, with the prophets and the angels and the shepherds and the wise men, and even pet rocks, praise God for His gift of peace and love.