Text: Luke 2:1-7, Christmas Eve

**Introduction**

Had a conversation with Annessa a couple of weeks ago. I drove the same car for just short of 20 years. Old enough that it had a tape player in it. No hooking up a phone to it. So I listened to plain old radio a lot more. I casually mentioned to her my observation that the Christmas radio stations had over that time steadily removed the sacred songs and it had become much more boring. The juxtaposition of Hark the Herald Angels Sing with Santa Baby, or O Come All Ye Faithful with All I Want for Christmas, was more interesting and could be left on longer. I told her that I just couldn’t take the modern continuous Rudolf and friends for long. And she informed me that the radio **was** mixing in sacred songs. So I turned off my phone for the past couple of weeks and turned on 99.9. And yes, they did indeed have a mix. Not quite as heavy as my memory of 25 years ago, but enough for the frisson of secular and sacred to work.

That little experiment kicked off another observation as I have been driving kids around a lot more in how what is on the radio used to inspire the conversation in the car. But now, everyone has their own spotify list and headphones and so the car trips are this combination of too quiet and yelling real loud so that someone might hear you through earphones and their own music zone. Why engage in conversation, argument and concession when you can have everything you want, the way you want it, forcing the world out?

Now the temptation to do that has always been with us, it has just been democratized and made available to many more people. But let me compare two versions of the same secular Christmas song. Judy Garland, always more of a wistful figure, originally sang Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas in Meet Me in St. Louis. And her version has one particular line and a couple of time references that establish it as a hope or a wish. “Someday soon we all will be together/ If the Fates allow/ Until then, we'll have to muddle through somehow.” The time references for Judy were all “Next Year all our troubles will be miles away.” Even at Christmas, the fates might not allow…next year might still be next year. But it is still Christmas, so we muddle through.

Such sad sack stuff was not for Frank Sinatra. The time references for the Chairman become “from now on our troubles will be miles away.” And we don’t muddle through we “hang a shining star upon the highest bough.” The hope has been turned into realization.

**Eschatology**

And one day hope will certainly be realized. That is part of the promise of the Christ child. “Peace on the Earth, goodwill to men, from Heaven’s all gracious king.” And the time will come when Christ shall raise his scepter decreeing endless peace. “Look up for golden is the hour.” The time will come when all the hours of time’s deepening stream are brought to that golden hour and not a small choir sent to shepherds but the full hosts of heaven are dispatched. This first advent necessitates that second one. The realization surely comes.

**Text**

But the first advent is more of a muddling through. God seems to desire the frisson of the secular and sacred thrown together. The first advent asks for faith and hope as we muddle through, not the full revelation.

It is none other than Caesar Augustus who orders all the world to be registered. Registered so that he could tax everything. Tax law of all very common things inspires the trek of the Holy Family from Nazareth to Bethlehem where the prophets long saw the messiah.

Joseph is the son of David, but that and $100 might have gotten him and Mary a place in the inn. As it was the heir of David in the City of David shares a place with the animals.

It took the intervention of the angels – “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife” – to get Joseph to muddle through the obvious embarrassment.

Angles are sent to shepherds.

The Magi, the wise men, the scholars of the age, are lead by a floating star, have to stop and ask directions, and then instead of being taken to a palace are probably lead to Nazareth.

The true light was in the world, yet the world did not know him. His own people did not receive him. But the darkness could not overcome it. And those who did receive are made the children of God.

The story is paradox after paradox. It is this scandalous jumble of sacred and profane. It is muddling through and waiting for the fullness of time…next year. It is stars on the highest bow that bring trouble right now.

**Christology**

If you wish to ponder it – that is all the great and mighty wonder of the incarnation. True God and True man, begotten of the Father before all world, yet incarnate of the Holy Spirit by the Virgin Mary in this time. This impossible mixing of things that don’t go together. How will this be? With God all things are possible.

The greatest of those possible things being the forgiveness of sins. The curse that is found everywhere finds its cure in this manger. Hail redemption’s happy dawn. All of us weighed down by that load – the shame and guilt. All of us who have walked in darkness. Here is the light. Here is the one who crushed that serpent’s head. Here is Immanuel, God with us, who heavenly high and holy, deigns to dwell with us most lowly.

For some reason, in the mystery of the will of God, he loves us and would not see the sinner die. He would not let the fates mete out deserved justice, but came to us in grace and truth.

**Moral**

And so God himself has come to us. Not in majesty and might as we might have expected, but as a child headed for a cross. The wondrous gift is given, in this unassuming wrap.

Not in power, but in meekness. Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die. Not in fulfillment, but by faith. Not in realization, but in hope. Not in merit, but in steadfast love.

The only question is what we do with such a gift. Do we reject it because it is not pure enough? Do we send it back because it is not what we desired? Do we put it on the shelf for when next year comes, if next year comes? Or do we ponder these things in our hearts? Do we pray descend also to **our** hearts. Cast out **our** sin and enter into **us** today? Do we receive Him…and join the chorus: Oh Come let us adore him? Evermore and evermore. Amen.