

Good News for the Nations *Luke 2:22–40* Christmas 1B 12-31-17

Have you ever “missed the memo” and felt out of place at work or school? Ever been left out of the loop on the latest news? People talking about a movie you missed, a party you were not invited to, or a joke you didn’t understand. Maybe limited hearing or not knowing the language caused you to be left out.

Such were Gentiles among Jews in Biblical times. The Jews had a shared history, religion, language, and the prophetic promises of a coming King. This hope united them in familiar customs and worship. Gentiles had no such hope. They clung to whatever gods might give a rhyme or reason to their existence. Or they had no gods at all. They were those on the outside looking in.

Then in the city of David, Bethlehem, a Savior is born. Not a Savior of the Jews alone. But a Savior of the Gentiles also. This we see in the visit of Kings from the east led by God’s star, in Christ ministering to Gentiles, holding them up as godly examples, such as the good Samaritan, the leper who thanked him, and the faith of the Roman centurion whose servant he healed.

All this while his fellow Jews resisted him. John writes that He came unto his own and his own did not receive him. That was obvious when Herod tried to have the boy Jesus killed, when the Pharisees rejected him, tried to trap him, and finally arranged for his crucifixion.

The apostles Peter and Paul were among the first Jews to get that Christ was good news for all nations. By visions given to Peter and Roman centurion Cornelius. God brought them together so that this Gentile would hear the Gospel and be baptized. Paul, who first persecuted Jewish Christians, later became a missionary not only to fellow Jews, but also to Gentiles.

In today’s Gospel reading, we hear Simeon’s familiar words: “*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.*” The Holy Spirit promised Simeon that he would see the Messiah before he died. Now he is ready to depart in peace.

Jesus has just become the Light to the Gentiles of all nations. Gentiles is a translation of *ethnos*, for ethnic groups, and peoples is *nations*. Jesus is the pathway to peace and paradise for all. Hear what John wrote in His Gospel: **1:9** The true light that gives light to EVERYONE, was coming into the world. Hear what Jesus said of himself. **3:16**, God so loved the *world* that He gave his only son, so that *whoever* believes in him will not perish have eternal life. **8:12**. “I am the light of the world. *Whoever* follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” **14:6** I am the way and the truth and the light, no one comes to the Father except through me. **All** are saved, but **only** through Jesus.

Look at the world through God’s lens. He sees all of Earth. We see our small town neighborhood. He sees people of every language, color, economic status, nationality, and lifestyle. We see our neighbor who looks and talks like us. God sees every individual as needing a Savior from sin, and for each one He sent His Son to save. We see people who may or may not know that they need saving. We seem content not to know which is the case. .

We don’t want to rock the boat or get involved in their personal beliefs, even though their belief may separate them eternally from God. Since they look like us, we tend to assume they believe like us. They’re good people, just let them be.

Or they don’t look like us, but have their own culture and religion. If we tell them about Christ, we might be called disrespectful, insensitive, or even racist.

But Christ saw no such cultural barriers. He came to us as a non-English speaking Jew, never visited Texas or ate chicken fried steak, and yet here we are: Christians, saved by a foreigner who didn’t even look or talk like us. Why would we put up barriers that keep us from sharing the Good News of Christ for all?

Remember what it’s like to be left out of the loop, not to be invited or included. Do we want anyone to feel that way about the greatest News the human race has ever heard? Do we want them to feel uninvited to the greatest home ever? Our attitude of “live and let live” really might be “live and let die.”

Jesus is Lord of all. Let all know about it. Don’t be too concerned about how. If you have the will, he will show you the way to share and care for all he came to save. Let’s leave out no one. He didn’t. Amen.