

Sunday, December 23, 2007

Rev. Dr. Walter Brueggemann Old Testament professor emeritus writes:

*"Advent is being ready for the saving one  
who will come when we cannot save ourselves."*

I think that is a very interesting quote.

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I think it is interesting because it ties in with the two names the angel told Joseph the child would be called. Some traditional people name their children after special people in their life like parents or grandparents. I know this one family that named their son after the mother's father who had just died tragically. I know another family that names their children after their ancestors. To keep the memory alive them. People now-a-days seem to look through name books or sometimes have all their children's name begin with the same letter.

Names in the bible often have meanings. Jesus is greek for Joshua or Isaiah and it means "Save". Nice name for a child. What are you going to name your son? What are you going to name him. I think I'm gonna name him "Save".

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The other name given to the child is Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God is with us. Many people have been named Jesus, Joshua and Isaiah. Many people have been called messiah. Messiah is the anointed one. It is one who is given the job to do God's work, God's bidding.

When we hear that the baby's name is going to be Jesus we know what he is going to do. He is going to save us. When we hear that he will be named Emmanuel, we know that God is with us. This Jesus, Joshua, Isaiah, this Messiah is God. And God will travel with us and God will save us.

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Who is the saving one? It's Jesus, his name tells us so. The saving one is God, come to us in Jesus. Well that's easy enough said. It is a wonderful thing but it takes faith.

In our reading for today we have two men struggle with faith. We hear about King Ahaz. Ahaz was king when Judah and Isreal still had a kingdom. Remember David united the kingdom, then Solomon was king. After Solomon the kingdom split. One was Israel and one was Judah. Ahaz was king of Judah. He,

that is Judah was being threatened by neighboring kingdoms. They wanted Judah to join with them to break from Assyrian control. Ahaz's choice was to either join with them or turn to Assyria for help.

Isaiah came to Ahaz with a message from God that he should not join in alliances but just trust him. God was even offering to give him a sign to prove the authenticity of the prophecy. Ahaz refused quoting scripture "you shall not put the Lord to the test." Ahaz may have thought himself righteous, quoting scripture however could not put his trust and faith in God's message. In fear he turned from God to Assyria for help.

Our last advent reading for this year tells of Joseph's fear. He wasn't being threatened by armies. His good name and honor was being threatened. Mary the woman he was engaged to was found to be with child. She hadn't been with him so he knew it wasn't his child.

Can you imagine how he must have felt. How embarrassing to have to tell your family and friends, not to mention heart breaking. Your fiancé pregnant with someone else's child. To add insult to injury she said she hadn't been with anyone. She said she was still a virgin.

Matthew tells us that Joseph was a righteous man, a man right with God. He did what he thought a righteous man should do. He would dismiss Mary quietly. They both had had enough humiliation.

Ahaz had been visited by God's messenger Isaiah, Joseph was visited by another one of God's messengers and angel. In a dream the angel told Joseph that God had another idea of what was righteous for him was in this situation. "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, the child is from the Holy Spirit. It will be a son and you will name him, Jesus. Why are they going to name him Jesus? Because he is going to SAVE. Save his people from their sins.

Matthew tells us that this fulfills God's word through the prophet, they shall name him Emmanuel". Why are they naming him Emmanuel? Because he is God with us.

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Hopefully this advent, even with all the busyness we have realized that we need saving. Hopefully we have realized that we cannot save ourselves.

God comes to us today and says, don't be afraid. You may have little things going on in your life, you may have big things. What ever it is God says don't worry, trust me.

Hopefully let us look for the babe in the manger. Hopefully Christmas eve, Christmas day and the rest of our lives we will be filled with hope and joy and promise in Jesus' name. God gives us a sign to show the authenticity of his promise, it is the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Amen.