

THE NAMING OF JESUS January 1, 2023

Numbers 6:22-27

Luke 2:15-21

In the gospel of Luke, the story about how Creator and the Mighty Spirit who moved like a powerful wind across the face of the waters of the earth is present in this universe. The identity and ongoing work of Creator/Great Spirit is made known through ordinary people. The shepherds looked upon the glory of Creator's mighty presence in their world and listened to the good news which the angelic host proclaimed. During a great darkness, bright light shone and hid the splendor of the twinkling stars. A messenger was heard, reassuring the shepherds tending their sheep in the fields with those calming words, **"Be not afraid!" Luke 2:10.** Then the angel speaks good news, not only for the Hebrew People...the People of Shalom...but for the Peoples from all of the nations of this planet.

Read Luke 2:15-21. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

These shepherds responded with curiosity, asking themselves, **"Is this the time about which the prophets have spoken throughout the ages to every generation since their people had been set free from slavery and oppression in Egypt?"**

OR "Is this another time when we will find ourselves waiting once again for the fulfilment of all of the promises made by the Lord God Almighty...the Source of Life and Love?"

These shepherds set out for Bethlehem to find out the answer to these questions.

These questions are questions which we too can ask ourselves now in this generation.

As listeners to this story, we know what these shepherds will discover. In Bethlehem, these ordinary people will find that a man from the house of King David will have journeyed to his home village along with his beloved, a young woman who is great with child. Two more ordinary people will have followed the decree set out by Caesar Augustus for all living under the PAX ROMANA and at the same time, Joseph and Mary will accomplish the purposes of Creator and the Mighty Spirit. Surrounded by animals in a stable, these shepherds find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

This infant however is no ordinary child. This infant is unique in all creation. This child's identity and role in this creation shows us the characteristics and work of Creator/Great Spirit in this universe.

Among Indigenous Peoples, a child is a gift from Creator/Great Spirit. Among Human Beings who believe in a generous and loving Creator, every child is a gift from Creator/Great Spirit. As a sacred gift, each child becomes a teacher for parents and others in our respective extended families and communities. Each child possesses unique characteristics and abilities for the well-being and survival of our families of origin, our extended families, our communities, and our complex web of other Human Beings who share this planet. Each child deserves to live among Human Beings who will treasure them and do all in their power to help them discover their authentic selves on their particular journey through life. EVERY CHILD MATTERS. Each child deserves to be the subject of thanksgiving, praise, joy, laughter, and song.

These shepherds discover that all that they have been told by messengers who speak the words of a generous and loving Creator/Great Spirit are true. With enthusiasm, these shepherds share the good news as they have experienced it with this newborn child, his mother, the man who cared for them both, and the animals gathered in that stable. Then, these shepherds left and shared all that happened with members of their extended families, their friends, and others in their communities.

The woman who gave birth to the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger ponders her experience of bringing new life into creation, the warmth and steadfast love of her partner Joseph, the creative energy of the animals who witnessed this birth, and the enthusiasm of the shepherds whose curiosity has been satisfied and transformed into praise and joy. The woman who gave birth also pondered her own experiences with messengers and messages from Creator/Great Spirit. Like other young mothers, she would also wonder what her newborn son would accomplish with his life and how his life would come to an end.

Reread Luke 2:15-21. What is God saying to us in this passage?

Like the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Luke moves quickly into the birth of the infant Jesus. Both Matthew and Luke bear witness to the generosity and lovingkindness of the Source of All Life and Love who has spoken words of good news to particular individuals in each generation in the past AND continues to speak words of good news in this generations AND will speak words of good news to generations yet to be born.

Before Europeans arrived on the shores of this part of the planet, Indigenous Peoples had developed a trust in Creator/Great Spirit to provide from the abundance of this creation for themselves, for their older relatives, for their descendants, and for their non-human relatives in creation. For thousands of years, Indigenous Peoples developed comprehensive cultural and spiritual practices which strengthened their relationships between themselves as Human Beings and all of the non-human Beings in the universe whom they considered to be their relatives. From birth to death, a multitude of ceremonies guided each member along their journey developing their connections with Creator/Great Spirit, teaching each member to care for each other, and protecting the most vulnerable. Each person learned how to contribute to the health and wellbeing of their extended families and respective communities. In contrast to the Settlers and Newcomers, Indigenous Peoples did not seek to subjugate others, claiming the land, wealth, and resources from the soil, air, and waters for themselves or their monarch. Indigenous Peoples did not tenaciously hold the gifts of Mother Earth as personal possessions or as belonging to the Crown for future exploitation. Indigenous Peoples did not establish themselves as superior to others. Instead, Indigenous Peoples sought to live in peace and friendship. Indigenous Peoples sought to honour other Human Beings as equals. Indigenous Peoples learned that Grandfather Sun rises each day to shine over both Human Beings and non-human Beings and that Grandmother Moon provides light at night. Indigenous Peoples learned that the rains and snows fall on both those who live in a good way as well as those who are lost and do not express gratitude to Creator/Great Spirit for the abundance of the gifts of creation freely given each and every day. For strangers arriving on their traditional territories, Indigenous Peoples made treaties so that the lands and waters along with all of the gifts of creation could be shared. When Settlers and Newcomers arrived, Indigenous Peoples sought ways to make treaties which would be mutually beneficial and reciprocal for as long as the sun shines, the grasses grow, the forests flourish, and the waters flow. All parties to these treaties also experienced constraints in making room for each other in the sharing of these lands and waters. Each party to the treaties were expected to care for the lands and waters so that these gifts of Mother Earth given by Creator/Great Spirit to those who agreed to these treaties would be available for their children, grandchildren, and their descendants as these gifts had been available to the Ancestors of the Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years.

As parents who trusted in the generosity and lovingkindness of the Source of All Life and Love, Mary and Joseph took their infant boy to be circumcised and identified by name in ceremonies conducted by spiritual leaders among the Hebrew People. This unique child was given the Hebrew name Yehoshua.

Among Indigenous Peoples, no distinction is made between males and females during the first seven years of life. Women gather to support the pregnant woman in the work of bringing new life into the world. At the time of birth, these women sing honouring Creator/Great Spirit, the woman giving birth, the unique role which women play in nurturing new life until the child takes her or his first breath. Newborns are held by members of the family and community or laced into a moss bag or secured on a cradleboard. At some point in time after birth, the parents take a

child to an Elder and offer tobacco tied in a small piece of material as a sacred medicine. After the Elder receives a vision about the child, the Elder provides the child with her or his Spirit Name. The meaning of this Spirit Name identifies the unique characteristics or abilities which will become more evident over time and shape the unique contribution of this person to the health and wellbeing of her or his family and community. During a lifetime, a child can be given other names which reveal her or his unique characteristics or abilities.

Rooted in a complex web of ongoing relationships with Creator/Great Spirit, with other Human Beings in their families and communities, and with all of their other non-human relatives, Indigenous Peoples offer the followers of Jesus an amazing gift. Indigenous Peoples challenge all Human Beings to trust that a generous and loving Creator/Great Spirit will provide for all that we need on a daily basis and will teach us to care for the most vulnerable on this planet. Indigenous Peoples challenge Christians to focus on the teachings and healing work of Jesus of Nazareth in understanding the character and ongoing presence of Source of All Life and Love in the universe today and in the future.

Reread Luke 2:15-21. What is God asking us to be and do?

For us in this generation, the good news is that we can be set free to live as generous Human Beings and to care for ourselves, other Human Beings, and the universe with lovingkindness.

Let us affirm every child as unique and treasured as the most special gifts given to us to cherish.

Let us do all that you and I are able to do to assist every child to live into their unique gifts and abilities on each part of their journey towards a just and new creation.