

Carol Service

NARRATOR: The world felt dark, horizons were bleak, enemy forces amassed on fragile borders while kings and rulers struggled to forge alliances that might help them withstand the coming conflict. Communities were displaced, rumours of oppression and atrocity were rife - people felt as though they walked in constant darkness. Yet even amidst this world of uncertainty and fear, voices of hope were raised. Holy prophets, those who listened for the voice of God even amongst their own struggles. Those who spoke for God's very self, foretold a day when salvation would dawn.

READER 1: But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come one who will be ruler over God's people. One whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. [Micah 5:2]

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace. [Micah 5:4]

NARRATOR: Some were gripped with such certainty that they spoke of these things as though they had already happened.

READER 1: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [Isaiah 9:2,6]

Carol:

NARRATOR: And centuries later, oppression and fear reigned again. Enemy armies once more invaded the land and earthly emperors issued decrees that few dared to disobey. As helpless inhabitants of their occupied domains were uprooted and displaced, one young couple were forced to make the harrowing journey to their city of origin.

READER 2: In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. [Luke 2:1-5]

NARRATOR: But this was no ordinary journey and the child to be born was no ordinary child. Months before, while kings and rulers devised their grand schemes, plotting with and against one another, an Angel from God had visited a forgotten corner of these troubled lands, echoing that same message of hope and promise that prophets and bards had spoken centuries before. For this refugee mother was part of God's greater reality:

READER 2: The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.' [Luke 1:28-33]

Carol:

NARRATOR: But God's ways are not our ways. And this child would not be born in some great palace or surrounded by the trappings of wealth and power. Instead he was born as a homeless outcast, rejected by those who should have cared, signalling a life that would encounter every human affliction and struggle. For while we may wish for God to sweep away our enemies and eliminate our struggles, his name would indeed be Immanuel – God with us, God with us in the joys and successes of life, God with us in our pain and confusion, God with us in our deepest fears and struggles – a God who became present at the very centre of the most desolate of circumstances.

READER 3: While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no place available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom God's favour rests.' [Luke 2:6-14]

Carol:

NARRATOR: They could have remained in the fields with their flocks, disturbed enough by all that they had witnessed, but they chose to seek out this child; they chose to set aside other priorities; chose to discover; chose to believe. For even the hosts of heaven in all their startling glory were only sign of something greater – Something to be found in the helpless fragility of a new-born, his first life cries piercing the night air from a borrowed feeding trough.

READER 4: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. [Luke 2:15-20]

Carol:

NARRATOR: And so they shared their story. Proclaiming to all who would listen that God's eternal promise is ours to receive. And now it is we who gather. Like those whose timeless story we share, we too are confronted by a world of uncertainty and conflict. Borders are invaded, communities displaced and the narratives of despair might so easily overtake us. But like those ancient shepherds who rushed through the night to greet this new-born child, we choose to believe, choose to declare salvation, choose to see beyond immediate circumstances to embrace again God's eternal promise. We join our voices with those who in faith declared amidst all this difficulty and struggle - God has come to us.

READER 5: The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.

He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human intent, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. [John 1:9-14]