

Luke 2:1-20

(Slide of Milky Way galaxy during the reading)

**We live in a universe of staggering beauty.** The Milky Way galaxy is shaped like a giant pinwheel of jewels. Our own sun is on one of the arms, about three quarters of the way out. There are between 200 and 400 billion stars. It takes our breath away when we can get somewhere dark enough to really see it. But even on the black side of a mountain, the size of the Milky Way, which is so much of its beauty is impossible to take in.

Here is how an artist has imagined it.

(slide 2)

And this is how to build your own model.

In this container are about 15 million grains of salt. (It was a slow week) Go out and buy 26,000 containers and lots and lots of black cloth. Place each grain just over 11 kilometres from the next one. When you have each grain of salt placed like that, you will have a model of the Milky Way.

<http://www.utne.com/Science-Technology/Obscene-Astronomy-and-Street-Smart-Stargazing.aspx?page=2>

Amazing.

We live in a universe of staggering beauty.

Let's take a look around us for a minute....

Slides .....

So what is beauty?

That is tough to say. Some day, dig out your old high school yearbook and show your kids how you beautiful you looked for picture day. You can try to tell them that it's not a mullet, but a mullet, it won't matter, they will still laugh.

One person finds mountains majestic, another loves open skies.

Beauty cannot be captured or defined. A picture, no matter how many megapixels, no matter how great a monitor or projector is never the same as the experience.

And, when it comes to physical beauty, we learn over our lifetimes what we all knew as little boys and girls. The ones who love us most and care for us most are truly the most beautiful and the most handsome people of all.

What does beauty do in us?

Doesn't it draw us out somehow? It is as if that echo of the voice is saying, "Hey, over here, listen to this!" "Look at this!" I think it pulls wonder out of us and that wonder lives close to the place where worship resides.

When our lives are flat and discouraging, beauty can inspire hope again. The men in the movie Shawshank Redemption live in a grind. One drab day follows the next. One of the inmates locks himself into the warden's office and gives the men a gift or beauty they have never known.

(Shawshank Clip)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=se8TM696HRY&feature=related> **1:58-2:40**

Does beauty make you wonder about the artist, or the writer, or the creative love that inspired the work?

Oscar Wilde said that a cigarette offers pleasure that is exquisite but somehow leaves us unsatisfied. (as quoted by Tom Wright in Simply Christian) Beauty leaves us unsatisfied too. We always need to see it again, or to see something new, or to show someone what we have seen.

Would you agree that our capacity for beauty drains away when we hide from God or live dishonestly and in fear of each other?

What we create, design or build always reflects what is in our hearts and the one we are working for.

Consider the contrast between cathedrals, offered as an act of worship to the living God, and Soviet apartment blocks, or maybe buildings offered to the gods of commerce and industry.

And consider the two announcements in this story.

Caesar's decree was carried by soldier-messengers to the farthest corners of the empire. A memo from the machine. Line up. Register. Pay taxes.

I have never heard a song written about Caesar's decree. Ever. It is ugly.

Now, imagine this announcement. It is so beautiful that the carols we sing and the story we hear draws wonder from us year after year.

There were shepherds, one reaching for the coffee pot, one putting his harmonica away, another patching his cloak, three walking the perimeter, checking on the flock, the rest in sleeping bags.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They froze in place, terrified!

We can only imagine, what was that light like? The light that shone around them? In Revelation it says that the voice of God is not like Morgan Freeman, but like the sound of rushing water. I love that description. Rushing water can be so loud that you can't shout above it, but at the same time it does not hurt your ears.

Was the light brilliant, but not blinding?

**The beautiful message needs a beautiful setting.**

"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger".

They struggle to take it in. The Christ has finally come. We can only imagine, "is that what the moment will be like when we finally see the Lord?"

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angels, praising God and saying:

They are announcing the two things that we long for, the two things God's law calls us to, the two things that the prophets cried over, the two things Jesus teaches us to pray for, the two things in life that always slip away from us, the two things that hold the keys to lasting beauty....

Glory to God in the highest....

-all honour and praise, all credit and glory be to our God forever and ever. They anticipate the day when we will finally leave all our fears and

shame and guilt and be able to worship with all our hearts. And in all we do, in our own creating and designing and working and telling of stories we will capture something of God's beauty and offer it back to him.

Glory to God in the highest.

On earth peace, shalom, the overflowing of good will that happens between people who finally dare to forgive, who finally dare to welcome strangers as friends, who finally love deeply enough to do justice.

The prophets ran out of words to describe what this will be like.

They went poetic. (not haiku)

The trees of the field will clap their hands.

The wolf will lie down with the lamb.

The glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

We shall be like him. Could that be that we shall be beautiful in the same way that he is beautiful, for we shall see him as he is.

These are the two things that Jesus' life, death and resurrection will accomplish. His coming again will bring it to completion. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined what that will be like".

Sometimes our own struggles or worries can make it hard for us to see the beauty around us.

A number of years ago we had a pastor-spouse retreat at the Entheos retreat center near Calgary. I went for a walk around supper time with Ron Nydam our speaker. We walked through the woods. All I could see was my own misery at the time. Ron would notice things around us and point them out, a

grouse, a ground squirrel, a flower. He was amazed by the beauty I did not even notice.

Our friend Mark Vanderwees works in Nicaragua in community development. He wrote this week of working for four years with a small community on the Rio Coco river, near the border with Costa Rica. Things were going well. The people were making progress, learning to feed themselves and their families. Then a small plane crashed, full of drug money. The people grabbed all they could, then began to spend all they could, fights broke out, one person was killed.

In everyone's family and life and ministry there are situations, discouraging situations that sometime seem to fall right out of the sky. Maybe it is in large part for that reason that the voice encourages us to lift up our eyes, to look to the beauty that reflects the character of our Lord. He loves you. He rejoices over you and he tells you and me over and over and over, "you ain't seen nothing yet".

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.