

"There is no wall between us and Jesus"

As you know Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem at Israel. If we go to Israel this month and visit Bethlehem for Christmas, we need to go through an inspection and there are soldiers standing there. Sometimes we have to show our passport, because Bethlehem is a Palestinian Territory. But because of recent diplomatic situation, people throw stones and having conflict at there, so we might not enter Bethlehem this year which means we cannot celebrate Christmas at Bethlehem.

The name of Bethlehem appears in the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. The time is around 1100 years before Christ, the widow, Naomi who lost her husband and two sons in the foreign country, Moab, has come back to her hometown, Bethlehem with her daughter in law, also the widow, Ruth who is a Moabite. **People of Moab is the old enemy for Jews** since the time of Moses.

Naomi left her hometown, Bethlehem with her husband and two sons because of the famine, but she lost her family and came back with only her daughter in law who has a totally different culture and language. We say in Japanese KOKYOU NI NISHIKI WO which means "To come home in triumph", but it was not her case at all. Naomi told her old friends, please call me "Bitter".

But God's gracious eyes and attention were upon these widows who were in the lowest position of society. Later, Ruth met the relative of Naomi, Boaz, and had married Boaz. They became wife and husband and they had a boy. Usually this is a good end of a story, but God had more plans. Now the dot became the line.

Dear brothers and sisters, please keep in your mind. The mother of Boaz was Rahab and she is a pagan and enemy of Israel, Canaanite and she was a prostitute, and as I said Ruth came from the old enemy of Jews. The son who was born from Boaz and Ruth was Obed, and Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of eight sons and the youngest one was David. The generations of the family must had stayed in Bethlehem, because David was raised in Bethlehem as a shepherd.

One day, God sent the Prophet Samuel to the family of Jesse to find the king of Israel. Seven of Jesse's sons stand before Samuel, but there are none to satisfy

God's will. Samuel asked Jesse, "Do you have any other son?" Yes, the youngest son, David who was not there, was taking care of the sheep in the field during their interview. Brothers and sisters, David was not counted! but God's eyes were upon him and he became the second king of Israel.

King David was faithful to God, but he committed adultery with his subordinate's wife, Bathsheba and she had a child, Solomon who became the king of Israel after David, and as a descendant of Solomon, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. **Jesus was born a thousand years after Solomon. Yes, Jesus was in the family tree of prostitute, pagan, and adultery.**

Jews value **genealogy** incredibly. Usually they put their pride and hope in their genealogy. Our Lord, Jesus accepted to be a part of these people, we would like to conceal or remove such ancestors from our genealogy, but the Bible actually highlight these people, and declared Jesus was born in this genealogy!

The town of Bethlehem was a small village at that time. It was less than a hundred households. Mary and Joseph could not find a place to stay, and they finally found a stable. We see the stable in postcards and ornaments, but according to scholars, the stable was like a natural cave, and the cave was used by shepherds who did not have the place to live. You can still see these caves in Bethlehem. Jesus must have born in one of these caves after a thousand years later of David.

As I mentioned in the beginning, there are no Jews who come to Palestine Territory, Bethlehem today. Even Jewish tourist bus driver would not drive into the town. It is too dangerous. How ironic that they cannot come visit the birth place of their Savior. Yes, Jesus was born in the family tree of prostitute, pagan, and adultery, but there is a tall wall between them.

And that is not only Jews. We have much more knowledge than the people in that age. The Wise men could find Jesus at his age but today's Wiseman does not know what happened in Bethlehem. We, the people who are always busy with so many other things, and facing so many problems really need Jesus Christ. Jesus was born in the manger, that means he did not have wall between us, but the wall of our heart is too tall, and we cannot see him.

For many years, we spent Cold War age, yes, that is coming from the difference of our ideology, but since 911, our problem come from our difference of race and

religion. I heard sometime, Is Christian create that conflict? Honestly speaking, it might be right. But please remember, as we have been told today, Jesus Christ who is we, Christian is believing accepted to be a part of genealogy who has pagan and enemy. And then, where is the problem? Yes, that is the problem of man and woman who called themselves "Christian". Yes, that is the problem of human. We should accept that truth humbly and repent it.

How was your past year? Can you see the manger? Do you feel emptiness even though you had everything you want to have? Do you have someone who gives you the direction of your life? Do you and your family has a foundation which you have confidence to keep stand? Are you going to rely on only your experience and knowledge? Please remember our experience is only a couple of decades and our knowledge does not give us the all answers.

We can change these today! You might have something you cannot share to anyone. You might think that nobody will understand and accept what you are feeling and thinking. But please remember, **Only Jesus can choose his genealogy among all people on the earth.** He was given such a privilege, but he accepted to be born under the name of the disparate widow, prostitute, pagan and murderer laid down on the manger and died for us on the cross. He knows and understands what you are thinking and directs the rest of your life. He will be your foundation. He has the words which really direct our life.

Christmas is the day of his birth, so we cannot say "Season's Greeting" It is not the greeting of a season but it is the beginning of your new life, so we proclaim to the heaven and earth, we all say, "Merry, Merry Christmas!" Let us pray.

Translated by Makoto Okura