

BIBLESTUDY

Bible study on Luke 2, presented by Rev. Prof. Dr. Fernando ENNS during the WCC Central Committee meeting (February 2008)

Friends, we had invited Lucas Vischer to give this bible study but unfortunately due to his illness he had to turn down our invitation. So I hope you are willing to listen to my reflection this morning before we invite you to share your thought.

Glory to God – and Peace on Earth. This is the motto that has been chosen for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, to mark the culmination of the Decade to Overcome Violence in the year 2011. In the morning-prayer we have listened to the words from the gospel of Luke: Glory to God and peace on Earth is right at the centre of the Christmas Story. Our reflections this morning should provide some orientation on our common journey towards the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

Luke 2 contains the story that I personally remember the best from my early childhood. Having grown up in a white middle-class protestant church in Southern Brazil, it was common to organize a Christmas play with the children – every single year. Usually I did not want to be one of the angels, since they were dressed like girls. It was much more exciting to be one of the shepherds, since they looked like real boys and had long sticks in their hands. But the best choice was to be Joseph: dressed like a boy but not having to say a word on stage –no memorizing of difficult and strange words from the Bible. Just sitting there with Mary. – What I understood in those days was very basic: something very special had happened. Joseph and Mary were poor people. The shepherds were afraid of the angels, but later they rejoiced with them. And this new-born child was different from us kids, it had a strange impact on everyone who encountered it. In the end everyone was very happy and we got presents. I remember the wonderful feelings of becoming part this very special story.

Today I am grateful for this early Christian formation. And when I read these words in the gospel of Luke now, it strikes me, how realistic and “down to earth” the story is told: It was a time of an Empire. Due to some new security-laws, everyone was asked to register – the whole of “*oikoumene*” – that is far more then the members of the World Council of Churches. It is the inhabited earth – in those days the Roman Empire. The government was seeking control over its people: regional provenance, ethnicity, name, place of birth, religion – everything had to be registered. The government wanted to know as much as they could. These security-laws have immediate impact on the lives of ordinary people, independent of their individual situation: migration sets in. Joseph and Mary, although pregnant, had to move – to Bethlehem. When I listen to a friend of mine who travels to Bethlehem to see her family – I can only hope that it was easier in those days to get there – without that terrible wall we see today. Joseph and Mary end up being homeless in this situation. Displaced in their own context. The child is brought to life in a context of marginalization – a story full of structural violence.

Shepherds are close by, people under very simple economic conditions – at the margins of society. In the darkest hour of night, they are the first ones to hear the good news, the “*euangelion*”: Confronted with the Glory of God, their first reaction is fear! Of course they

were terrified, because whenever they were confronted with power, it meant suffering. "Do not be afraid" is the first part of the heavenly message. "Do not be afraid", "I am bringing you good news, of great joy for all the people" – in Greek: "*panti to lao*" – "Laos" means "ordinary people". The birth of this child implies joy and good news first of all to the ordinary people! "To you"! is born this day a "saviour", a "Lord" – different from all political self-styled saviours, different from the Lords of this world. A "messiah" for the Jews, a "*kyrios*" for the Greeks – for everyone to understand clearly the political connotations. And beyond: this has a cosmic dimension too: a multitude of the heavenly host praising: Glory to God and Peace on Earth.

Just imagine the simple Shepherds, beginning to realize what on earth is happening here. Now they want to see, proof, if it is real. And when they find out, they became the proclaimers themselves. Those who had not been heard, who had been reduced to their economic function in the existing political order, who had to suffer under security laws, become the messengers of the revealing good news. Of course the society reacted "amazed" by such a breaking news! And Mary? The mother, the woman becomes the treasurer of the words: pondering them not in her intellect, but in her "heart": the place of the will and of emotion, of passion. This seems to be the appropriate place for the word of God within a person. The shepherds return to their places, not unchanged: glorifying, praising God, having encountered their saviour, knowing who their "*kyrios*" is, carrying the wisdom "Glory to God and – finally – Peace on Earth". They return full of joy. **Glory to God and Peace on Earth.**

Friends, let me highlight four aspects, that seem to be important here for our further reflections towards the Ecumenical Peace Convocation:

1. Doxology first!

Peace is a gift of God. Peace is an eschatological reality. It is not something *we* are making, it is something we are awaiting, expecting. In this message of incarnation, God reveals himself to us as he becomes one of us, giving himself to this world of violence. In this way the kingdom of God becomes a reality for us. As Jesus says (John 14:27) "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." This is God's promise: violence will be overcome – entirely. Therefore: rejoice, Glory to God – yes, peace building starts with Doxology. To hold on to this promise of the peace of Christ prevents us from linking our human ideologies too fast and too simple to God's will. Starting with doxology to the triune God provides us with a clear orientation: there is no theological legitimization of bringing peace with violence, there is no such thing as a "holy war", there is only a "holy peace with justice". Anticipating the fulfilment of God's shalom is the lens through which Christians understand the world.

2. Peace on Earth – is peace with the earth.

The incarnation is more than God reconciling humankind with Godself. Revealing himself in the Love of Christ, the incarnation prepares the redemption of all creation. What we find here is a theological concept of cosmic dimension: "*eirene tās gās*" – peace on Earth (!) is included in the will of God's peace. Therefore we cannot reduce peacebuilding to

interpersonal conflicts or structural violence but include our responsibility for nature, even the climate.

And to be sure: it includes people of other faiths. The Motto is not: Glory to God and peace to the members of the WCC. The good news has direct implications on how we relate to people of other faiths – the 138 Muslim leaders should expect a clear and substantive reaction from us to their “common word”.

3. The movement of incarnation as a model for the local congregation

The movement of incarnation tells us something about how to become a peace – building – church. At the very beginning of the DOV I visited a church in Boston, USA. They were confronted with terrible violence among their youth on the street. Only after they had realized that they would have to incarnate themselves into the context of violence – leaving behind the sacred walls of their beloved church building, they were able to actually overcome violence. They started to live the ministry of reconciliation where the violence took place – being with the ones inflicted in it, going out to the margins. That is the wisdom of incarnation.

4. The Community of Churches is called to be an icon of reconciliation

“ora et labora” is the wisdom of medieval monks, as it was to many Church Fathers. Praying and Working for Peace is inseparable. The universal church – that is the community of churches – is called to be an icon of God’s peace. And it is! Ecumenism is reconciliation. Since the church ecumenical transcends all confessional, ethnic, national, and economic boundaries, it is the People of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit – or it is not the church at all. This tells us something about the outstanding gift of reconciliation that was entrusted in the church. There is no such thing as a holy nation, a holy ethnic group, or a holy economic dogma, there is only the one holy church.

Brothers and Sisters, recalling the wonderful feelings that I had as a child at Christmas, back in that church in Brazil, I am filled with that same joy again today: something very special has happened. We have received the greatest gift of all – God himself coming to Earth announcing Peace for all! Leaving his Spirit with us we become part of this God-story – in order to play a role in it. Thanks be to God for this *“euangelion.”* Amen.

GEBET:

Make me a channel of your peace...

LUT Luke 2:

1 Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, daß ein Gebot von dem Kaiser Augustus ausging, daß alle Welt geschätzt würde. 2 Und diese Schätzung* war die allererste und geschah zur Zeit, da Quirinius Statthalter in Syrien war. 3 Und jedermann ging, daß er sich schätzen ließe, ein jeder in seine Stadt.

4 Da machte sich auf auch Josef aus Galiläa, aus der Stadt Nazareth, in das jüdische Land zur Stadt Davids, die da heißt Bethlehem, weil er aus dem Hause und Geschlechte Davids war, 5 damit er sich schätzen ließe mit Maria, seinem vertrauten Weibe;* die war schwanger.

6 Und als sie dort waren, kam die Zeit, daß sie gebären sollte. 7 Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn und wickelte ihn in Windeln und legte ihn in eine Krippe; denn sie hatten sonst keinen Raum in der Herberge.

8 Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend auf dem Felde bei den Hürden, die hüteten des Nachts ihre Herde. 9 Und der Engel des Herrn trat zu ihnen, und die Klarheit des Herrn leuchtete um sie; und sie fürchteten sich sehr.

10 Und der Engel sprach zu ihnen: Fürchtet euch nicht! Siehe, ich verkündige euch große Freude, die allem Volk widerfahren wird; 11 denn euch ist heute der Heiland geboren, welcher ist Christus, der Herr, in der Stadt Davids. 12 Und das habt zum Zeichen: ihr werdet finden das Kind in Windeln gewickelt und in einer Krippe liegen.

13 Und alsbald war da bei dem Engel die Menge der himmlischen Heerscharen, die lobten Gott und sprachen: 14 Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe und Friede auf Erden bei den Menschen seines Wohlgefallens.*

15 Und als die Engel von ihnen gen Himmel fuhren, sprachen die Hirten untereinander: Laßt uns nun gehen nach Bethlehem und die Geschichte sehen, die da geschehen ist, die uns der Herr kundgetan hat. 16 Und sie kamen eilend und fanden beide, Maria und Josef, dazu das Kind in der Krippe liegen.

17 Als sie es aber gesehen hatten, breiteten sie das Wort aus, das zu ihnen von diesem Kinde gesagt war. 18 Und alle, vor die es kam, wunderten sich über das, was ihnen die Hirten gesagt hatten.

19 Maria aber behielt alle diese Worte und bewegte sie in ihrem Herzen.

20 Und die Hirten kehrten wieder um, priesen und lobten Gott für alles, was sie gehört und gesehen hatten, wie denn zu ihnen gesagt war.

21 Und als acht Tage um waren und man das Kind beschneiden mußte, gab man ihm den Namen Jesus, wie er genannt war von dem Engel, ehe er im Mutterleib empfangen war.

NRS Luke 2:

1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered.

4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child;
18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

GNT Luke 2:

- 1 εγενετο δε εν ταις ημεραις εκειναις εξηλθεν δογμα παρα καισαρος αυγουστου απογραφεσθαι πασαν την οικουμενην
- 2 αυτη απογραφη πρωτη εγενετο ηγεμονευοντος της συριας κυρηνιου
- 3 και επορευοντο παντες απογραφεσθαι εκαστος εις την εαυτου πολιν
- 4 ανεβη δε και ιωσηφ απο της γαλιλαιας εκ πολεως ναζαρεθ εις την ιουδαιαν εις πολιν δαυιδ ητις καλειται βηθλεεμ δια το ειναι αυτον εξ οικου και πατριας δαυιδ
- 5 απογραψασθαι συν μαριαμ τη εμνηστευμενη αυτω ουση εγκυω
- 6 εγενετο δε εν τω ειναι αυτους εκει επλησθησαν αι ημεραι του τεκειν αυτην
- 7 και ετεκεν τον υιον αυτης τον πρωτοτοκον και εσπαργανωσεν αυτον και ανεκλινεν αυτον εν φατνη διοτι ουκ ην αυτοις τοπος εν τω καταλυματι
- 8 και ποιμενες ησαν εν τη χωρα τη αυτη αγραυλουντες και φυλασσοντες φυλακας της νυκτος επι την ποιμνην αυτων
- 9 και αγγελος κυριου επεστη αυτοις και δοξα κυριου περιελαμψεν αυτους και εφοβηθησαν φοβον μεγαν
- 10 και ειπεν αυτοις ο αγγελος μη φοβεισθε ιδου γαρ ευαγγελιζομαι υμιν χαραν μεγαλην ητις εσται παντι τω λαω
- 11 οτι ετεχθη υμιν σημερον σωτηρ ος εστιν χριστος κυριος εν πολει δαυιδ
- 12 και τουτο υμιν το σημειον ευρησετε βρεφος εσπαργανωμενον και κειμενον εν φατνη
- 13 και εξαιφνης εγενετο συν τω αγγελω πληθος στρατιας ουρανιου αιουνων τον θεον και λεγοντων
- 14 δοξα εν υψιστοις θεω και επι γης ειρηνη εν ανθρωποις ευδοκιας
- 15 και εγενετο ως απηλθον απ αυτων εις τον ουρανον οι αγγελοι οι ποιμενες ελαλουν προς αλληλους διελθωμεν δη εως βηθλεεμ και ιδωμεν το ρημα τουτο το γεγονος ο ο κυριος εγνωρισεν ημιν
- 16 και ηλθαν σπευσαντες και ανευραν την τε μαριαμ και τον ιωσηφ και το βρεφος κειμενον εν τη φατνη
- 17 ιδοντες δε εγνωρισαν περι του ρηματος του λαληθεντος αυτοις περι του παιδιου τουτου
- 18 και παντες οι ακουσαντες εθαυμασαν περι των λαληθεντων υπο των ποιμενων προς

αυτους

19 η δε μαριαμ παντα συνετηρει τα ρηματα ταυτα συμβαλλουσα εν τη καρδια αυτης

20 και υπεστρεψαν οι ποιμενες δοξαζοντες και αινουντες τον θεον επι πασιν οις ηκουσαν και ειδον καθως ελαληθη προς αυτους

21 και οτε επλησθησαν ημεραι οκτω του περιτεμειν αυτον και εκληθη το ονομα αυτου ιησους το κληθεν υπο του αγγελου προ του συλλημφθηναι αυτον εν τη κοιλια