

Jesus was born into a particular time and place. There were stories that helped Jesus understand the world and history. We also are in a particular time and place and have stories that help us make sense of our world. As American stories about George Washington, Sakakawea, Lewis and Clark, Harriet Tubman with the Underground Railroad, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and Martin Luther King Jr's Dream are some stories that shape us as Americans. For Jesus there were 1800 years of stories that shaped him we refer to them as the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible and we started reading them on September 10, 99 days ago.

We started reading in Genesis about Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob has 12 sons. Then Joseph is the one who gets them to Egypt (1800-1500BCE). Next is the book of Exodus telling about God freeing the people from slavery in Egypt and Moses' leadership in the 40 years of wandering in the desert (1500-1240BCE). Next God's people moved into the promise land and settle 12 different areas as 12 separate tribes (1240-1000BCE) in the books of Joshua and Judges. Starting in 1000 BCE is the united kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon. In 922BCE the kingdom splits with Israel (Northern) & Judah (Southern). In 722BCE Assyrian capture Israel and 586BCE the Babylonians capture Judah. Taking the people into exile for 50 years. This reading from Isaiah is set during the exile in Babylon, at about 540BCE.

These stories helped Jesus know who he was and these stories tell us about ourselves and God. In the last 14 weeks we have read story after story about God's faithfulness to God's people. We have seen that God loves all people and that God has a special concern for those who have little or no power. Today's verses from Isaiah are words of hope to God's people in exile—

if you have no way to obtain food for yourself and for your family these words are a gift, they bring overwhelming hope—“you that have no money, come, and eat! Come, get wine and milk without money and without price.”

This morning during worship, these words of comfort from Isaiah are nestled in amongst stories from 500 years later in gospel of Luke telling about the birth of a child to a teenage mom. The story we so often hear about the birth of this child is clean and refined, the songs we sing even claim the baby didn't cry. This was a first time teenage mom in a small barn in a foreign place. The Bible tells nothing of a midwife or other women to help her. Mary and Joseph are far from home because of the oppressive economic system of the Roman Empire. Rome wanted a census to insure maximum possible taxation—not to provide food or health care for those in need—but to make the ultra-rich richer. What might have been the words echoing in Mary and Joseph's ears as they sat in the stable? What words comfort you? When you feel alone or scared, or taken advantage of, what words comfort you? God's words of invitation: You are valuable even though you can't afford to pay, you are cared for in spite of the place you were born into. You are loved not because of what you know, or do, **but because of who you are know by.** The one who is faithful invites you. The one whose words are so true that they are like the rain, giving life in dry places; like rich food given to the hungry. Let these words echo.