

I.N.I.

Christmas Day
Dec. 25, 2011
Selected verses from Luke 2

In Christ Jesus, whose birth is the Good News we proclaim today, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

One of the most awe inspiring miracles of all time is described in less than 30 verses---God becoming man. Matthew 1 tells us of the angel's message to Joseph in a dream saying: **"JOSEPH, SON OF DAVID, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO TAKE TO YOU MARY YOUR WIFE, FOR THAT WHICH IS CONCEIVED IN HER IS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AND SHE WILL BRING FORTH A SON, AND YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS, FOR HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS."**

In Luke 1 the angel Gabriel tells Mary: **"AND BEHOLD, YOU WILL CONCEIVE IN YOUR WOMB AND BRING FORTH A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS. HE WILL BE GREAT, AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE HIGHEST; ...THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL COME UPON YOU, AND THE POWER OF THE HIGHEST WILL OVERSHADOW YOU; THEREFORE, ALSO, THAT HOLY ONE WHO IS TO BE BORN WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF GOD."**

In Luke 2:1-20 we have the events described for us that occurred on that first Christmas night. Words that not only our children know by heart, but probably also many of us here this morning. But that is it. The Lord chose to simply compact all the information about the incarnation in only a few verses. We would love to know more, but we know enough. And even as God, in His Word, gives us a glimpse of what took place so also this morning we will have four Christmas Vignettes---short literary sketches--touching on this great miracle. The first is one entitled:

I: ALONE

Luke 2:8--AND THERE WERE SHEPHERDS LIVING OUT IN THE FIELDS NEARBY, KEEPING WATCH OVER THEIR FLOCKS AT NIGHT.

Shepherds were common in Israel. They had been around since the beginning of time. Abel, the second son born in the world was a shepherd. Shepherding was a lonely job. It meant long hours sitting and watching over the flocks. It meant long hours of boredom watching and waiting for enemy predators to attack, but then it meant quick and decisive action when such an attack came.

And although the Bethlehem shepherds had a lonely watch that night, set apart and alone in the middle of the night while no doubt their family gatherings and reunions were going on in town; that did not stop God from finding them and blessing them. It was to them that the Lord sent His angel with the good news: **"TO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY A SAVIOR!"**

Sometimes we feel isolated and alone from the crowds of people around us, and sometimes -- as we seek to glorify our heavenly Father -- we not only have been set apart by God, but often isolated by the unbelieving world. But that very fact that we are often weary and burdened in this life of sin and temptation is used by God to bless us, for the joy which God's angel proclaimed to the lonely shepherds was for all the people. And especially to us He still calls: **"COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY AND BURDENED, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."** We are not so far from Bethlehem that He cannot bring us to see our salvation and rejoice! Hymn 103:1-4

II: HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Luke 2:11--TODAY IN THE TOWN OF DAVID A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU; HE IS CHRIST THE LORD.

So much of the Christmas story depends on being at the right place at the right time. Mary and Joseph were in Nazareth of Galilee, as her due date approached, but the prophesied place for the Messiah's birth was in distant Bethlehem of Judea. It was not a journey they were likely to undertake with the impending birth about to take place. So God had the Roman emperor issue a decree that left them no choice. To Bethlehem they had to go! What extraordinary measures were taken to get them to the right place at the right time!

The shepherds were out in the fields at night, a time when they were not likely to leave their sheep to the clutches of their nighttime predators. But God sent an angel, yes, a heaven filled with angels, to give the good news to the shepherds and they ran with haste to Bethlehem town.

The wise men were even farther away in the East. Maybe it just wasn't feasible or necessary for them to come and bow before the Baby King so far away, but God let them see a special star and filled with joy they undertook the long, long journey, and they came to worship Him who was born king of the Jews.

Such extraordinary means our God employed to get these people to the town of David! He must have really wanted them there! And He did!

How about us? Where were you and I at this time? In the heart of God -- **"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON."** He gave His Son and then many year later He led us to hear that Good News and brought us to faith through the work of the Holy Spirit so that we too have gone to Bethlehem to **"SEE THIS THING THAT HAS COME TO PASS, WHICH THE LORD HAS MADE KNOWN TO US."** What extraordinary measures God has taken to get us to the right place at the right time—in His home for Christmas!

Hymn 647:1-3

III: TO YOU

Luke 2:11--... A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU; HE IS CHRIST THE LORD.

Christmas is for children! Who is better at showing excitement, at looking forward to the day with such longing that it seems to them to take forever to arrive? And why does it take so long for children, while for us adults the days seem to fly by and so often catch us almost unprepared?

Is it perhaps because the children do not really do as much in preparation? Yes, they learn their Christmas parts. They wrap their little presents, but their to-do list is not as long as that of their parents. And they look forward to treats and presents that they have not prepared or bought.

And what did the shepherds do to bring about the first Christmas, or even prepare for it? They had been learning all their lives about the promised Messiah, Christ the LORD. But that night overtook them in a heart-beat! They had done nothing to bring it about, **BUT WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, BORN OF A WOMAN, BORN UNDER THE LAW.**

Who knows how far away from town they were when it happened, and yet the angel said, **"A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU!"** The shepherds ran to Bethlehem, like little children running down the stairs, excited to receive gifts under the tree, purchased by their parents; but this gift was from their Heavenly Father.

We are even further away than the shepherds, and yet **"TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO US A SON IS GIVEN"** (Isaiah 9:6) Truly, it is not we who make Christmas special. We too, all of us are like children excitedly coming to receive our Gift. But then, Christmas is for children, enjoying the blessed work and gift of their Heavenly Father! Hymn 85:1-2; 6, 13-15

IV: GO TELL

Luke 2:17-18: NOW WHEN THEY HAD SEEN *HIM*, THEY MADE WIDELY KNOWN THE SAYING WHICH WAS TOLD THEM CONCERNING THIS CHILD. AND ALL THOSE WHO HEARD *IT* MARVELED AT THOSE THINGS WHICH WERE TOLD THEM BY THE SHEPHERDS.

The words of the angels and the event of Jesus' birth forever changed the lives of these shepherds. But they didn't quit their jobs and all become preachers of the Word; missionaries to some foreign countries--no, they returned to their jobs, to their everyday routine of life as shepherds but now as Christmas witnesses, Christmas believers, Christmas missionaries! They were the first people to be able to say to others: **THE CHRIST HAS BEEN BORN!** rather than "the Christ is coming." They were so excited about what they had seen and heard they went out immediately and told others. They **HAD TO** share the Good News with others!

How about us? **DO WE TALK ABOUT GOD'S GIFT AS THE SHEPHERDS DID?** Our children did last night, but that was in the safety and security of our church with fellow believers around them. How about out in the world? One of the best ways to keep Christmas alive in our hearts all year long is by giving it away to others. That's right, the more we give away the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the more secure it is in our hearts. We, too, have welcomed God's gift, Jesus, into our hearts through faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit. We, too, have worshiped God's Gift, Jesus with our hearts and voices. We have been told and shown the Good News in God's Word. We, too, are filled with joy that we have a Savior from sin, a Savior who has gone from the cradle, to the cross, to the empty tomb and the crown of life for us! We, too, are surrounded by people who need to hear about Jesus. We may not be the first to speak of the Christmas story like the shepherds were, but we may be the first ones to tell someone else, a neighbor, a classmate, a fellow worker, a good friend, a spouse, a relative.

As we ponder this Good News this morning, may the Holy Spirit fill us with the same kind of zeal and eagerness that the shepherds had so that we too find it impossible to keep it to ourselves; impossible to not say something; impossible to remain silent but say with Peter and John: **WE CANNOT BUT SPEAK OF THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD!**

Then the gift of our Savior from sin will be a gift that lasts not only for a lifetime, but for more than a lifetime, into eternity, a celebration and a gift that will never end.

Amen.

Hymn 706