

I.N.I.

Christmas Day
Dec. 25, 2019
Luke 2:15-20

In Christ Jesus, the long awaited Savior, born in Bethlehem, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This past Sunday we heard of the Greatest GIFT ever! The gift of Life!

THE GREATEST GIFT OF DIVINE LOVE TO THIS WORLD: GOD'S SON!

Last night we heard about **WAITING FOR THE PERFECT GIFT, THE BABY BORN IN BETHLEHEM.**

I am sure that last night or this morning we all got some very nice gifts, maybe even some pretty expensive gifts, but the Greatest gift, the Perfect gift? Most gifts won't even last a few years much less a lifetime. But this Greatest Gift, this Perfect Gift we were given by God is guaranteed, is certified to last for eternity---the gift of our Savior born some 2,000 years ago. It is a gift that never wears out, never grows old, always is in style and lasts forever and therefore it deserves a celebration that also never ends, that lasts all year long. And we can make sure of that in our own lives by:

**CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS AS THE SHEPHERDS DID
I: BY WELCOMING GOD'S GIFT AS THE SHEPHERDS DID**

Most of us know the first 20 verses of Luke 2 by heart. You probably memorized them when you were a child for your Children's Christmas Eve service, or maybe you have heard them recited in so many Christmas Eve services that you have learned them by heart. And that's great! Throughout this coming New Year 2020, we should recall these words over and over again.

Remember the setting---the census that brought it all about--that brought Mary and Joseph down from Nazareth, into Galilee, to Bethlehem--the lowly birth of the Baby Jesus being born in the stable because there was no room for them in the inn--His first bed a manger--His first clothes, swaddling clothes (strips of cloth that wrapped Him tight)--the angel's astonishing message to the shepherds and the wondrous light display as the heavens were filled with a countless host of angels praising God--the shepherd's enthusiastic race to the little village--their worship of the Baby--Mary's pondering all these things in her heart and the natural mission program of the shepherds (speaking to others as they returned to their fields about what they had seen and heard.)

If only we could celebrate Christmas the way the shepherds did? No Santa Claus to clutter the view of the Christ-child. No endless T.V. and newspaper advertisements for things, things and more things. No hectic hustle and bustle to make sure the right gift is bought and given and everything is prepared just right. If it could just be the Lord speaking to us about the birth of His Son, the Savior without all the materialism and media celebrities singing about jingle bells and sleigh bells and about a Baby they don't even know in their heart.

But that will never happen! For that is the day and age in which we live. These are all part of the worldly Christmas displays and observations of today's society. How different on that first Christmas night. Lowly shepherds were doing what they always did every night when their sheep were out in the fields--they were taking shifts keeping watch over them. Carefully surveying their flocks so that no harm would befall them. No doubt that night was no different than a thousand other nights till suddenly...**AN ANGEL OF THE LORD STOOD BEFORE THEM, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD SHONE AROUND THEM.** Not only were their eyes amazed, but their ears also heard an amazing message: **DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR BEHOLD I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY WHICH WILL BE TO ALL PEOPLE.** What news could be that good, what kind of good news could there ever be that would affect every person in the whole world?

This kind of Good News! **FOR THERE IS BORN TO YOU THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.** A Baby is born! A Baby who is the Christ—the Anointed One, the One promised for some 4,000 years; the Messiah. This Christ is the Savior of all people, the One who rescues sinners from eternal death and hell. He is the Lord, Jehovah. He is God and Man in one person. What a message!!

The shepherds asked no questions. They too had been waiting for this Good News for many

years. They had no doubts, just excitement, wonder and amazement filling their hearts. Believing everything that was told them from God through His angel they ran to welcome their new born King. **LET US NOW GO TO BETHLEHEM--forget about the sheep; forget about our livelihood; forget about our business; forget about other distractions--LET US SEE THIS THING THAT HAS COME TO PASS, WHICH THE LORD HAS MADE KNOWN TO US.**

Do we forget about our work, our busy-ness, our other distractions and with joy filled hearts welcome God's Gift? We can celebrate Christmas as the shepherds did when we take the time to forget about other things that bother, distract and worry us and with joy filled, faithful hearts repeatedly welcome Jesus into our hearts and homes.

And so they ran, they hurried over the fields and down the road to Bethlehem and there they found the Baby lying in the manger. There before their wondering eyes lay their Lord, their Savior, their King, the Son of God! The One who would live a perfect life of obedient love for them and someday offer His life as a sacrifice upon the cross for their sins. What uncluttered simple worship it was. All alone in the darkness of the stable with Mary and Joseph, and the heart and core of their worship was--the Baby--Immanuel, God and Man in One person, the Savior from sin; the One who had come to bring peace between the holy Father and sinful man by removing man's sin once for all.

II:

Is that how we worship the Christ-child today--**BY WORSHIPING HIM AS THE SHEPHERDS DID?** Is our worship simple and uncluttered? Do we hasten to the Lord Jesus' cradle, to His house, to His Word to throw ourselves down before Him in repentance and thankfulness for this great gift of the Father; the gift of His Son for us? Do we see in Jesus the God-Man who has come to live that perfect life for us and to die that needed death for us as our Substitute? If we do then we too **CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS AS THE SHEPHERDS AND WORSHIP JESUS AS THEY DID.**

III:

Finally we see that these words and this event forever changed the lives of these shepherds. 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 left the stable and immediately 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?** We did last night, but that was in the safety and security of our church with fellow believers around us. 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, a stranger.

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 we will be able to celebrate Christmas as the shepherds did-- this new year, all year long, and every year. Then the gift of our Savior from sin will never be an empty, hollow, disappointing gift, but a gift that lasts not only a lifetime, but for more than a lifetime, into eternity, a celebration and a gift that will never end.

Amen.