

The Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord
24 December, Anno Domini 2018
St. Luke 2:1-14
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Tucked away in a nothing town, in a dimly-lit barn, to people no one really knew or cared about, something significant took place, something of such indescribable importance that the angels of heaven couldn't contain themselves and broke open the night sky singing the very first and still greatest Christmas hymn: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!" Simple, beautiful, and right to the point, much like the event they were heralding. That tiny baby was the undoing of Satan's tyrannical rule over us. God and man were no longer at war because God had become man. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity stepped out of the riches of heaven and did what none of us could ever do – He crossed the great chasm of sin and death that Adam and Eve had opened.

Such an incomprehensible gift to say the least and yet it wasn't announced to royals, the angels didn't appear to the Jewish High Priest. The King of kings and Lord of lords didn't come surrounded by great pomp and circumstance, making sure that everyone knew exactly who He was. The Word of God was incarnate in humility because He didn't come to rule by force and power. He isn't interested in anything the world thinks is important – titles, wealth, power, recognition, talent, grades, accomplishments, or business. He came for those despised by the world, terrified by their sin and weakness. He is interested in our eternal salvation, even if we choose to ignore it, take it for granted, or find it inconvenient and not worthy of our precious time.

The arrival on earth of the one who would finally undo what had been done in the garden, who would crush the head of the serpent and lift the curse that had descended on all mankind was proclaimed in dark watches of the night to nobody shepherds, whose names we never learn even though they are some of the very first people in all of creation to know that the Messiah had arrived rescue us from the gaping jaws of everlasting death and condemnation.

Everything about this story is wrong. Doesn't God know better? If God knew what He was doing, He would have gone straight to Herod or better yet, straight to the head honcho, Caesar Augustus himself. There should be great processions and banners, silk sheets, and attendants. There should have been invitations engraved in gold sent to the Sanhedrin. That's how we would do it. How else is anyone supposed to know Jesus is important?

But this baby is Emmanuel – God with us. If he wore all the trappings of earthly importance then we would never be able to believe that He had come to serve, to be with US. We are in need of a Savior who is indeed with us - who is with us as we watch our loved ones slowly wither away from cancer or Alzheimers, who is with us as our bodies languish and our minds begin to weaken, who is with us when suicide leaves us with no answers and no help, who is with us as we anxiously try to figure out which creditor will be the most merciful, who is with us as Satan harasses us with vile thoughts and fear, who is with us as we are crushed under the guilt of sins

that will not go away and flesh that will not stop wanting to think and act in ways that we know are evil.

Glory to God in the highest! That is exactly who Jesus is. He is Emmanuel – God with you. He has shown already in His birth that He has come for those who are sick, the despised, the lowly, the broken. Jesus has come to save sinners. He has come to save you. The Christian Church celebrates tonight and tomorrow not just because Jesus is born, but because of the good news of great joy that is for all people – a Savior, who is Christ Lord was born unto us! This little baby who now is sweetly yawning, curling His toes, nestling His newborn head against the warm skin of His mother would, in a few short years, allow our sin and hatred of God to drive nails into those same hands and feet and thorns into His brow – all to undo the ancient curse and bring us forgiveness and peace with God. The Almighty God has this night shown forth His true glory, that He is a God of mercy who would rather endure the full weight of His own wrath against sin, than see you perish under it.

The angels of heaven invite you again this night to step into the dark and damp of the stable and see past what your eyes see, to see wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger your God who is not offended by your lowliness, who does not reject you because of your continued disobedience, a God who joyfully steps right into the muck and stench of your broken world in order to pick you up and rescue you. The angels invite you to see past what your eyes see, to see Emmanuel, God with you wrapped not in pieces of cloth but in lowly bread and wine.

There is simply no greater reason for the heavenly choir to break forth in hymn and no greater reason for us to join them, than the birth of Jesus, the Son of God who through His incarnation, death, and resurrection has brought peace to poor miserable sinners like us.

Glory to God in the highest and peace always to you on whom His favor rests.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.