

The Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord
24 December, Anno Domini 2020
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. These are vanity and those who seek them are chasing after the wind. Contrary to everything the world thinks it knows, God's attention is directed to those whom the world imagines God wants nothing to do with - the weak, the broken, the helpless, those terrified by their sin and guilt, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. God 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 shepherds, whose names we never learn even though they are some of the very first people in all of creation to know that the promise of the Messiah had been fulfilled - that God had descended from His throne and now lay in a feeding trough wrapped in swaddling cloths in order to make peace between God and man.

Everything about this story is contrary to the expectations of man. Man would have directed God to Herod or better yet, straight to Caesar Augustus himself. That's how we would do it. How else is anyone supposed to know Jesus is important? Man wants flash. Man wants to be impressed and wowed. Then he'll be interested.

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 every sneeze and cough fills our hearts with the dread of death, who is with us as our bodies languish and our minds begin to weaken, who is with us when the ever-maddening and darkening world threatens to collapse us and consume us, who is with us as life-savings wither away and jobs dry up, who is with us as loneliness and depression and anxiety threaten to overwhelm us, 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, who is with us as more and more we see the world falling into darkness and death and insanity.

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. Jesus has come to give hope to those who have come to the bitter realization that this world can't offer any hope or any peace and, in fact, only robs us of those things. 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. See in the infant Jesus the God who doesn't recoil at the thought of contracting what afflicts us and who doesn't leave us to suffer it alone and die under its weight because of what it may cost Him. The angels invite you to see past what your eyes see - a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger - and to see Emmanuel, God your Savior with you, as you are.

And yet how often we have treated the events of that first Christmas as quaint bygone events that have little or no consequence for us today other than to sing some favorite hymns by candlelight and then return to life as normal? This night and every time the good news is proclaimed, that first Christmas is repeated all over again. Will you listen in faith to the messengers sent by God as the shepherds did and run with haste to where the Christ now lays - the Holy Communion - or will you blow out your candles and make haste back to the cares and priorities of the world, refusing the gift that God has given which He has made known to you? Will our hearts be drawn away or will we seek Christ and the salvation He brings somewhere else? Will we look for other signs - happiness, wealth, physical health, the acceptance and approval of the world? Repent. That is where the world seeks after God but it will never find Him there and neither will you.

But fear not! Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that is for all the people, for sinners and those lost and wandering under the cloud of darkness and death that covers this sinful world. For unto you tomorrow morning and every Lord's Day, your Savior, Christ the Lord, descends from heaven and gives Himself to you to forgive all your sins and rescue you from death. We are not left to find hope in events of long ago or in the nostalgia of this time of year. Christ is still Emmanuel - God with you. And this will be the sign for you - you will find the Savior wrapped in bread and wine, lying on this altar, given to you to eat and drink. These are the signs given that you may know where your Savior is and these are the signs given that you may know that He has saved you. Blessed are those who hear the angelic preaching and run with haste to the Lord Jesus Christ who still comes to be with us and save us.

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

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.