

# "The LORD Comes to His Temple"

Sermon #3

## "Along the Judean Road"

Luke 2:1-5

18 December Anno Domini 2002

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

In ancient times a city would set a watchman upon the wall of a city or in a tower in order to watch for an approaching danger, particularly at night, in order that the city may not be taken by the surprise of an enemy. At various times the watchman would give report to this person or that. To protect His Church, the LORD also has done a similar thing. From the Prophet Ezekiel we read:

"So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the House of Israel; whenever you hear a Word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me. If I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way; he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life" (Ezekiel 33:7-9).

Though one must confess that doctrinal supervision and loving warning against false practice are not the current habits for called watchmen in many congregations and denominations, such a wise custom of having watchmen, whether in the state and in the Church, is nothing new. We sing of this in the responsive verses of one particular hymn during Advent.

"Watchman, tell us of the night, What its signs of promise are.  
Trav'ler, o'er yon mountain's height, See that glory-beaming star.  
Watchman, doth its beauteous ray, Aught of joy or hope fore-tell?  
Trav'ler, yes; it brings the day, Promised day of Israel."  
("The Lutheran Hymnal," # 71, stanza 1)

Our theme during the seasons of Advent and Christmas is - "The LORD Comes to His Temple." As the Incarnate Son of God continues His Advent, He does so ...

.... "Along the Judean Road."

Luke 2:1-5 - "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of

David, to be enrolled with Mary his betrothed, who was with child."

Thus far the Word of Yahweh our God.

Greetings trav'ler. It's nighttime and you have ventured out into the darkness. I'm glad that you stopped to rest here for a hour or so at this watchtower along this Judean road. Your sojourn, short as it may be, is an occasion for you to hear what has happened. While many are out at this time of darkness, not many find their respite here. Most people have interests or business elsewhere, like in Jerusalem, the Holy City not far to the north and even beyond that place to the region of Galilee. This Judean road that leads to Bethlehem is not so heavily traveled and it rarely has what many in the world would call exciting and wonderful comings and goings.

But looks are deceiving and there are times when the passers-by are involved in the most important historic events within all creation. Traveling this road is the most breath-taking journey that a person will have. Why? Well, not because of the road itself, but of those who journey upon it and where this Judean road leads and of the Savior Who passes this way.

For example, a while back there was an increase in travelers along this Judean road when "a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled." This was the first enrollment when Quirinius was governing Syria. The pax Romana, that is, the Roman peace permitted safe travel, though one also must be aware of thieves who will lighten your load and henchmen who will leave you for dead along the side of the road. Anyway, in order to be enrolled each had to go to his own city, and if you no longer lived in your ancestral city, then that meant that you had to make the journey back home. Because Bethlehem is the city of David, Bethlehem had many people traveling to it and there was an increase of traffic along this Judean road.

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary his betrothed, who was with child." Mary, who was with child of the Holy Spirit, had been with her kinswoman, Elizabeth, for three months. The house and household of Zechariah were blessed to have the Holy, unborn, Incarnate Son of God dwell within its walls and in His Presence. Six months after returning to her home in Nazareth in Galilee, Mary, her unborn Savior, and Joseph leave Galilee for the 60-70 mile journey to Bethlehem.

Dear traveler, do you not behold the LORD God orchestrating history in order that His Word might be as He had said? God used the decree of a pagan caesar to fulfill the Word that He had caused His prophet Micah to write some seven centuries earlier ... "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me One Who is to be ruler in Israel, Whose origin is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2).

The trio traveled slower than most, plodding along the Judean road. Joseph walked with his betrothed who was ready to give birth to the Savior. This nine-month-old unborn Redeemer traveled in His 98.6° degree tabernacle along the Judean road to Bethlehem. Others arrived in the city of David first and the rooms were taken and the inn was filled to capacity. At the Birth of the King a special star will shine over the little town of Bethlehem. Forty days later the holy family will go from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem and return to Bethlehem along the Judean road. Wisemen from the east will take the last leg of their trek along the Judean road on their way to behold the newborn King. Years later Jesus will travel to Jerusalem where He will becoming the atoning

Sacrifice for the world and die for everyone of your sins, whether ones of thought, word or deed. Jesus will rise again on the third day, appear to His disciples for forty days, ascend into heaven, be enthroned as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He will prepare a place for you that where He is, you also will be. He will be with you always and invite you into His Presence here through His Divine Service of Word and Sacrament.

Ah, but I get ahead of myself - not that this is wrong or inappropriate. Indeed, this is the Good News that God wants you to hear and which I, as a watchman, am called to proclaim. If you stop by hear in the up-coming days, nights and weeks you will hear of the King's Birth in Bethlehem and His accommodations in a manger. You will hear of the day when He was named Jesus, as well as that time in Jerusalem when He was 40 days old, and also the season of the Feast when He was twelve-years-old in the Temple. Will you not accept the invitation to be here?

But this night during the blessed season of Advent, you are on your way to Bethlehem, aren't you? God has guided you onto and along the right way. But it is also a narrow way that leads to Bethlehem and beyond into eternity. Not everyone who stops here will make it to the end that the Lord desires for all. It will not be His fault for surely He has provided what was necessary for them to know that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. God sent John to prepare the Lord's way and then sent His Son to be the Way.

Even Jesus has said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to Life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13-14).

You may use many words to describe this your Advent-ure and trek along the Judean road, but ones of those words that is not appropriate is the word "boring." This life of faith in the LORD God is breath-taking, exciting and fraught with dangers. The calls of synergists beckon you to work your way away from the truth that you believe right now, namely, that you are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus and not because of your good deeds. The sirens of syncretism invite you to come into their Gospel-less chapels or bid you enter their LORD-less stadiums. There is nothing boring about avoiding those who are universalists on the one side while staying clear of those who advocate and practice unionism on the other. Watch out for those who hawk the world's bobbles of the new age religions, as well as the others who speak the Word- less babblings of the old enthusiasts.

Many, many, instead of journeying to Bethlehem, are slouching towards Gomorrah and the inviting waters of the Dead Sea that bear rank witness to the evidence of the wrath of God against open, community sin. Many others have fallen to the appeals of pietism and Pelagianism, the glitters of deadly prodigalism and double predestination, the charms of the charismatic and the eunuch. Up ahead, along the Judean road, you will have to thread your way around Buddha, Brahma, Allah, Moroni and an earthly host of false gods. Then there are the Arians, the Modalists, the Tri-theists, the Gnostics, the Mohammadens, the Donatists and the Romanists. Look out particularly for the liars who bear the name Christian, but are not - that is, those who bear claim the confession of a Lutheran, but are not. What treachery! What deceit! To summarize, "I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

Beloved traveler, don't let anyone or anything sidetrack you from your journey along the Judean

road. There is a special danger that rises up from within, especially when one seeks to defend the Church and her confession from the corruption and idolatry that is being manifested in these latter days. The spirit of the old adam rises up from within and sears the soul until it is calloused in the Christian's fight against the forces of the evil one.

The apostle not only says, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness," but also that you need to "look to yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Thus the psalmist encourages us to "Be angry, but do not sin" (Psalm 4:4). But who can do this? Fear not, God does the impossible. Therefore, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13).

Beloved traveler, don't let yourself sidetrack you from your journey along the Judean road. May God grant you the faith and strength to go to Bethlehem to behold your "Savior, Who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). May the LORD move you to follow Him to the Place of the Skull and lead you into and through His empty tomb. Surely He will continue to wash you in His baptismal grace, pronounce you His again and again in the absolving Word of forgiveness of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit, even as He invites you to His Holy Supper where He serves Himself. He has given His Word and this is His Promise:

"Behold, I send My messenger to prepare the way before Me, and the Lord Whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; the Messenger of the Covenant in Whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:1)

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). Amen.