

## "Children, Shepherds at the Manger"

### Luke 2:1-20

23 December Anno Domini 2001  
Advent IV -- Service of the Word  
Children's Service  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Emmett, Idaho  
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Dear Baptized, that is, dear children of God,

This is one of those joyful days when the older children watch the younger children come into the holy place as the Story of the Birth of Jesus is told. The older children are those of you back there along with a sprinkling of older children sitting up here with these younger children. Younger children, that's you up front here. But as I said, the older children like to watch and listen to the younger children as we all hear about the all these things concerning the Son of God Who was born in Bethlehem. Now, most of you younger children are all dressed up this evening for this once-a-year service. Some of you are dressed up as angels, one of you is dressed like Mary, one of you is Joseph and quite a few of you are shepherds.

Hmm. So, what do shepherds do? Well, you say, that's easy. Shepherds herd sheep. That is true, but there really is a great deal to it. Shepherds make sure that the sheep have enough food and water, and they keep watch to make certain that the sheep are safe. Faithful shepherds care for and protect all the sheep, but especially do they do so for the lambs. And shepherds even, and particularly, keep watch at night. Most of the time it is quiet and the shepherds stand by as they watch by night and wait for the sun to rise.

But one time something happened out in the fields, under the stars, to a certain group of shepherds that was absolutely amazing and fantastic and spectacular and glorious. What happened was so wonderful that children, both young and old as well as those in between, have, for hundreds and hundreds of years, talked about it, and celebrated it, and sung about it, and have given thanks to God for it happening. The shepherds were visited by one angel and then, in a moment, by many, many angels and the Good News was told to the shepherds that the Savior of the world had been born and the singing of the first Christmas hymn was heard by the angelic choir. But let's go back just a bit and hear what happened just before those angels appeared to the shepherds.

Two thousands years ago, a time when there were no cars, no airplanes, no trains, no books, no electricity and no Christmas Trees, a stern ruler, which is like a very strict king, sent out an order that was a strict rule. Every man had to return to the place where of his lineage, which is like where your great-great-grandfather was from, and be registered, which is like going there and saying your name to the king's officials. As a result, a carpenter named Joseph was required to go from Nazareth and walk to Bethlehem to register, a distance of at least 70 miles, which is like walking from here to

Boise and back! Joseph's wife, a blessed woman named Mary, went with him. Mary was going to have a baby; only it wasn't Joseph's baby she was going to have. It was God's Son who was going to be born!

The Baby was just about ready to be born when Joseph and Mary journeyed to Bethlehem. And by the way, we don't know if Mary rode a donkey or not, for the Bible doesn't tell us. Anyway, they travel slowly. They get to Bethlehem and try to find a place at the inn. But there is no room. So Joseph brings Mary to a place where animals are kept and there the Baby is born. It's a boy! She wraps her firstborn Son in swaddling cloths, which are like long strips of cloth, and she lets the little LORD Jesus sleep in a manger, which is a feeding box or trough for animals that has hay in it.

So now we come to the part where those faithful shepherds hear the Good News of the Baby's Birth. Listen carefully to Luke 2:8-20 as we think about and hear from the ...

... "Children, Shepherds at the Manger"

"And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, 'Fear not; for behold, I bring you Good News of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased!'"

"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this Child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Notice what takes place with these shepherds as they were going about the business of their vocations.

First, they heard the Word announced by the angel about the Savior Who was born. This Word is the fulfillment of what the prophets of old had told concerning the Christ Who would be born to a virgin and Who would be wonderful. This Baby would grow up and when He was a man, He would defeat the devil in the wilderness. Jesus would be the Substitute Who would suffer the wrath of God on account of the sins of all people and earn forgiveness for all people. The Son of God would be Isaiah's Emmanuel, that is, "God with us," and Job's hope for the Resurrection. The shepherds heard the Word of Good News that the Savior was born.

Second, they heard the Word announced by the angel about where to find the Baby. They could have gone on pilgrimages, journeys and missions in search of the Savior and never found Him. Why?

Because the Lord reveals Himself where and when He wills. The prophet of old told that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, that is, in the City of David, but didn't tell forth the date. However, in the fullness of time an angel of the Lord told the shepherds just exactly where in Bethlehem that Christ the Lord was ... "you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." The shepherds were told where the Savior was present for them.

Third, they went with haste to see the infant Son of God and to be in the presence of the Almighty LORD God. What a privilege and blessing to come to the place where God was graciously present for them. The shepherds left their jobs and journeyed with haste to congregate with Mary, Joseph and any others who were there as this little Church celebrated the Christ Mass at the manger of the Lord. The shepherds were glad to be in the Presence of the LORD.

Fourth, "they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this Child." Faithful shepherds are always doing that ... always telling the Good News of the Savior, just as it has been revealed to them through the Word spoken to them. Mary, Joseph and any others at the scene listened to the shepherds as "they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this Child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds had told them." The shepherds tell the Good News to those who are gathered together in the Presence of the LORD.

Fifth, the shepherds returned to their jobs and as they went about their lives, they were, probably for the rest of their days on this earth, "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." There is no doubt that they shared the Good News of the Savior's Birth with other shepherds that they happened to meet later on, and indeed, with anyone whom they met and would listen. These shepherds bore witness to the truth of the Incarnation of God. They glorified God and praised Him for the Word of Good News of a great joy which will come to all the people ... that in the City of David the Savior, that is, Christ the Lord, was born.

Do you realize that this is quite a bit like what has happened here this morning and will continue to happen with you children who are assembled here in front of this wooden manger?

First, just as the shepherds heard the Good News of the Savior's Birth, so also have you children of God. Someone ... a mom, a dad, a grandparent, a pastor, a Sunday School teacher, a preschool teacher, a friend ... someone has told you that the Son of God was born and that it is time to celebrate this Good News of a great joy.

Second, just as the shepherds were told specifically where to go to be with Christ the Lord, so also have you children of God been told. Now you can't go to Bethlehem and look for Jesus in a manger. That's because Jesus grew up for you, lived a perfect life for you, brought about forgiveness of all sins for you, earned eternal life for you, achieved salvation for you, died for you, and rose from the dead for you. Nope, Jesus is not in a manger in Bethlehem. However, you are told exactly where to go to be with Jesus ... to go to the place where He has promised to be with His people ... to a Church where the Word is graciously present.

Third, just as the shepherds went with haste to behold the Savior, Who is Christ the Lord, so also you children of God came quickly to be here this night. You and I are very blessed to be able to be here in the Presence of the Lord in this Divine Service of the Word. You are here in this holy place with certain other shepherds, with the children of God, with angels, archangels, and the entire company of heaven, and ... with the LORD Himself.

Fourth, just as the shepherds let the Good News be known of the angel's announcement, so also you children of God have sung the same message by your hymns and told the same story by your recitations of the Good News of a great joy. And all who here, who have heard it, wonder and marvel at what you Children, Shepherds at the Manger, have told us. Truly, we have many things to ponder in our hearts. You have shared the Gospel with us and we rejoice in it and we thank God for you.

Fifth, just as the shepherds left the area of the manger and returned to their vocations, so also you children of God will leave this Divine Service of the Word and return to your homes and schools. You will be with people ... family and friends ... some who have not heard about Jesus being born in Bethlehem in order to be the Savior. Tell them about this Good News and invite them to come to Church with you in the days and weeks and years ahead. That way they can come to this place where God is graciously Present and they would be able to hear, just like you hear every time you come here ... that you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and the (+) Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.