

"When Pretending Isn't Pretending"

Luke 2:8-20

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

17 December Anno Domini 2000
Children's Christmas Program
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Lord God - in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear Baptized Children of God,

The congregation watched you as you processed in a line at the beginning of the service this evening. Many people are glad to have "Oh Come, All Ye Faithful" memorized so they didn't have to use the order of service but could watch you while they sang. Older children whose shoulders are stooped with age and who are near to the time when they must use a cane were watching you younger children whose little hands are made for pretend shepherds' staffs as you pretend shepherds filed in with the pretends angels and all the company of the Sunday School.

Dear little children, you make us smile. Those of you, whose earthy-colored robes are sometimes a bit too long and promote stumbling and whose head-coverings often get in the way of little eyes and promote wandering, ... that's right, you little shepherds, are kept in line and herded to the front pews by those special people called Sunday School teachers who are watching over you this night. Those of you, whose white choir robes and tinsel halos tell us that you are angels, are lead to your places by those who direct you to the places and times when you will sing.

You see, children, while a part of those smiles that are on the faces of the adults here this evening is because you are pretending to be shepherds and angels and Mary and Joseph, mostly we smile because we know, if we were to stop and think about it, that you are not pretending at all. The sermon this evening is based on Luke 2:8-20. Please listen to that text as we ponder, this night, those times ...

... When Pretending Isn't Pretending

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For to you this day is born in the City of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to 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,
good will toward men!'

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them."

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

You children know that there is some pretending that is good and other pretending that is quite bad. Bad pretending is not good. Kidnappers sometimes pretend to be a friend and they trick people into trusting them. That's why parents don't want their children to talk to strangers. Bad pretending is not good and sometimes even the people we know are pretenders. Maybe you know someone you thought was your friend but was just pretending. When you found out that person was just pretending it really hurt you in your heart. What's really awful is that sometimes we discover that we are the ones doing the bad pretending - like when we are the ones who pretend to be a friend and end up laughing at someone else or playing a mean trick on them and that person who thought you were a friend is hurt. You see, bad pretending is a sin and when you "bad-pretend" you are sinning. God doesn't want you to do that and when you do, well someone has to pay the price for that sin. The problem is that we can't undo the sin and we can't pay the price. That's really kind of scary when you think about it.

But listen, dear children, fear not! - for this is really what the Christmas Story is all about - it's about God sending His Son to pay the price for all the sins - it's about God sending us Jesus to be the Savior - to die on the cross for all sins - for every one of your sins and for every sin of every one in the whole world. But when Jesus came into the world, it was not as a grown-up but as a tiny Baby.

There is bad-pretending but there is also pretending that is good. For example, some of you are pretending to be shepherds this evening. You are copying the shepherds and that is just excellent because there is some pretending that isn't pretending. Let me tell you what that means. The shepherds heard the Good News from the angel of the Lord, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For to you this day is born in the City of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

The shepherds heard this Good News and you have heard this Good News when someone tells you the story or reads you the Story of the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Some of you are pretending to be angels this evening. You are copying the angels and that is wonderful because there is some pretending that isn't pretending. Let me tell you what that means. "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,
good will toward men!'"

The angels joined together to sing this Good News to the shepherds and you have joined together to sing tell the Story of Jesus' Birth to those who are here this night.

Dear children, there may be some of the grown-ups here tonight who came only to watch you pretend to be shepherds and angels, and they had no idea that they were going to be drawn into and become a part of this Story. They are like the hard-working shepherds who suddenly heard the Good News of the Savior's Birth and "said to one another, 'Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger."

Now, everyone in this earthly place realizes that he or she is in the Presence of the Lord Jesus and that none of this is pretending at all. In fact, the shepherds "made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds." Listen children, for the people in this place are listening to you as you tell the Story of the Birth of their Savior and yours. He is our Redeemer - and God wasn't pretending when He sent the multitude of the heavenly host to praise Him and sing the Good News that God the Father sent His Son to be our Savior - and God isn't pretending here and now as the angels hymn the Gospel.

Then the congregated shepherds processed out of the sanctuary and returned to their lives in the world outside, "glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them." And with the angels now returned to the place whence they came and after the shepherds left the Holy Place, still, there remained in that place, one who "kept all these things and pondered them." That person knew that none of this was pretend and that one person had been given quite a bit to think about ... don't you think? Amen.