

# "The Christmas Decree"

Luke 2:10-11

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Emmett, Idaho

24 December Anno Domini 2000  
The Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord  
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

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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,

In the unstable darkness of a still night in this fallen world a small band is assembled to protect those whom they are charged to oversee ... it is their vocation to tend, protect and care for those entrusted to them by challenging and warding off any and all intruders who might be lurking in the shadows seeking to devour, as well as making certain that not one under their stewardship wanders from the congregation. So the shepherds stand on the higher ground "in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8).

By all accounts this evening would be an ordinary night with the same dangers in this valley of the shadow of death and the same thoughts occupying the hearts and minds of the old Adam. These shepherds were no different that any one of inheritors of the Fall from God's grace and presence. Each one of the children of wrath sits in the darkness of sin and anticipates that greater darkness called Everlasting Death. What earthy shepherds and you have in common is the need for a Savior from sin and Satan, a Deliverer from destruction and death, and we absolutely need this Redeemer before the latter day darkness covers over our eyes. This is the decree of death.

We - both the shepherds in those days when a decree went out from Caesar Augustus and today when the decrees of death are listed in the obituaries across the land - we need the Gift of the Savior and the salvation He brings to be decreed. What is the decree that is heard from God? The decree that directs us to depart from Him into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels? (Matthew 25:41). Or will the decree be that there is a Savior?

Well, as for those shepherds outside that little town of Bethlehem - for those men who were "keeping watch over their flock by night," well "an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear" (Luke 2:9). A decree was coming. Had this angel been sent from the LORD God Almighty to

gather "all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; where "men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matthew 13:41-42) - that the godless may be "thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:6) ?

To know the answer to that all important question, we turn the pages of history to the Gospel of St. Luke, the 2nd chapter, the 10th and 11th verses where an angel of the Lord speaks and the shepherds hear ...

... The Christmas Decree

"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."

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

"Fear not" you shepherd. Though I am an angel of the LORD, and though you are a man of the dust, do not be afraid. Though I am come from the very Presence of Perfection and Life Himself, and though you are sinful man who may not see God and live, fear not. Though I abide and bask in the pure Light that is from above and before the foundation of the world, and though you dwell in and grope about the lightless gloom, do not be afraid.

Truly at this point, any honest shepherd might reply, "Fear not! Why? From these statements that I acknowledge and confess to be absolutely true, why should I not fear? The angel of the LORD continues with the Christmas Decree and why the shepherds should not fear. "Fear not; for behold, I bring you Good News of a great joy."

The angel has not come to the shepherds in order to assist Jehovah with in that awe-full hour when those end-time events will take place on Judgment Day. Not this holy night! Instead the angel - this messenger of and from God - has come bearing the Good News of a great joy ... the Gospel declaration ... the Incarnate Word promised by the Inscribed Word of the prophets ... this Good News of a great joy is the Christmas Decree spoken to the shepherds. Ask ye what is this? Listen.

"To you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord."

Listen to the Good News, you shepherds, "to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord." There is a Savior from your sin, from your death, from your self; there is a Savior from the devil's hell and the lake of fire, from the demons' nether gloom and the second death, from eternal suffering and everlasting darkness, from cries of pain and tears of sorrow.

Oh shepherds, you have a Savior! He is born this day. He is born and that means He is truly human with body and blood, a Savior Who will know what it means to feel pain, whose blood will flow, who will know temptation and yet, if He is a Savior, will not fall

to it as the first Adam did, who will behold the cup of sin that awaits and yet, if He is a Savior, will not sin as all other children of Adam have. He is "true Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world" (Athanasian Creed).

But there is more to the Christmas Decree, oh shepherds, for you have a Savior "Who is Christ the Lord." This Savior, this newborn Baby is the Christ of God, the Divine Seed of Eve, Abraham's Great Shield, the God Who wrestled with Jacob, the Cloud by day, the Fire by night, the wilderness Rock, the Prophet like unto Moses, Job's Redeemer, the Lion of Judah, the Messiah of the prophets, the Virgin's Son, Simeon's Promise, Anna's Ransom, the King of Creation, the Word made flesh, the Incarnate Son of God, "God of the Substance of the Father begotten before the worlds" (Athanasian Creed) - "the only-begotten Son of God ... God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man" (Nicene Creed).

Dearly beloved shepherds, behold this is the newborn Savior "Who is Christ the LORD" Who "is born this day in the City of David." The little town of Bethlehem is the place where the Infant Ancient of Days will draw His first breath. This Bethlehem, which means "House of Bread," is the host for the Manna from above. Indeed, "the Bread of God is the One Who comes down from heaven, and gives Life to the world" (John 6:35) and that One is the Show Bread in the Temple Who is born in Bethlehem.

So, dear friend, you sit here in this church on this night and you hear these words and perhaps you say to yourself, "But I am not one of the shepherds. Everything seems to be for those who were in the fields watching over their flock that night. Not only was I not near Bethlehem that night when the Savior was born, it would be nearly 2000 years later before my birth took place. So I was not there and I did not hear the angel of the Lord. Does any of this Gospel apply to me? What is there for me?"

Then it came to pass on this night that a messenger of the Lord spoke to a few people who congregated in this darkened place. And the messenger announced the Christmas Decree: "Fear not; for behold, I bring you Good News of a great joy 'which will come to all the people.'" Do you not hear these words? The Good News of a great joy is intended for all the people.

The Good News is intended for all, for ...

- shepherd and inn-keeper
- scribe and Pharisee
- Mary and Joseph
- Herod and heretic
- mill-worker and secretary
- Pilate and pilot

farmer and executive  
male and female  
slave and free  
Jew and Gentile  
mother and daughter  
wealthy and poor  
dictator and counselor  
judge and jurist  
husband and wife  
prophet and evangelist  
maid and matron  
boy and girl  
father and son  
magi and majesty  
Zechariah and Elizabeth  
widow and widower  
old and infant  
grandfather and grandmother  
employer and employee  
parishioner and pastor  
in short,  
for you and me

Dearly beloved, this is your Savior, the God-man, conceived by the Holy Ghost in the town of Nazareth of Galilee, born of the Virgin Mary in the town of Bethlehem of Judea. Some thirty years later, the King of kings would suffer under Pontius Pilate. Jesus the Christ would be crucified for the sins of the world, would die for the life of the world, would be buried in the tomb of the world. He would descend into hell to proclaim victory over death and Hades. The third day He would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven and be enthroned at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Therefore, "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." Amen.

Thus far, dearly beloved, is the Christmas Decree. What is next? Well, there is for you and for me part two of the Christmas Story. Therefore the messenger of the Lord invites and encourages you to be here tomorrow morning at 10:30 am to hear ...

... "The Christmas Invitation."