

"The Christmas Invitation"

Luke 2:12-20

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

25 December Anno Domini 2000
The Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord
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,

Just as the shepherds of old who were "out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night," so also the faithful assembled here last night to hear the Gospel of God heard 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." Amen.

Well, what of that? In truth, those two verses really speak of the historical truth that was brought about by the LORD God and which is intended for all people. While it is true that we would never have known this Good News of a great joy had it not been revealed to us in God's Word or told to us by angels, pastors, teachers or parents, it is also most certainly true that we still need to know where to find this gracious Savior and then to trust such Incarnate Word of God. For it is also most certainly true that, of ourselves, that is by our own reason or strength we would not know where to find the Savior and we could not come to Him. We need not only the promise from God, but also the gift of faith to believe such Word of God, for indeed, "without faith it is impossible to please Him (God)" (Hebrews 11:6). Where in the world is this gracious God?

For example, consider the shepherds who had heard the Good News of the Lord's Birth. But exactly where was this newborn Savior to be found? Where should they go in Bethlehem ... probably to a glorious house, the best place in town, right? Or maybe to an inn? Where would Christ the Lord be sleeping and what would He be wearing ... likely in purple finery and snuggled down in a golden cradle, wouldn't you think? And another thing, should one not be required to possess and present a royal invitation to visit Christ the Lord in the City of David ... especially if one is a smelly shepherd with dirt under his fingernails? Indeed, the shepherds have heard the Christmas Decree from the angel of the

Lord. What they need now, in this time and place, is ...

... The Christmas Invitation

"'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, good will among men.'"

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Who would have ever thought it could be so? An angel of the Lord declares the Christmas Decree to some common men out in the fields, and with this announcement is the proclamation seconded by the choir of angels that the Highest of heaven is come to the lowest on earth, and with the proclamation is the invitation for those particular overseers of sheep to visit the newborn Savior Who is Christ the LORD, and with this invitation there is that sign directing these specific shepherds to Immanuel, to "God with us," to Peace on earth Himself. "'And this will be a sign for you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.'"

Had these shepherds not been given either the invitation or the directions, they would have, at best, wandered through the streets of Bethlehem and inquired among the houses in the City of David asking where to find Christ the Lord Who had just been born. Imagine the number of doors that would have been slammed in their faces at such an inquiry. Without the Divine directions, where would the shepherds look? Where in Bethlehem is the Savior? In fact, would they even realize that they had an invitation if they had been given no directions? Where in the world is this gracious, Incarnate Christ? Thus Isaiah speaks for all mankind ... for himself, for shepherds and for us ...

"Therefore justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not overtake us;
we look for light, and behold, darkness,
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.
We grope for the wall like the blind,
we grope like those who have no eyes;
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among those in full vigor we are like dead men."

Isaiah 59:9-10

Thanks be to God that He did not leave us in such a condition in which we would all be lost for ever and ever. Micah, of the goodly fellowship of the prophets along with Isaiah, had received the Lord's special revelation and he wrote God's Word, including a prophesy

that announced and promised that Bethlehem would be the place of the Lord's first Advent ... this King "Whose origin is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2).

Suddenly the angels are gone and it is quiet once more and the night is still. What should the shepherd do? Certainly these men of the field are not offended that God is in a manger, or that the Christ is an infant, or that the King is wrapped in rags, or that their Savior's overnight abode will be in a barn-like place and in a smelly atmosphere where animals eat, live, move and have their being. "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.'"

These men make the most of this opportunity and they are not offended at the angel's invitation. The LORD has come to them and has given them the way to find Him. Though it was the messenger who spoke the Word, it was the LORD Who made this thing that has happened known to them. Truly, God the Savior "has exalted those of low degree" (Luke 1:52).

Are you offended at this Savior Jesus Who lies in such mean estate ... the King of creation cradled in a manger as the Word made flesh silently intercedes for you? If you are, then you will be offended at the Infant Redeemer Who will begin shedding His Blood for you when He is eight days old. If so scandalized, then you will have no use for a King Whose throne is a cross-beam, Whose crown is one of thorns and from Whose face and hands streams the holy Wine of God and the sweat of the Divine, and from Whose side, as His heart is pierced, flows "Blood and water" (John 19:34). If you are offended at this King of the Jews then you will look at the crucifix ... at the corpse on the cross and view it as an ungodly curse and declare it a bloody miscarriage of Justice.

But that is not you, is it? Indeed, you are here this morning and you do rejoice in the Festival of the Nativity of your Lord. So, will you join the shepherds and "go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened?" You may like to do so, but you can not for this promise was not given to you. While the promise is of "Good News of a great joy which will come to 'all' the people," includes you, the promise to "find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" was given only to the shepherds, and even then, it was only for a specific place in Bethlehem and for a particular evening some 2,000 years ago. Had they decided to go to the inn they would have missed out being in the Presence of the Lord Jesus. Had they waited forty days before visiting the manger site, the shepherds would have not seen Christ the Lord. But they didn't wait; not at all.

"They went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger." In the darkness of that night, the shepherds were guided by the Word of God, the Word delivered by a messenger, directing them to the one place where their Savior was and those men entered into the very Presence of the Savior Who is Christ the Lord and

became part of the holy family assembled around the altarized 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."

Is there a promise for you ... a time for you to be in the gracious Presence of the LORD? Yes and fear not for "behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Is there a promise for you ... a place for you to be in the gracious Presence of the LORD? Yes, for the Lord Jesus has promised, "Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). We began in that Baptismal Name this morning when we gathered together in and invoked the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. So listen, all of you who are baptized, especially you little children, we are gathered here in the Presence of the Lord.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9) and in the absolution the called messenger of the Word announces that forgiveness which is for the children, for any visitors who might be gathered in this holy place as well as for the confirmed members of the congregation. You are invited to hear this Word of cleansing as you "come into His Presence with singing" (Psalm 100:2).

Then there, or rather here, in this Bethlehem ... in this House of Bread is that special, sacramental, real Presence of the Lord; that Gift of Himself to His Church where Jesus says, "This is My Body; this is My Blood." The confirmed members of Our Redeemer, those who are prepared for beneficial reception of that same Body born of Mary and of that same Blood shed on the cross, are invited to participate at and in this Christ Mass.

What is there left to do after hearing this Christmas Invitation? Two specific things come to mind this day in the City of Truth ... in the City of Emmett ... namely, to be like Mary and to be like the shepherds. What did these do? Listen to the Word: "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." Amen.