

*The Eve of the Nativity*

*Luke 2:1-20 (Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14)*

*Our Redeemer Lutheran Church – Emmett, Idaho*

*December 24<sup>th</sup> Anno Domini 2006*

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for this evening is the account of our Lord's Nativity from the Gospel according to Luke.

*Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.* With these words the angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds in the field the arrival of the promised Savior of the world, Jesus Christ our Lord. It was the announcement of the Messiah's long-awaited advent, and was in effect the arrival of God's promised gift to man.

On this most holy night, we have heard from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah that the darkness shrouding sinful humanity would be overcome with the brilliant light of a child who would be born. Isaiah had foretold of the Savior as the one to be born of a virgin and named Immanuel—God with us. He further proclaimed that this child would bear names like Almighty God and Wonderful Counselor. Such was the purpose of the entire Old Testament—to point to the coming One, the One whom the Lord had promised would save his people from their sins.

The Gospel reading this evening from St. Luke describes in detail how this promise was fulfilled. The Evangelist tells us that God kept his promise to mankind during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus Caesar, therein telling his hearers of the specific time in history at which the miracle of all time had taken place. The almighty and eternal Lord of the universe, in

his love and goodness toward humanity, had announced to a humble virgin by the name of Mary that she would be the mother of the Christ Child. He informed her betrothed husband Joseph that the child conceived in her womb was of the Holy Spirit. God came down from heaven, taking on human flesh as the seed of the woman. And as St. Paul pointed out, this came to pass only when the fullness of time had come.

Luke tells us that Joseph and Mary departed from their home in Nazareth to the town of Bethlehem in order to be registered for Roman taxation. We hear how the events of secular history came to pass in order that divine prophecy be fulfilled. The prophet Micah had, centuries beforehand, foretold that the Messiah was to be born in that little town, the least of all cities in Judah. Now, because of this imperial decree, the Christ Child was carried in his mother's womb to his destined birthplace in a lowly stable. God's gift had arrived in the humblest of conditions, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

After Luke records for us the events surrounding Jesus' birth, he tells us of God's subsequent announcement of his gift to the shepherds of the field, who tended their flocks by night. The angel of the Lord approached these men in great splendor and brilliance of light, bringing word of the Christ Child's birth, causing the shepherds to cower in fear. *Fear not*, said the angel, *for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* God had chosen the Israelites to be his people, and he promised that Christ the Messiah would come from their lineage, but Christ would be more than King of Israel. He was the promised Savior of the entire world! It is significant to note that Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was writing his Gospel to Gentiles, not to Jews. In

writing to heathen, he was showing that Jesus Christ came into this world to suffer and die *for everyone!* For inasmuch as all are the descendants of Adam and Eve who fell into sin, so all are sinful and are in need of a Savior. And it was to these lowly shepherds that the Lord chose to announce the incarnation of the Son of God.

Indeed, there could have been no humbler circumstances surrounding the birth of the Lord and Savior of the world. Not only had he chosen the little town of Bethlehem over Jerusalem, and a rude stable instead of a spectacular palace, he also announced this miracle not to the mightiest of the land, but to the humblest of God's servants, the shepherds, who endured the cold, biting wind to protect their flocks. Moreover, the Lord's angel brought tidings not of impending wrath and doom, but great joy and comfort. The shepherds feared a great fear as they stood in God's presence and were overwhelmed by the glory of the angel's appearance. But just as the angel bid them have no fear, so also our Lord bids us to rejoice in the announcement of his great gift to us—our Redeemer and Savior from sin! For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. God's gift of peace and reconciliation with the world has arrived!

The angel of the Lord indeed brought tidings of joyous news to these shepherds. It was news of such a miraculous nature that the angel host could not keep it to themselves! The heavenly beings made an appearance before men to proclaim the birth of the Savior, the Messiah who was first promised in the Garden, and whom all Israel had awaited throughout their history! They burst forth with great joy, praising God saying, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.* The prophets of God, who had faced persecution and even gruesome

deaths on account of their faithfulness to God's promises, were now vindicated in the fulfillment of their oracles. Satan's tyrannical reign of sin and death would soon be over. God's Anointed One had arrived!

After recording the arrival of the Christ Child and the announcement to the shepherds of the field, Luke proclaims how God revealed the Christmas gift of his Son to those who first heard the good news. The shepherds traveled hastily to Bethlehem, the city of David, to the stable where they found the Child lying in the manger. Upon seeing this great sight that God himself had promised to them, they proclaimed what they had seen to others. Those who heard it marveled and wondered at this great miracle.

We, too, stand in awe of what transpired on that night. For we have heard the news of the wondrous Child. Therefore rejoice, dear Christians, for you have heard the tidings of great joy. Unto you is born this day your Lord and Savior. Unto you has come your salvation. Amen.