

**Text: Luke 2:1-20**

*The Birth of Jesus*

<sup>2</sup> In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to his own town to register.

<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

*The Shepherds and the Angels*

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. – NIV84

**Prayer of the Day:**

Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of true light. Grant that as we have known on earth the wonder of that light, we may also behold him in all glory in the life to come; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Verse of the Day:**

Alleluia. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. Alleluia. (Luke 2:11 cf. NIV)

## Sermon Text:

What is the coolest thing you have ever seen? If you know me, you know I don't like to have to make choices like that so I have many things that have captivated my attention over the years. If you're married, your spouse should be toward the top of the list. If you're a parent, you would include seeing your child or children for the first time, watching them grow from that tiny baby in the womb to an adult, it's pretty cool stuff. Car buffs will be able to talk for hours about the beauty of a tricked out V-8 or a perfectly restored muscle car. If you love the great outdoors some of your most memorable moments are times spent in nature viewing the majesty and mystery of God's creation. As a pastor, really just as a Christian, baptisms rank pretty high on my list as does seeing God's faithful living in the forgiveness given them in the Word and in the Lord's Supper.

For some reason, I found myself wondering how the Shepherds would have answered that question this Christmas season. Can you imagine? Here are a group of guys out with the sheep. Predators can pick off prey pretty easily under the cover of darkness so they have to be vigilant. Probably sleeping in shifts and marveling at the stars in the sky while surveying the darkness for threats. Nothing abnormal about the night at all save a strange star if they have been really observant and then unexpectedly the glory of God pierces the darkness around them and an angel of the Lord appears to them and all of a sudden they are more terrified than if the wolves had started howling. No wonder the angel began as it did, *"Don't be afraid! I bring you good news of great joy ..."*. Then not one but a multitude of angels appear praising God and saying, *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

I wonder how long after the angels had left them it took before they closed their mouths and looked to see if the other shepherds were still there and ask if they had seen it too. There really just aren't words to describe such a sight. But it wouldn't be the coolest thing they would ever see that Christmas. No that honor would be reserved for a far less impressive sight, a Baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger. Our last verse said as much, *"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."* They leave not talking as much about the angelic choirs and the light of the glory of God as they do about the child who was actually there as the angels had said. The child, finally come, just as they had always been told. So dear Christians this Christmas Eve, let's focus on the child and **HASTEN TO BETHLEHEM WITH THE SHEPHERDS**.

You see I think that's excellent advice to us in our present day world. Life has gotten pretty crazy. The shepherds would probably be terrified anew if they were suddenly moved from their quiet night in the hills with the sheep into our fast paced modern world full of gizmos and gadgets of every kind, shape and size. There is a constant and discontented lust for more that drives us, more money, more time, more happiness, more, more, more. All that hustle and bustle can slowly entice us away from the manger and away from the truths it contains.

Let's pause all the craziness of life, even of Christmas, for just a moment and take an honest self assessment. Of all the preparations you made for Christmas, how many of them were spiritual? As we put up lights and ran to stores for all the right gifts did we run to the Word to listen to the voices of prophets and angels, of Jesus himself assuring us that in a crazy world we have lasting peace in the forgiveness He would provide? Or instead, have we begun to fall into thinking about Christmas the way the world does? As just a time set aside to celebrate family, give gifts, and the hope maybe just maybe someday we all might just get along? As you got ready

this year, was Christmas a day that's all about the children? Or is it all about the child, the one child that changed everything?

No there is nothing inherently wrong with any of those things we mentioned but if they move us away from the manger I would suggest that we've missed the point. Listen again to the angel as it speaks to our shepherds. *"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

There is the point of Christmas. It's not about barnyard animals waking a baby in the manger or the atrocity of a government that would move a pregnant mother 80 plus miles on rough and treacherous terrain on the back of a donkey only to give birth in a manger because no other place was available. It's not even about angels or shepherds. It's about a Savior born for you! The long promised Messiah, foretold to Adam and Abraham, Moses and David, Isaiah and Micah.

It is about peace, but not as we so often think of it. Rather peace between us and God because of what this Child, God in the flesh will do. Peace in the knowledge that sin is forgiven because as Mr. Vajda wrote in our previous hymn, this still small voice will cry one day for me. On a cross, He will defeat Satan and free us from hell and not because we were good enough that God was moved into action but simply by His grace. Christmas is God becoming one of us, coming into this crazy world of ours for us, coming because we so often forget the true meaning of his birth and in the hustle and bustle of a crazy world forget to take time to ponder it all, so God comes into this world to save us from ourselves and to gift us with forgiveness, life and salvation.

The Shepherds get it and hasten to Bethlehem to see what has happened, Mary gets it and stops to ponder all of it as the shepherds depart and brothers and sisters, by grace and through the gift of faith, you get it. It's why you found yourself coming to God's house tonight and to listen to the message once again, to be reminded of the truth that God would take on flesh to live, to die to rise and this not just for you but for all people as the angel said.

Those Shepherds hastened to Bethlehem to see the child, to see everything that the angels had said would be there. And when they had seen Him, the reality beheld there in the manger was simply to amazing not to talk about. One begins to wonder just how busy that manger in Bethlehem became as the shepherds returned to their homes and fields, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.

And so fellows believers, we may not be shepherds watching sheep at night, but God has message has come to us again calling us from the hustle and bustle of life with its constant lust for more. He has bid us to hasten again to the manger and listen, yes even see with the eyes of faith the love of God for humanity, His favor for us as the angels proclaimed it. And soon, you'll head home. May we return glorifying and praising God for all we have seen and heard. May our lives exemplify the quiet confidence of the peace that comes from sin forgiven. May our mouths proclaim a reality so awesome that people have been marveling at it for centuries that God by His grace, would send His Spirit through His Word that the manger would become busy again with all those who **HASTEN TO BETHLEHEM WITH THE SHEPHERDS.**

What is the coolest thing you have ever seen? If you know me, you know I don't like to have to make choices like that. So I'll simply point to a manger where God becomes flesh for us, a cross where He dies that we might live, an empty tomb where His resurrection means our eternity and then we'll marvel about all the things we have heard and seen which were just as we had been told. Amen!