

The Angelic Sermon

The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Eve Late (24 December 2011)

Candlelight Lessons and Carols

Saint Luke 2:8-14

Dearly beloved, it began with one angel who appeared to some shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. Can you blame them?

So the angel's first words to them are **"Fear not!"** God's angels, though not physical beings, have hearts that cannot contain their joy. How grieved they were on that saddest of days when justice demanded that they drive Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. How saddened they were to stand with flaming swords, blocking access to the Tree of Life. They patiently waited for this night for several millennia. They eagerly watched God work through the priesthood, Temple, and sacrifices, and carefully listened as God made promises to His chosen people through the prophets. God's angels can hardly contain their joy on this night, for their role has now reversed. No longer do they hold swords to bar mankind from the Tree of Life. Now they extend peaceful hands to beckon all the fallen Adams and Eves of this world back into the paradise of Bethlehem, where they may partake of the fruits of the Tree of Life in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

"Behold!" That word is intended to perk up your ears, so pay attention. The fullness of time has come. You shepherds are about to hear what future shepherds will repeat to their flocks year after year until this Christ-child returns in glory.

"Behold, I bring you good news." The word Gospel means "good news." And sure enough, the angel's message is pure Gospel. It is good news for every sinner.

"Behold, I bring you good news of great joy." Not a vague joy or an earthly emotion, but a specific joy from a specific source: the birth of God's Son. His name: Immanuel. God is with us. This is indeed a great joy, so to hell with sadness. Sadness belongs to the devil. He is the one who grieves today. The family of God rejoices with a great joy.

"Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Surely this joy can't be for me. I am a sinner, as the Apostle Paul writes: **"For all**

have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Those words are true, O sinner. Nevertheless, this good news is for all people, even for you.

“For unto you...” Did you catch those words? Not unto them. Unto you! This greatest of gifts is yours. From God. To you! What’s more, the Good Shepherd continues to speak His “unto you” via His Word. He pours His “unto you” over you in Holy Baptism. And He places His “unto you” in your mouth each and every time you partake of His body and blood. Take those two words to heart.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David...” Royal David’s city is Bethlehem, a word that means “house of bread.” And so it is that He who is the Bread of life is born in the house of bread and grows up to be the living bread who came down from heaven to give His flesh for the life of the world.

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” A Savior is someone who saves. If you don’t need saving, then put on your coat and head home. Jesus is your Savior. He became Man to save you from your sin. He can do this because He is the Christ, the One anointed by God the Father to be born of a virgin, **“born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons”** (Galatians 4:4-5).

“And this will be a sign for you.” We need signs. Without them, how would we know where to find God’s Son? Thankfully, God gives us signs. He gives us His Word, His Baptism, His Absolution, and His Supper to lead us to His Son.

“You will find a Baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” There may have been other babies born that night in Bethlehem. But only one would be found wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Sadly, Bethlehem had no room for this Savior. They confined Him to a stable with the beasts. How prophetic. For even as He was born outside of the inn with the animals, so He would later be crucified outside of the city with beastly criminals. Even as He was wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a manger, so He would later be wrapped in strips of linen and laid in a tomb. Even as the shepherds came to worship Him, so it is that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Bethlehem had no room for Him. Do you? Clean out the clutter that fills the chambers of your heart with the good news proclaimed by the angel. Sweep away the filth of unrepentant sin with the broom of God’s love, born this night for you.

And then, no longer is there a single angel heralding good news of great joy, but heaven itself is emptied of its angelic choirs. Job tells us of the last time God's angels sang in chorus. It was at creation **“when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy”** (Job 38:7). This time the angelic choirs have gathered over the hills of Bethlehem and their hymn is nothing short of an Alleluia chorus: **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”**

“Glory to God in the highest.” What else can we give to Him who gives us Himself this day? He, the highest, has become the lowest to pull us up out of depths of sin and the grave to the very heights of heaven. Let us give all glory to Him, for He has had mercy on us.

“And on earth peace...” Can you really find real, true, and lasting peace anywhere in this world? Only if you take a closer look into the manger. There you will see peace, the **“Prince of Peace”** (Isaiah 9:6) to be exact. The one who will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord and **“be their peace”** (Micah 5:5). Before Christ came and took your sin upon Himself, you were at enmity with God. But then Jesus came and defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil on your behalf, **“making peace,”** writes Paul, **“by the blood of His cross”** (Colossians 1:20). The very first word Jesus speaks to His disciples after being raised from the dead is **“Peace!”** (John 20:19). That word means your sins are forgiven, forever removed from you. Which is why Paul writes: **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Romans 5:1).

“And on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.” God is well pleased with you, dear friends, not for your sake, but for Jesus' sake. In this Christ-child, and in Him alone, you have peace. So cling to Him. Let nothing separate you from Him. He is your Peace, your Savior!

To all of you, whoever you are, wherever you came from, whatever you've done, know this: **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”** (1 Timothy 1:15). In Him you are forgiven, you are one with God. So join your voices with the angelic choirs, come often to this Bethlehem to behold your Savior manged in Word and Sacrament, ponder this good news in your heart, and then return home glorifying and praising God for all that this Christ-child has done for you! That is what God's angels invite you to do this evening. They come to bring Joy to the World, joy to you, on this Silent Night, with their heavenly sermon: **“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!”**

Merry Christmas!

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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