***God’s Christ Comes Enfleshed***

**Christ – Peace On Earth, Goodwill Toward Men**

12.24.2020

Christmas Eve – 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You have all heard it before. Most of you, at least a year or two in the past, recited some portion of Gospel lesson for this evening. You may have mumbled it under your breath, or whispered it, while it was being read a few moments ago. In other words, it is familiar to you all.

As familiar as it is to you, I am going to read it to you again.

*Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!”*

Who are you? Who am I? Who were those shepherds on that Judean hillside keeping watch over their flocks by night?

That is answered for us when we consider what we discussed in the first midweek Advent service this year.

Adam was created in the image of God. That image was perfect, holy, without sin. That image was also, and importantly, human flesh. Adam's flesh was the image as a prophecy, a type so to speak, of God enfleshed in the person of Jesus. Our own flesh bears that image of God.

Maybe what you most remember from your time in Catechesis as the definition of man being created in the “image of God” is that man knew God and God’s will. That man was perfect and without sin. Man’s holiness was given to him by God.

However, we can easily see from reading Genesis five, that something happened to **that** (aspect of the) *image of God* very soon. We are again reminded that God made “man” (Adam) in His image, ***but*** by the third verse it declares that Adam *Fathered a son in his likeness, in his image.* In other words, there was something of the image of God that was lost. Disobedience to God happened when the forbidden fruit had been eaten. Sinfulness had now corrupted that image as it was passed to the next generation.

That sinfulness has been passed on from generation to generation. When the angel appears to the shepherds, the glory of the Lord shone around them. You remember what happened? I still remember it from my days as a child in the recitations of this passage. It says that these shepherds were “sore afraid.” Or, as our more contemporary translation has it, *they were greatly afraid.*

Why? What would make shepherds, men who chase away those who would steal their sheep – from evil men to the wild beasts like unto lions, tigers, wolves or such? If with a sling, stones, and a shepherds staff they are brave enough, what could make them “greatly afraid?”

It is not anything outside themselves. You see, when the glory of the Lord shone around them, it was plainly obvious that it was the glory of the Lord. And as much as we like to think of angels and cute and cuddly, they are more often described as incredible warriors. But it is obvious that they are there to do the will of God.

Faced with the glory of God suddenly appearing to them, their lives literally flashed before their eyes – and what they saw was sinfulness. Sinfulness and the glory of God do not go well together, one or the other will be extinguished. Yeah, now you are understanding their fear. They know that their sinfulness has earned the wages of God’s wrath and punishment.

God’s messenger has a word for these shepherds though, he extols them not to be afraid. He proclaims that he has good news of great joy. It is a message for all people. What is this new? What is the message? *There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”*

What is born? A Savior? OK, what can a baby do? This Savior is Christ the Lord!

You and I do not hear these words as do those Jewish shepherds on that Judean hillside. We think about the Baby. In fact, there are many who like to pray to “Baby Jesus” as if somehow He is easier to talk to that the grown-up one? I am not sure I understand that, but.

To the ears of a Jew at the time of Jesus’ birth, this heralded message by the angel is incredible news.

Since the time of Adam, the world has been waiting for the One God promised who would crush the head of Satan. And since the promise was made to Abraham, the Jews have been foretelling the coming of God’s Christ, Messiah, the One who was to come and win forgiveness from sin and grant salvation. He would be “Lord,” which every Jew understands immediately to mean “God.”

So, what the Shepherds heard was this.

The One whom God has long foretold was going to come and defeat sin and death has been born. And this One is none other than God Himself. God has taken on human flesh, doing so in the child born in Bethlehem.

God has also given you a sign. In order for this Child to do His task, He must be indistinguishable from any other newborn child. There will be no halo around His head, He will not glow, in fact His divinity is hidden in the garb of human flesh. So, here is the sign, you will find this Baby wrapped in swaddling cloths – that is, torn strips of cloth unlike what normal babies are wrapped in. Furthermore, the child will be lying in a feeding trough for cattle.

These Jewish shepherds keeping watch over there flocks by night understood immediately that this is how God humbles Himself to come into our world to save us. They knew He would be bruised. They understood that this Child is the suffering servant who would endure what was prophesied in Psalm 22 and in Isaiah’s 52nd and 53rd chapters.

This Child was going to take all mankind’s sin into His own flesh and endure the wrath of God against sin.

You and I know that He did this upon the cross when He died for us.

After this one angel announces that God is now enfleshed to purchase forgiveness from sin and endure God’s wrath – that He is the Savior, Christ the Lord – then a multitude of the heavenly host, a whole lot of angels, blanket the sky and sing, “Glory to God in highest and peace on earth, good will toward men.”

Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in that manger is the One who comes to bring, from God, the gift of peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

Yes, we celebrate the birth of this most holy Child tonight. We rejoice that God looked upon us in our infirmity and granted us grace.

If there has been any year in our lifetimes that has made us know of our mortality, made us beg for God’s grace and mercy, then it is 2020 and the pandemic we are enduring globally. It is evidence that indeed this flesh is mortal and passing away. It is evidence that sinfulness will wreak havoc, bringing death and the fear of it upon us all.

Yet today we rejoice. *There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* We can rejoice for we know that this life is passing away. There will come a day when we will have to face God, but we do so with joyous anticipation. There is no dread in the hearts of those who know what God Himself has accomplished in His Son, given to us as our greatest gift. We know that Jesus is – God’s peace on earth, good will toward men.

So let us this night raise our voices to join the angelic song, “Glory to God in highest and peace on earth, good will toward men.”

In the name of Jesus. Amen.