**Luke 2:1-20 (ESV)**

**1** In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. **8** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. **10** And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14**  “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” **15** When the angels went away from them into heaven, 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.” **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**“Christ Identified For You”**

In the Name of Mary’s Child and the One sent by our Father in Heaven, Jesus Christ our blessed Lord and Savior, Amen. During the season of Advent, we looked at several hymns or canticles that praised the coming of God. The Virgin Mary sang her “Magnificat” magnifying the Lord’s favor to her who would be blessed among women. Silent Zechariah sang his priestly “Benedictus” blessing the Lord for His faithfulness in preparing the way for the Savior. Lastly, elderly Simeon sang his “Nunc Dimittis” departing in peace over having held the infant Christ in his arms. These significant figures from the earliest times of the New Testament note how God becoming man is the highest honor celebrated at Christmas.

Of course, there is one last song for us. It has a special place at the nativity of Christ. This is because no other songs were present on the night of God’s birth in the world. Mary was crying out in labor exhausted from the birth of her firstborn son. Joseph was tending to the needs of his wife as a faithful husband. Those in Bethlehem were blind to God being born in a manager behind the inn. Even the shepherds were busy at work with no time to sing a little tune to God. Yet, such humility by God received the full attention of the heavenly hosts who always praise His Holy Name. Their song is short, but the “Gloria In Excelsis” only seeks to introduce Jesus Christ. Christmas Eve invites us to sing with the angels that God has come to save.

Unlike a song coming from man, the shepherds were not in a singing mood over what came from God. The sight of a single angel only brought fear. This was not because of the darkness caused by sin, death, or the Devil. Instead, it came from the light of having “the glory of the Lord shone around them.” Israel in the Old Testament trembled the same way before the glory of God revealed on Mt. Sinai. If the angels had sang to such a crowd of scared shepherds. Their song would have turned from joy to the world to only sorrow for sinners. The praise of “Glory to God in the highest” first had to be a preached word that could save. It was to hear the angel say, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

Plenty of fear floats around in hearts and minds still today. Unfortunately, what takes hold of sinners also lets them miss the celebration of Christmas. How easy is it to make other fears in life greater than the fact that God has become man. Likewise, we can also end up seeing Jesus born of the Virgin Mary seeking to get back at sinners rather than to make the unholy Holy in Him. Christmas is the great “fear not” that points to the faithfulness of God crying in a manger. He is the same One who went from the cradle to crying on the cross. St. Paul said, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” The glory declared at Christmas is that Jesus is both God and man. It is in faith to God’s first coming in humility that we look to the Final Day where “glory to God in the highest” will be to Him who has loved us.

With fear removed, the angels delivered a song for the shepherds. A gift came from heaven down to earth. Why not bring such praise, since “peace on earth” meant God gave Himself as a present to His fallen creation. Humanity will always be at war with God and one another because we are born sinners. Christmas tells us the child of Mary is the only man born without a sinful grudge because He is God. There is peace on earth because of Him bearing all sin for sinners. This was the promise declared to the chaotic and frustrated lives of shepherds. They heard, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Jesus later appealed to what He alone could give as Savior saying, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” Matthew 11:28-30.

Christmas is a song of peace extending out to the ends of the earth. What comes down from heaven by God’s grace is to hear good news in Jesus. It is surpasses the goals of peaceful government, a happy home, or lawful business. You can have all this and not have the peace the angels sing of on Christmas. It is what Jesus speaks from His Church to the whole world saying, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” Mark 2:17. His birth in a manger shows God submitted to the “peaceful” ways of man, even if it meant poverty. His suffering and death proves true peace on earth is what God gives by His way of forgiveness. What the angels sang to the shepherds, the baptized now sing over Jesus humbly working by His Word and Sacrament. As Isaiah promised, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”

After the song by the angelic host, the shepherds would share what they saw of the nativity scene. They did not turn away from the simplicity or meekness of Mary’s child. Rather, they truly had something to celebrate in faith “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” God’s good will toward men is that they meet Jesus, the Word made flesh. “Those with whom he is pleased” were the shepherds who saw God’s saving will was in Christ given for them. The arrogant will never see a need for such humbleness made known by God. The wise will never see the depth of love sent to save sinners. As Jesus would later boast, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” Luke 10:21.

Why do you celebrate Christmas? Why are you a Christian? Why listen to the story of Christ’s birth? It has nothing to do with our goodness or some mighty decision worked by us. Instead, it is God’s good pleasure to deliver you, forgive you, and sanctify you in His Son. St. Paul states, “…he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will…” Ephesians 1:4-5. The nativity scene is not a threat, but a call to celebrate what Christ does for all. His cradle will become the wood of the Cross. Our “Gloria in Excelsis” rests in the humility of Jesus at work in the world by God’s grace. Christmas Eve invites us to sing with the angels that God has come to save. Amen. Now may the peace of God, born of the Virgin Mary be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.