

"A Savior Has Been Born To You"

(St. Luke 2:8-10)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. And now we can say it with accuracy as the season of Advent fades, and the new season begins for the next 12 days after this holy night: Merry Christmas! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, why did God choose to give the single most important announcement the world has ever known that "a Savior who is Christ the Lord" has been born "for all people" first to *shepherds*?! This first proclamation by the heavenly host did not go to kings, governors, Roman centurians, or priests, but to *shepherds*. There are two main reasons.

First, it is because shepherds – definitely among the marginalized and unimpressive by societal standards – represent the overall theme of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is otherwise known as "the great reversal". You would think that such a magnificent heralding which indeed revealed glory from heaven via the angels would show God coming as One who is mighty, but that is not how He came. There is a surprising reversal that takes place. Instead, God comes as a baby who needs to cry (the Christmas carol that says "no crying He makes" is a little idealistic to say the least; He had to cry to clear His lungs and for that matter had to experience all of His other bodily functions that we never sing about out of pious sensibilities right?). I say this, because Jesus -- the Creator of the Universe -- was once a helpless baby like other babies and yet we confess the truth: this baby was the King of

Kings and Lord of Lords! As Almighty God He took on our human flesh so that He could even taste death. And as if this humble condition was already not enough, He was born in a manger, a cave-bedroom shared with animals with a bed of straw.

You would think God would have made a splash coming in all majestic radiance with His fiery ones surrounding Him in His glory, but no, instead He was born under such conditions that would make even the poorest family in Bethlehem self-conscious and embarrassed. Why? Because in the radiant; make-believe version, people would only bow before Him in fear. The announcement of the angels to the shepherds, however, begins with the words, "*Fear not...*"(v 10). They were being pointed to the sight of the Messiah that would cause them to fear, but to marvel in the greatest joy that God was truly, *truly* joining their lives. Weak like them, poor like them, practically insignificant – in the eyes of the world anyway – like them, struggling like them, and a Savior who could and would die like them. Such a Savior did not make them tremble in fear, but rather filled them with glory and praise to God knowing that they were not abandoned by God; God had come into their lives and would rescue them from everything associated with sin and death.

So again, the shepherds epitomize this great reversal. They are not kings, governors, Roman centurians, or priests, but *shepherds*, so that *the theme of the Gospel would be established from the very beginning of Christ's coming into the world: God has come for the weak, not the strong*. Some will object, "But I thought the angels said for 'for all people,'?" Yes, true, but the

strong reject the Savior who comes; He does indeed come for the strong as well, but the strong do not need Him (so they miscalculate); they love the world more than anything else; and they do not want the things of God; they do not want Jesus; they believe that they do not need Jesus, so even though Jesus comes for them as well, He is also rejected by them. This is why we say He does not come for the strong. We are simply pointing to the end result. Because the strong reject Him, they do not receive Him.

Instead, He comes to the poor shepherds who represent the poverty of hearts and spirits weighed down by sin; He comes to the exhausted, the lowly, and the despairing. Some of us despair because we are ashamed – struggling with a sinful addiction – some of us are filled with guilt knowing that what we have done and what we are doing is not only an affront to others created in the image of God, but rebellion towards God Himself, and some of us are full of fear for that medical diagnosis or that situation that seems to be spinning out of control...all such conditions make us feel weighed down with sin, poor, and weak. And in the world's version of Christmas the ironic "solution" is to try hard to mask what we despair of through merchandise that will fade and money that is useless for repairing broken hearts. If you relate to what I'm saying then you're like the shepherds...you too are like those who take great joy that Jesus has entered your life, your real life. If He could come for the poor, dusty shepherds, then He could – and did – come for the likes of you and for the likes of me!

Thank God that he came to shepherds! Hear the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 9: "But when he heard it, he

said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (vv 12-13)." And hear from Matthew 11: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (v 28)." These words fit shepherds, and more importantly, they fit you.

There is, however, *second* reason God chose shepherds. The shepherds not only represent poor sinners like you, but more importantly, they represent God. The angels were announcing the birth of Christ to those who represented who and what Jesus was! Abraham the father of faith was a shepherd; Isaac was a shepherd; Jacob who became Israel was a shepherd; Moses was a shepherd when God called him to lead Israel out of Egypt (Ex 3:1), and David was a shepherd when God called him to be king of Israel (1 Sam 16:11ff). This was no coincidence. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city where King David was born, and now to completely identify with King David and the royal line promised to Abraham, the angels go to those doing the work King David once did. Why? Because Jesus was *the* Shepherd!

What did shepherds do? "*The shepherd was known for his feeding and protecting the flock (Jer 31:10; Ezek 34:2); for seeking out the lost sheep (Ezek 34:12) and for rescuing those which were attacked (Amos 3:12) (Tinney. Ed. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol 5, 397).*"

This is the perfect description of the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ born on that first Christmas. He feeds His flock, He seeks

His lost sheep, and He rescues His sheep when they are attacked. He feeds you with His Word and Sacrament to keep your faith in Him alive and well as you go through life; so that everything you do, everything you encounter in life would be kept in the context of faith. For the child of God, the disciple of Christ, nothing is random; nothing is meaningless, everything happens for a reason, and all of it is used for your good (Rom 8:28) even the trials. Through all things, He feeds you so that you would continue to experience all that He is in your life as your Shepherd who feeds you, protects you, seeks you out when you go astray, and who rescues you when you are attacked.

And He seeks you out when you feel totally lost. Do you ever feel lost? And ask those questions, "What am I doing? Who am I? What have I become? What have I done? The good that I would, I do not do; instead the things that I hate and wish I did not do, I do (Rom 7)." When you are in the midst of your internal conflict, when drugs replace opening up to those who love you; when deceit blocks your love for those God has bond you to; when you live in a frenzy so that you won't really look in the mirror and confess what needs to be confessed; when you feel least of all as one who is loved by God, you feel lost. But behold dear Christian, Jesus became even lower than you and at the same time, born as the Greatest Shepherd with the immediate mission to FIND YOU His lost sheep!

He has not given up on you. He was born to find you and bring you back into His loving arms to say this night, "You are forgiven and we can start again, and I will take the lead."

And finally, as Shepherd He protects you, comes to your rescue when you are attacked. You do know of course that your worst attack and your most sublime rescue has already occurred. It was when all sin, all satanic forces, and all the power of death itself came down upon you and attacked you with the greatest ferocity to ensure that you would be nothing less than destroyed, because that is what Satan does. He uses alcohol, lies, fornication, adultery, pornography, verbal abuse, physical abuse, addiction to work, addiction to your appearance, anger, hatred, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition...they are merely tools in the evil one's toolbox to effect one thing and one thing only: to destroy you, to somehow try to convince you that you are beyond salvation and that you must run from God and live desperately as if this world is all there is. All of this came upon you in full force; and then the rescue took place.

Christmas came 2000 years ago: Jesus was born and He faced the attacks for you; he bore your sins in His body on the tree that was shaped in a cross (1 Pe 2:24); and just when death seemed to prevail, that enemy too was conquered on the third day. You were attacked, and the Shepherd overwhelmed your attackers and crushed them through His blood and resurrection. He said to those attackers: "No, not this one. This one – He said of you – is mine! This one shall not die, but live; this one shall not be condemned, but shall be saved; this one is one of my sheep for whom I was born. This one – He said of you – is my sheep and I am their Shepherd!"

Listen to Him who was born for you dear Christian! "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11)." Listen to Him speak to you this Christmas Eve: "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me (Jn 10:14)." Do you know Him? Of course you do. You are like those shepherds, like those who need a Shepherd, like those who need a Savior. You know this. Do you know Him? Of course you do! Because you know and believe as well that he is the Good Shepherd and that He feeds the hungry, He seeks and finds the lost, and He protects and defends poor sinners not for anything you have done, but because He was born to save those like you and those like me. So let us soak in the words and speak them back and forth in faith as to what they really mean and we'll do it three times in honor of the Holy Trinity: the Father who sent your greatest gift out of the greatest love; the Son who came to mere shepherds as the Good Shepherd; and the Holy Spirit who has once again created faith in your heart [repeat after me]: "Merry Christmas!" [repeat] "Merry Christmas!" [repeat] "Merry Christmas!" [repeat].