

Sheperds, Savior and Song

Luke 2:8-20

Hymns: #98 Hark the Herald Angels Sing #104 O Come All Ye Faithful

Readings: Luke 2:8-20

Prayer: Our God and Father, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, your only begotten and beloved Son, we gather together and come before your glorious throne of grace to offer you the fruit of our lips in praise and in giving you thanks. Lord Jesus thank you for your promise that where even two or three are gathered together in your name, that you are there, so thank you for being with us this morning. Holy Spirit, we thank you for your indwelling and the gifts you have given us, especially your inspired and preserved Word of God. As we reflect this morning on the concrete reality of Jesus Christ having come in the flesh in the past, may we be strengthened to see and expect your concrete return for us in the future. Open the eyes of our hearts and give us ears to hear now as we listen to and for your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Mark Twain was once asked to record a Christmas message on an early gramophone. This is what he said, "It is my heart-warm and world-embracing Christmas hope and aspiration that all of us, the high, the low, the rich, the poor, and admired, the despised, the loved, the hated, the civilized, the savage; every man and woman of us all throughout the whole earth; may eventually be gathered in a heaven of everlasting rest and peace and bliss... except for the inventor of the telephone."

Many times I couldn't agree more with Twain's exception. Mark Twain could never have imagined what would become of the humble telephone. It has been transformed into a device that announces messages to us 100 times a day. It announces texts and tweets; messages of love and messages to please pick up some milk on the way home. It also announces news that is received instantaneously around the world; some of which is even true. But it also announces much that is in error, as Mark Twain also recognized when he said, "A lie can travel half way around the world before the truth has even put its pants on". The problem with this "announcement inundation" is that we can only take so much. After a while we just become numb to it and cease to really sense the impact of it all.

In some ways, the Christmas story is like that. For many of us, we have heard it so many times that it simply fails to really register with us just what was announced that night on a Judean hillside outside Bethlehem. Because, as the old adage goes, "familiarity breeds contempt", some seek to get gimmicky or cute with the Christmas message in order to try and recapture peoples imagination. But I don't believe we need to do that. I believe the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any double edge sword, able to penetrate even to the dividing of us from our i-phones. I believe if we simply let it speak to us, yet again, the Christmas story will announce staggeringly good news to us; yes even to US. So, this morning, this Christmas Eve morning, let us listen to the "old, old story" with the heart of the hymn by that name:

"Tell me the story slowly,
That I may take it in—
That wonderful redemption,
God's remedy for sin;
Tell me the story often,
For I forget so soon,
The "early dew" of morning
Has passed away at noon."

"Tell me the story softly,
With earnest tones and grave;
Remember I'm the sinner
Whom Jesus came to save;
Tell me the story always,
If you would really be,
In any time of trouble,
A comforter to me."

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Read: Luke 2:8-20

Luke's nativity account is all about announcement; Announcement TO Shepherds; Announcement OF The Savior and Announcement IN Song. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Announcement to Shepherds

The first thing we notice is that the Incarnation announcement was made, not to Kings. Herod was not on the guest list. It was not made to Priests, so Joazar the High Priest that year wasn't on the guest list either. It wasn't made to Prophets, rather it was announced to Shepherds. We must understand in that day, as it is today in many places, Shepherds were seen as unclean and uncouth; borderline social outcasts; they were looked on with suspicion like current day gypsies or carnival workers. They couldn't even give testimony in a legal proceeding because their word wasn't considered trustworthy. They lived with and among sheep 24x7, didn't shower much if ever, and were not highly educated. They were despised and the lowliest of society.

I can still recall my own experience of how despised shepherds are to this day. Back in the mid 1990's I was living and working among the last truly nomadic herdsman of the Sahara in Niger; the Wodaabe people. While there I had the priestly privilege of seeing several clans of Wodaabe respond positively to the Gospel message when it was announced to them. Their spontaneous "Min jaabe, min jaabe- we believe, we believe" when seeing the Jesus Film shown on a sheet tied to the 4WD in their bush camp is something I shall never forget. But equally, I shall never forget the shock, shame and embarrassment I felt one Sunday when some of them accompanied us into a little mud brick structure in our town that was the local expression of the Nigerien church. The local people despised the Wodaabe shepherds and so it was nothing for them to jab them in their backs with staffs and speak rudely to them...IN CHURCH. Needless to say, it would be over our dead bodies that we ever took any Wodaabe seekers in there again...nor ourselves for that matter.

The shepherds outside Bethlehem were lowly and despised, and yet it was to them that God announced the most staggering theological truth: the Incarnation; that God had become a man. This should give us a great sense of hope and joy this morning. For are not you and I like the shepherds? Are you and I not common, lowly and increasingly socially despised and outcasts from the world? As the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians:

"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, 29so that no one may boast before him. 30It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:26-30)

But these were not just the ordinarily despised shepherds. These shepherds were under Levitical supervision and responsible for the flocks and the lambs that were used in the daily Temple sacrifice and especially for the Passover Lamb. According to the Talmud, the Jewish Civil and Ceremonial Law, the hill country from Jerusalem to Migdal Eder, that is the Tower of Eder, was consecrated and sheep and cattle born there were deemed holy and could only be used in the sacrificial worship, in particular the Passover.

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The first mention of Migdal Eder is in Genesis 35:21 and is associated with Bethlehem where Jacob buried Rachel. The prophet Micah also refers to Migdal Eder. "And you, O tower of the flock (lit. Migdal Eder), the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem." (Micah 4:8) Based on this prophecy, prominent Jewish writers concluded in the Midrash (Jewish commentary) that from all of the places in Israel, it would be the Migdal Eder where the arrival of the Messiah and the appearance of God's kingdom would be declared first (ICEJ).

The church historian Eusebius also linked the fields where the shepherds of Luke 2 were watching their sheep to a unique biblical location called Migdal Eder, the "tower of the flock". Further, the Christian Messianic Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim writes, "That the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, was a settled conviction. Equally so was the belief, that He was to be revealed from Migdal Eder, "the tower of the flock." This Migdal Eder was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks which pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem."

This watchtower was located just on the outskirts of Bethlehem on the road to Jerusalem. It was a stone structure, similar to a giant igloo in shape with a tower erected on top. From the top, shepherds could keep an eye on the temple sheep across a vast expanse. And down below, they would bring the sheep inside to give birth to their lambs. It was a ceremonial pure place. Since only spotless and unblemished lambs could be used in the temple sacrifice, they would immediately swaddle every sacrificial lamb in a long band of cloth and lay it in the manger. They did this to keep it from injuring itself and thus become disqualified for sacrifice. The prophetic significance of the angel appearing to shepherds; them knowing exactly which manger to go to, namely the one beneath the Migdal Eder, and finding a baby named "Jehovah Saves" swaddled and lying in the manger, can hardly be overestimated. Here is where Mary most likely gave birth to our Passover Lamb something these shepherds knew all about. And here he was surrounded by and witnessed to by the Levitical shepherds to be a lamb without defect or blemish. And here the prophecies of Micah 4:8-10 and 5:2-5 find their dual fulfilment, first in the Babylonian exile and then in the birth of Jesus Christ.

Micah 4:8-10 "As for you, **O watchtower of the flock (Lit. Migdal Eder)**, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, (**lit. to you it shall come**) the former dominion will be restored to you; **kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem.**" 9 **Why do you now cry aloud-** have you no king? Has your counselor perished, that **pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor?** 10 **Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field.**"

Micah 5:2-5 "But you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, **out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.** 3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned **until the time when she who is in labor gives birth** and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. 4 **He will stand and shepherd his flock** in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then **his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.** 5 **And he will be their peace.**

Using our scripturally informed and sanctified imagination, join me in picturing this scene. After a week of excruciatingly painful travel for Mary, they arrive in Joseph's ancestral home town late in the afternoon. But Joseph was not the only one of his extended family to come for the census and needing a guest room with local family. Though Mary was pregnant, none of his family were willing

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to offer them a guest chamber, lest they become ceremonially defiled should Mary give birth in their home. Not to mention the public scandal of Mary being found pregnant before they had married. Finding no καταλύματι (katalumati- lit. guest room) they turned away from Bethlehem and headed back out of town on the road north to Jerusalem. Though it was nearly sunset, Joseph thought perhaps they could cover the 9km back to Jerusalem before it was completely dark. Suddenly, just a thousand paces out of Bethlehem, Mary writhes in pain. "Joseph, stop! Help me! The baby is coming, it's too late. I can't make it." Looking around, Joseph sees the Migdal Eder, the Tower of the flock just off the road to the west of them. Mary staggers there on Joseph's arm. Looking inside, there are no shepherds, no sheep, just an empty manger and some scattered lamb swaddling in the corner. Mary's labour was that of a very young girl, painful but she was preserved as God had promised. Within a few hours her baby, our Lord and Savior, was born. Joseph rifled through his belongings for his knife and the bag of salt they carried on their journey. Having cut the cord and rubbed the newborn down with salt, Joseph retrieved one of the shepherd's long pieces of swaddling discarded in the corner. Looking him over for any defects, Joseph lifts Him up for Mary to see. He is perfect. Joseph then gently swaddled the baby Jesus before handing him to Mary. For the next several hours, Mary and Joseph stared into the eyes of their creator and marvelled. When neither of them could keep their eyes open any longer, Joseph gently and protectively laid the sleeping Jesus in the manger still filled with fodder. Joseph and Mary thought they heard voices in the distance. Indeed they did, and they were coming closer. Joseph arose and stood defending the entrance to the cave like lower half of the tower. "Did you see it? Did you hear it too?" the shepherds exhaled excitedly upon their arrival. "See and hear what?" Joseph replied. "The Angel and the armies of heaven. Where is He? Where is the Savior?" Stunned, Joseph stepped aside and points inside. Exactly as the angel's announcement had said to them, the shepherds found a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger; they beheld the swaddled unblemished Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. And Mary treasured up and pondered in her heart all that the shepherds said and discussed amongst themselves before they left Mary and Joseph all alone once again in silence of that amazing night.

I hope that blows you away as it has me this Christmas.

The Christmas storey first announces itself to shepherds; to people of no account just like you and me. But people to whom a great prophetic sign has been fulfilled and an announcement made. And what does it say to us? The first thing it says is "Do not be afraid". In the Christmas narratives, there are several "fear nots":

- The "fear not" of **unanswered prayer**: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John" (Luke 1:13).
- The "fear not" of the **humanly impossible**: "But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you... For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:30, 35, 37).
- The "fear not" of **immediate obedience**: "...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit... When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife" (Matthew 1:20, 24)
- But in our reading this morning it's the "fear not" of **salvation**: "And the angel said unto them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

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Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10, 11).

What are you most afraid of? Really...what is the ultimate thing to be afraid of? Is it not death? Is it not the possibility of Hell's Judgement Fire? Is it not that God is against you? Yes, these are truly the most fearful and dreadful things that every man must either experience, suppress or else find relief from. And what is it that begins to relieve us from these much warranted fears? It is the announcement of The Savior. Only a Savior can calm these dreadful fears of ours and set us free from them. And that my friends is exactly what was announced that night outside Bethlehem and is being re-announced to you this morning.

Announcement of The Savior

The Christmas story announces to you and me this morning that The Savior has been born:

- The Savior who saves **you** from **death**: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." (Heb. 2:14-15)
- The Savior who saves **you** from **judgment**: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:17)
- The Savior who is **not against us**: "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31-32)

This is the Good News of Christmas; the Gospel. And note carefully two things about this gospel that the angel announced to the shepherds:

- First, this good news is something that has already happened. Christ the Lord "has been born". The Gospel is always a declaration of a historical fact and reality. It is first and foremost a declaration of an objective truth, not an invitation to a possibility. Yes, it is true that apart from faith that receives Jesus Christ as Savior, the objective truth remains unrealized and a person remains condemned in sin. But, the point here is that faith is first and foremost a discovery of what is true. And what is true is the historical fact that the Savior has been born.
- Second, note that the angel said "...a Savior has been born TO YOU". That's right TO YOU...even YOU! Can you believe it? Yes, you! Fearful, doubtful, sinful YOU. You have a Savior this morning.
 - John Calvin commented on this when he observed that "The pronoun "to you" is very emphatic, for it would have given no great delight to hear that the Author of salvation was born, unless each (shepherd) person believed that (it was) for himself (that the Savior) He was born."¹

The angel also made clear that this "good news of great joy will be for all the people". The gospel announcement is not just for the shepherds, it is for all people. Everyone needs to hear the glad tidings that the Savior has been born. Jesus made this clear just before his ascension into heaven when he said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you

¹ John Calvin; *A Harmony of The Synoptic Gospels*; Calvin Publications Inc.; p. 52

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always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20). When shepherds, lowly and despised people like you and me, believe that they are one of the "to you's" only then are they transformed into priests who will share in the "priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel" (Rom. 15:16).

The angel made it clear that the Savior had been born in a specific place, "in the town of David" thus fulfilling the prophetic promise in Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Let us never forget that for this prophecy to have been fulfilled required an obedient response from a Godly couple to an extremely burdensome governmental taxation requirement at the worst possible time in their young lives.

In Luke 2: 1-5 we read "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to his own town to register. 4So 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. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child".

Consider for just a moment what this journey was like for Mary and Joseph: From Nazareth to Bethlehem is about 70 miles south (112 km) as the crow flies. But the journey would have been even longer for they likely headed east first, crossing the Jordon River into Perea, modern day Jordan, so they could avoid going through Samaria. They travelled along the east bank of the Jordon until they reach Jericho where they likely crossed back over into Judea. Then up the eastern mountain slopes to Jerusalem, where they turned south and descended down to Bethlehem. This trip would have been more like 100 miles (160 km). If they travelled two miles an hour, that's 50 hours; and at 7 hours a day of travel time, that means a full week of walking or riding on a donkey. This was no little inconvenience for them especially for a heavily pregnant Mary. I suspect many of us would consider such a journey a once in lifetime achievement; like conquering Everest; that is if we survived.

Yet, Mary and Joseph endured all that, including having their firstborn child of the angelic promise, The Savior, born in a sheep tower and laid in a feeding trough. But Joseph and Mary didn't resist the providential hand of God in their lives, even when it meant making a difficult trip. They trusted that God was in control of their lives and that He would Shepherd them gently on this burdensome journey, just as the Prophet Isaiah promised: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; **he gently leads those that have young.**" (Is. 40:11) God entrusted the fulfilment of this great Messianic prophecy to a couple who understood and obeyed the principle you and I have been given in Romans 13: 5-7 "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor." Remember Joseph and Mary next time you're tempted to do something dodgy with your taxes just because it seems burdensome. Don't fight circumstances you can't help without rebelling against God. He may actually be inviting you into the fulfilment of His prophetic purposes.

Notice also that the angel announced that a Savior had been born and that "He is Christ the Lord." Here we have three title descriptions of Jesus Christ.

- First, Jesus is Savior, for that is what His name means. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means the Lord saves. Your greatest need and mine is a Savior. You don't deserve a

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Savior; you don't earn a Savior; but you need a Savior. If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But our greatest need was redemption, so God sent us a Savior.

- Second, Jesus is The Christ, that is "the anointed one"; the Greek word for the Hebrew Messiah. In the OT three types of people were anointed:
 - Prophets- act on behalf of God to Man
 - Priests- act on behalf of Man to God
 - Kings- act to conquer the enemy tyrants
 - Jesus Christ was born to fulfil all three of these.
- Third, Jesus is the Lord- kýrios – meaning a person exercising absolute ownership rights. He is the Sovereign One who made you and owns you. He is God.

Whether the shepherds fully understood the prophetic significance of these titles or not, we do understand clearly that Jesus Christ is the long awaited and prophesised Messiah of Isaiah 9: 6-7: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."

I have also personally seen in shepherds, the power of the fear removing good news of Jesus the Savior, Christ and Lord. One night, while sitting on a bamboo matt under a diamond scattered Saharan sky, making Arabic tea with one of the sons of a Wodaabe clan king, I witnessed the power of this baby born in the city of David. In the glow of the kerosene lantern, Ali lifted his long black Wodaabe shirt and said, "Maaket, raa, walla layaaji, emi walla kulol", meaning Mike, look, no more charms, I don't have any more fear. This shepherd had been gloriously liberated from his bondage to fear and the bondage to worthless magic charms to protect him. Now he had the Savior and was free. Oh, may everyone who hears this announcement be set free from fear and the trinkets of a false security.

Announcement in Song

Then suddenly, the sky exploded above the shepherds. Now, not only was there just one angel and the glory of the Lord shining around them, but now there was the visible appearance of the innumerable army of heaven, for that is what the heavenly host means. This army of angels penetrated the atmosphere of satanic space and with an orchestrated blasting shout sang: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests." I get the impression that this song was repeated over and over before they withdrew back into heaven". The army of heaven simply could not contain its excitement and wonder, its worship and glory to the God of the Universe. No greater announcement to the world could possibly be conceived than the two realities expressed in their song.

The first realty is that there is now "Peace to men"...there is peace to you this morning because God "was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds as shown by your evil behaviour. 22But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col. 1:21-22). My friends you are reconciled to God this very moment, whether you believe it or not. But to be saved, you must

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believe in Him and trust Him. But if you have believed in Him, then you were saved, you were justified and now both peace with God (Rom. 5:1) and the peace of God (Phil. 4:7) are His Christmas gifts to you.

The second reality in this heavenly song is that God's favour rests on you...let me announce it again... God's favour rests on you...even you. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Rom. 8:32-34)

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins...And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. (1 John 4:9-10; 16).

This Christmas Eve, let us not miss the point like this man did back in December of 1903. After many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine saying: "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." Katherine was so excited and she hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "Oh, how nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the big news: man had flown!

O may God spare us from the kind of contemptuous hearing that over familiarity with the Christmas storey can produce. This is a heavenly love song sent to you from God your Creator... It says, "Be at peace...be loved...My Son has done it all. Believe Me, Receive Him and Trust Him."

Response

So what is your response to all this? Is this just another "Christmas story"? Or will you dare to respond as did the shepherds and Mary?

Look at these shepherds run. They didn't sit around and throw another log on the fire. They got up, very riskily left their sheep unattended and "hurried off" to see what had been told them. If you are listening to this message and you have never "heard" these things before, then hurry. Don't delay! Get up! Go see for yourself! Run to the Bethlehem – the House of Bread- and find Him who is the Bread of Life, the living bread that came down from heaven for you (John 6:35;51).

When the shepherds arrived they found the Savior according to Gods word to them. Have you found the Savior according to God's word to you yet? He is there! In Bethlehem...in His spoken Word recorded in the Bible (John 6:63). Hurry and find him. It will be just as God has promised. You will find Him even in a manger. Oh behold the love of God and the humility of your Savior. If He was not ashamed to be born in an animal trough and He is not ashamed to be born in you either. Fear Not! He will not reject you. He said "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28) He said "...whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."(John 6:37-40)

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And look at these shepherds spread the word "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them." Those who truly hurry and find Him cannot help but tell others about the long prophesied and now fulfilled Good News of the Savior having come.

And will you look at Mary with me? Look at how she "treasured up all these things" (lit. guarded them closely to herself). God has freely given you an eternal treasure in His Son Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior. Where do you keep your most treasured possessions? You keep them close to you and secure. And look at Mary who "pondered them in her heart". She lit. "συμβάλλουσα", she threw them together; she threw it all together in her heart; the events of her life good and easy, bad and hard and she started to connect the dots as she mediated day and night on the way God had been leading her. Oh can I exhort you this morning to respond like Mary. Keep this message close and connect the dots in your own life and see how God has been leading you to find your Savior and to grow in Him. "Ponder anew what The Almighty can do, Who with his love doth befriend thee"

Invitation

As I close, I am conscious that someone may be hearing this message either here or on our website, who has never heard or responded to the glorious Christmas announcement, but wants to. If that's you, then listen closely, "By this gospel you are saved...For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve."

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death. But God has demonstrated his own love for you in this: While you were still a sinner Christ died for you. The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

If you have come to the Migdal Eder this morning and have found the swaddled Lamb of God, Jesus Christ who alone takes away your sin and gives you a second birth, then you can simply respond to God by faith with this prayer:

My God,

I have heard and seen your Word. I acknowledge that I am a sinner and can't be good enough to save myself from eternal death and hell. I believe your Word and trust that Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again for me in all my sin. Lord Jesus come into my life as I now receive you through faith. Thank you for the forgiveness of all my sins and the free gift of eternal life. I believe and confess Jesus Christ is Lord. Amen.

If you just prayed that prayer in faith then the words of the Savior born in Bethlehem are for you: He said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

Welcome to the family and Merry, Merry Christmas to you.

Sheperds, Savior and Song

Luke 2:8-20

Let us pray... Blessed Triune God of Grace, thank you for the indescribable gift of your Son having been given to us to save us from sin and death. Tonight and tomorrow as we celebrate your incarnation, we ask you to seal this word to our hearts. As the Psalmist pondered, "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD (Ps. 116:12-13). So now Father, we join that Psalmist in coming to your Table to lift up the cup of salvation and call upon your name with eucharista- the giving of our thanks. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.