

The birth of Jesus is recorded in Scripture, proclaimed by angels, heralded by foreign wise men, seen by Jewish shepherds, and shared with all who would hear: Christ born for you! Jesus, the Lamb of God, was born in a stable where sheep sleep, He was lovingly wrapped with swaddling cloths, and was laid where the sheep eat. Jesus, the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd, came to where His sheep are.

The first people to hear the Good News of the Saviour's birth, besides His mother and earthly father hearing His newborn cries: were the shepherds. That first night, shepherds were doing what shepherds do every night, providing for, guarding, protecting, defending, and if the situation were to arise, were even prepared to die for the sheep in their charge.

But then something very different happened, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, the glory of the Lord shone around them, and then the angel spoke to them the words generations longed to hear. The angel, along with a multitude of the heavenly host, arrived in the field around Bethlehem to proclaim to the shepherds the great news for them and for all people of the earth: **“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”**

Of all the people the angel could have gone to, it may seem strange the angel first proclaimed the message of the Saviour's birth to shepherds, those dirty, ritually unclean folk who lived with sheep most of their life, but really who else but shepherds would the angels proclaim such a wonderful message that first night? The Lamb had arrived, and not to for the shepherd to deliver and save Him, but because He came to deliver and save the shepherds and all people!

When looking at Israel's history, mainly their patriarchs, it is not as strange as one might think that the angel went first to shepherds. The nation of Israel had a long history of being shepherds, including: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons, and most notably, King David (whose blood line Christ is born into). The children of Israel had a long history of taking care of sheep, but now in these last days, the Lamb had come to take care of all people.

And so, the Angel proclaimed: **“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”** The promised Saviour has been born for you. You will know Him when you find Him, for He will be exactly where God says He will be: **“wrapped with swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger.”** Which is not something seen every day.

There was excitement at Jesus' birth. **“Jesus Incarnation is proof that God is not against us.”** God had not abandoned His people. God is not our enemy; rather it is exactly the opposite: God is our ally, our friend, and our Saviour! Jesus, the Christ, born for you begins to demonstrate how far God was willing to go in order to save us and all humanity. There was nothing, not even an excruciating death could stop God from coming for you. Jesus birth brings the Lord's presence near to humanity

Sure enough, after hearing the angel's message, the shepherds went and found their Saviour and ours just as the angel proclaimed. They didn't doddle, they didn't wait until

morning, or wait for their relief crew to come in; the shepherds took off that night, leaving their sheep to find the Lamb. They risked most everything to see the One who would give everything for them.

Once they saw the Christ, they shared the Good news with all who were around them! They retold to others the Good News the angel had told them. They did this, not because they had to, but because that kind of Good News is contagious! How could anyone keep such wonderful news to themselves after receiving such a wonderful gift; after hearing such Good News and then seeing it, seeing their Saviour, with their own eyes? **“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them”** (Luke 2:20). They glorified and praised God for what He revealed to them by His Word.

This Good News was not just for the shepherds, but this Good News is for each and every one of us! God did not just come for some people, He came for everyone. God was not content to leave us to our own sinful devices and allow us to condemn ourselves eternally; rather God intervened, and continues to intervene, in our time and space with His very presence! Christ was born with the shadow of the cross looming over the manger where He lay. The 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of “What Child is This” nails the importance of Christ in the manger as we sing: “Why lies He in such mean estate, where ox and ass are feeding? Good Christian, fear; for sinners here The silent Word is pleading. Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, The cross be borne for me, for you; hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary.” (What Child is this, LSB #370)

Christ lies there separated from the rest of the people in the inn because we were separated from each other, and even more so from God because of our sin, and without Jesus we would be eternally separated from God. Yet, even from that manger the Word made flesh was already silently pleading and intervening for you and your salvation. He would complete His intervention in your forgiveness and salvation when He would sacrifice Himself for you, sealing your release when the nails and spear pierced Him on the cross, when His blood was shed, and finally when He died in your place, this babe, this Son of Mary.

Through God’s Means of Grace—by His Word and Sacrament—Jesus exchanged His death and resurrection for yours: your death for His life, your bondage to sin and death for His deliverance, and your sins for His salvation. His Word brings faith to your ears and heart. In Baptism, God makes Christ’s death and resurrection your own and brings His gifts of forgiveness, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal life with Him. In His Supper, the Lamb who laid in a manger, who was nailed to a cross and pierced with a spear, and who was raised from the dead on the third day brings to your mouth His body and His blood for you to eat and drink for your salvation. The Lamb for you.

We celebrate Christmas because we are sinners. We joyfully remember Christ’s birth and His entrance into our world to save us and all sinners, all of us born of woman. If we were not sinners, Christ would not have had to come to save us.

But because we have sinned, do sin, and cannot save ourselves from our sinful condition, Christ Jesus came into our world, was born in Bethlehem, and died on Calvary to save each and every one of us. The Lamb of God was sacrificed by His people in order to save His people:

you, me, and all humanity. The Lamb poured out His blood to cover your sins and to give you life, eternal life in Him.

The Lamb of God continues to also be our Good Shepherd; the One who continues to provide for, guard, protect, defend, us His sheep since, when the situation did arise, He gave His life for you.

Christ continues to bring His temporal and eternal gifts with Him, for you, and me, and all people. We receive them by grace through the gift of faith. As with the shepherds, God continues to direct us by His Word to where Christ and His gifts continue to be found: in His Word and Sacrament. For they are the swaddling cloths and manger where Christ continues to be present with you, and for you.

Jesus was born for all. He lived for all people. He died for all people, and He rose from the dead on the third day to proclaim His victory over sin, death, and the devil, for you and all people.

As the shepherds could not hold back the Good News of their Saviour, we too are blessed with a tongue, lips, and a mouth to share the Good News of salvation for all people with all people. For we have heard with our ears, seen with our eyes, and tasted on our lips the salvation of the Lamb.

Having freely received this Good News, it is and continues to be contagious. Yet, we have even greater News than what the shepherds heard, for we have heard the rest of what Jesus did through His life, His death, and His resurrection for you, me, and all people. Christ, the Lamb of God, continues to come for you, to find you in the fields of your life, and He directs you by His Word to where He continues to be present with His gifts of grace, forgiveness, and eternal life. Christ comes to you and for you: This is the Good News for your salvation!

Rejoice in this Good News, glorify and praise God for all you have heard and seen, as it had been revealed to you. You have received the greatest gift this year, and every year: Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. **“for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”**(Luke 2:10-11)

Thanks be to God! Amen.

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