

#1689

Cf. #6 #64 #122 #343 #344 #686 #684 #744
#920 #977 #1044 #1164#1165 #1340 #1514

Luke 2:11,17&18¹
A Savior Christ the LORD is born;
spread this Good News.
4th Sunday in Advent
Free Text

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Grace WELS Durand MI
December 18, 2011
Sunday School Christmas Service
WSC Cookie Walk & Christmas Bags

¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the LORD....

¹⁷ When they [the shepherds] had seen him [the baby Jesus], they spread the Word concerning what had been told them about this Child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS

I. GOOD NEWS OF JESUS

II. GOOD NEWS TO BE SHARED

In the Name of Jesus, whose birthday we are celebrating with Scripture Lessons and Songs,
Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

There are two emphases that surface during the Christmas Season. The obvious emphasis is the celebration of Jesus' birth. The second emphasis is the fact that Jesus is coming again and will judge all people – as we confessed earlier in the Apostles' Creed.² The recitations and readings you have heard and the hymns to which you have listened and which you are singing, all focus our attention on the first emphasis: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

What is the significance of Jesus' birth? How should we react to it? We take our cue and directive from the shepherds who received from the angel the Good News of Jesus' birth. For, CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS ... I. GOOD NEWS OF JESUS; and, II. GOOD NEWS TO BE SHARED.

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

² *Christian Worship – A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee Wisconsin, Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), pp. 19, 41, 146, 150.

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS

I. GOOD NEWS OF JESUS

An angel of the LORD appears to shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem and the glory of the LORD surrounds them. The shepherds react with terror ... and rightly so. The shepherds in the area of Bethlehem and Jerusalem – Bethlehem was about five miles south of Jerusalem – these shepherds do not have a very good reputation. In addition to being dirty, filthy and smelly, if they were raising sheep which were to be sold to those coming from faraway lands to offer as sacrifices in the Temple at Jerusalem, the shepherds probably charged exorbitant and outrageous prices. Now, they are confronted by an angel of the LORD, and they are surrounded by the glory of the LORD. They are rightly terrified. But, the angel dispels their terror with the words, “Do not be afraid!” (2:10a). The reason that these shepherds are not to be afraid is that the angel is coming to them with Good News (2:10b).

The Good News is that a Savior has been born (2:11). His Name is Jesus. The Name Jesus is taken from the Old Testament name, Joshua, which means the LORD saves or the LORD is salvation. Jesus’ Name means “Savior.” This Jesus is not a Savior from earthly trials, tribulations, troubles or turmoils, although during his earthly public ministry, he does deliver many people from some of these things. No. The reason that this Savior has come, is to save people from their sins. In addition, the angel of the LORD tells these shepherds that this Savior has been born in Bethlehem – “the town of David” (2:11).

As you heard from the Sunday School Students’ recitation of Luke Chapter Two, the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, had ordered a census, and along with the census, went a taxation. This census required that people return to the towns or lands of their heritage. Both Joseph and Mary are descendants of King David, so they return to Bethlehem, the town of David. It is at this time that Jesus is born.

Jesus is born in fulfillment of God’s promise long ago to King David. As you heard earlier in the service, through the Prophet Nathan, the LORD told David,

11 “... the LORD himself will establish a House for you 12 ... I will raise up your Offspring [Seed] to succeed you 13 He is the One who will build a House for my Name, and I will establish the Throne of his Kingdom forever. 14 I will be his Father, and he will be my Son.... 16 Your House and your Kingdom will endure forever before me; your Throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:11b,12b,13,14a,16).

God is keeping his promise to King David, for Jesus, the Seed, the Descendant, the Son of David, is born. Moreover, the angel announces that this baby is the Christ.

The word Christ or Messiah means Anointed One, and it is not a name but a title. Jesus is the Anointed One who serves as Prophet, Priest and King.

As a Prophet, Jesus preaches God's Word in truth and purity and proclaims the forgiveness of sins to repentant sinners. Jesus verifies that his forgiving of sins is valid by the miracles he does.

As a Priest, Jesus offers up the only perfect sacrifice to God for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. That sacrifice is Jesus himself. Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (cf. John 1:29b,36b; 1 John 2:2).

As a King, Jesus conquers sin, death and hell for his people, and he rules and reigns in their hearts through his Holy Word. In addition, as King, Jesus rules, guides, governs, controls and directs all things for the benefit of his people (cf. Ephesians 1:18-23; Colossians 1:15-20, 2:9,10). Only Jesus can do all these things because Jesus is also LORD.

From the beginning of Luke's Gospel through the end of the Christmas story, Luke 2:20, the Name LORD is used twenty-two times in the Old Testament sense of Yahweh or Jehovah. The Name LORD signifies that God is eternal – from everlasting to everlasting; he is the Alpha and Omega – the Beginning and End (cf. Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 1:17b). That Name LORD also signifies that God is the God of free and faithful grace. God the LORD forgives the sins of people who ought to be punished. Now, this LORD is found in a manger, bound up in swaddling cloths. This Child is the Savior, Christ the LORD. This is Good News.

APPROPRIATION

The shepherds needed this Good News. So do you. You may not be as dirty, filthy and smelly as those shepherds, but you are just as sinful. You would react the same way in which these shepherds reacted to the appearance of an angel of the LORD. You would react with terror. Let me remind you of another appearance of angels that brought terror upon people.

The incident is recorded for us in Genesis 19. There are these two angels who have been sent to Sodom and Gomorrah. Those towns are hotbeds of wickedness. Sexual immorality – adultery, homosexuality – is rampant – much like it is today. Wickedness has increased – just like it has today. The people of that town think they will continue to live as they want – just like you are tempted to think today. But you know what happens, the LORD sends down fire from heaven and destroys those towns and the people in them. That destruction is similar to what God is going to do to this place, this town and this world and universe. How will you – how should you react – if that happens in the next few moments? With terror, like these shepherds.

But you need not react that way, because the Good News brought to the shepherds is the Good News being brought to you. Moreover, this Good News of the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation through Jesus, is not proclaimed to you in Scripture and song only at Christmas time. In worship and Holy Communion, in Bible study, in devotions and Bible reading, this forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, is proclaimed to you throughout the year. In addition, God makes plain why he proclaims this Good News to

you. Through the Apostle John in the closing chapters of his Gospel, John states that these Scriptures “are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his Name” (John 20:31).

God gave his Son at Christmastime to take away your sins and to give you eternal life. God gives you his Word throughout your lifetime – your time of Grace – so that you may believe in Jesus and enjoy that eternal life in heaven with him. The reaction of the shepherds to this Good News, reveals something else to us.

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS II. GOOD NEWS TO BE SHARED

First of all, the shepherds go to Bethlehem to see and verify that what the angel told them is true. They find Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger (2:15,16). How amazed those shepherds must have been as they realized that this little child lying in the manger is their Savior, Christ the LORD! But now what?

What do the shepherds do with what they have seen and heard? Luke tells us – as you heard previously – “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” (2:17,18). What “Word” did the shepherds spread?

Undoubtedly the shepherds recounted the things we have recorded for us in Luke Chapter Two. The shepherds said, “Angels appeared. An angel said that in the town of David a Savior, Christ the LORD was born. The angel said that he was lying in a manger. We went. We saw. We saw this Savior, Christ the LORD.” This is the Good News the shepherds told to others.

The shepherds told the Good News about Jesus to others. We are told how people reacted to the message of the shepherds. “All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them” (2:18).

“All who heard ... were amazed.” We need to be careful in understanding this amazement. Luke does not say that “all who heard ... believed”; he says, they were “amazed.” Some probably considered the shepherds’ message as the ranting of poor, dirty, filthy, smelly and unreliable shepherds. In others, through the message of the shepherds, the Holy Spirit worked faith in this Savior, Christ the LORD, who had been born. The shepherds shared the Good News with all.

APPLICATION

The shepherd shared the Good News that Jesus, the Savior, the Christ and LORD, was born. So should you share that Good News. So why are you not sharing that Good News better?

Are you too timid to share this Good News? Through the pages of these Scriptures, the same angels who appeared to the shepherds are also appearing to you and presenting their message to you. You ought to be cut down by these mighty angels of God; instead, they are proclaiming to you the Gospel of Jesus. Do you use the excuse that you are not sure of what to say? Remember that these shepherds were ignorant men. They were not the Bible scholars of the day. They simply told others what had been told to them. In addition, Jesus has promised that the Holy Spirit will guide you in what you are to say on each occasion (cf. Luke 12:11,12). Share the Good News of Jesus with others.

Share the Good News of Jesus with your friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors (FRANs network). It is only through the Good News or Gospel of Jesus, that the Holy Spirit works to create faith in Jesus in the heart. And, it is only by faith in Jesus, that a person enjoys the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven that Jesus won for all.

CONCLUSION

You have had the privilege of hearing the Good News about Jesus today. You have that same privilege here every Sunday, not only in worship but also in Bible study. You have that privilege as you open your Bibles at home. Through this Word of God, the Holy Spirit brings you to faith and keeps you in faith in Jesus. Through the same Word of God that you speak to others, the Holy Spirit will create faith in Jesus in the hearts of others, so that you, along with them, may enjoy eternal life in heaven with Jesus. Amen.