

FESTIVAL OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Luke 2:1-14

Today, unto You, Good News!

The world turns upside down. And He who will walk on water can't even walk yet. And He who will feed five thousand cannot even feed Himself. And He who will lift up the lame cannot even stand Himself. All He who will bring the sweet tears of the forgiven to those overwhelmed by sin can do is cry. The world turns upside down, and He hasn't even said a word yet.

The Emperor who rules the world decrees a census to include the King who made it. At a set time, in a set place, as real as the bread and wine on the altar and the water in the font.

Bethlehem, the house of Bread, receives the Bread of Life. He who sets the seasons, sends the rain, and raises the sun, sleeps in a feeding trough. Bethlehem, the city of David, receives the Son of David. The "*hosannas*" must wait, but the angels can't help but sing a "*Gloria*." A dot on the map, this tiny town is marked with a star forevermore.

The Virgin, the Mother of God, anonymous among the masses that travel Israel's roads, but called "blessed" by all generations to follow, assents to God's promise and gives birth to the Life that will crush the head of Death, birthed by Eve, the mother of all men, who assented to the Devil's lie.

The Inn, warm and inviting, which made not room for Him who prepares for us a home in heaven, forevermore remains cold and callous, while the cattle shed, cold and callous, sanctified by its divine Guest, is reenacted by millions with warm and inviting love.

The shepherds, the silent fringe with little to say and little hope of being heard, preach, like later fishermen, so that all marvel at their message of the Shepherd.

The angels, though not physical beings, have hearts that cannot contain their joy. Having lost communion with us through the deception of their fallen brother, the devil, communion is restored through our incarnate brother, the Christ. God is man. Heaven comes low. The angelic choir bursts into song.

"Fear not." Such sweet words. For the Shepherds were most sorely and surely afraid. *"Fear not."* The sugary command of the gospel, which consoles even as it commands. *"Fear not."* This a day, not of judgment, but of acquittal, not of wrath, but of mercy, not of sorrow, but of joy. *"Fear not."* Today God smiles, holding His tears for another day.

"Behold." I was curious if anyone would life up there heads suddenly if I said that loudly enough. *"Behold."* If we were in the classroom, we'd say that this is going to be on the test. *"Behold."* Ears up. Pay attention. This is important. There's no time for zoning out. This is the fullness of time. Everything from the past and everything from the future hugs today in forethought affection. *"Behold, you shepherds."* You are to hear what God will repeat through the mouths of countless shepherds.

"Good news." The word "gospel" means "*good news*." The fiery darts of the devil must dive into the dirt. The darkness of death must give way to the light of Life.

"Good news of a great joy." Not nebulous, and hazy joy, but specific joy from a specific source: the joy of the birth of the King. To hell with sadness! It belongs to the devil to grieve today. The family of God rejoices, joins the angel's song.

"Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people." Slay your misgivings and smite the doubts of the lost with this question: Am I, are you a person? Then this good news of a great joy is for you.

"Unto you." Trap that in your noggin. Let it bounce between your ears and massage your brain. *"Unto you."* Not unto them. *"Unto you."* *"Fear not, unto you."* There is the sermon. Gospel. *"Unto you,"* poured on your forehead. *"Unto you,"* poured in your mouth.

“Unto you,” poured into your ears from the lips of the Shepherd by His shepherds. Unto whom? *“Unto You.”* But I’m me? Yup. What good is forgiveness for the sinless? *“Unto you.”*

Make room. Cast out the clutter that fills the chambers of your heart with the new muscle of this message. Sweep away the filth with the broom of God’s love. Chase away the darkness with the light that guides the Magi. Clean out the skeletons in the closet with the promise of Him who brings the dead to life. *“For unto you is born this day.”*

“Christ the Lord.” Surrender your bondaged hearts. He who removes the chains is He who will also guide you. He is anointed to save. He is almighty to protect and preserve. He is *“Christ the Lord.”*

“Glory to God.” And what else can we give Him who gives us Himself this day? *“Glory to God”* for the highest has become the lowest to pull us out from grave and into His presence. *“Glory to God in the highest!”*

“And peace on earth.” *“Peace on earth.”* Can we say it enough? What is further from this world than peace? Every day we see everything but peace. But *“peace on earth”* is not a dream. *“Peace on earth”* is the most real of realities. *“Peace on earth”* now reclines in the lap of His mother.

“A world at prayer is a world at peace,” the new billboards on 46 promise, and I couldn’t help but cringe the first time I drove by them. It’s just not true. It may look nice and give you warm fuzzies, what with all the happy faces and peaceful poses, but for all you know, it won’t be a block before you’re carjacked, cut off, or hollered at. We like the picture, but, unlike the manger, it has no place in the real world.

Peace is not prayed. Peace is born and proclaimed. Peace comes down from heaven into the hearts of men, not from the hearts of men, to heaven, and back to the hearts of men. And peace prays not to any and everyone, any and every idol, but to the Prince of Peace. This world will war until its end, but it will not rob us of our Peace, our Peace that surpasses understanding and buoys us in the battles of a sinner-saint. Paul, the prophet of this peace that did not perish in prison, assures us:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

“Peace among those with whom He is well pleased.” And He is well pleased with you, not for your sake, but for His Son’s, with a peace rooted, not in your feelings, but in His love, His unchanging and inextinguishable love. Cling, then, the flesh and blood of His love, incarnate in Christ. Let nothing separate you from Him. Let nothing so clutter your hearts that there He finds no room. Today, unto you, good news. By God’s grace and mercy, let these words echo unendingly that neither the devil, nor doubt, nor sin, nor sorrow, nor sickness nor suffering, nor death might silence them. Trap that between your ears and you won’t know what else to do but sing, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”* Amen.