

In the Name of Jesus

3rd Sunday in Advent – December 15, 2019

Sermon Text: Luke 2:8-14 – The Message of Advent Is “Come”

THE ANNOUNCEMENT IS GIVEN: “THE LORD IS COME!”

Scripture Readings: Micah 5:1-5, Matthew 11:2-11

Hymns: 63, 62 (4), 65, 702, 66

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

In Jesus' name, our heaven-sent Redeemer, dear beloved of God:

This morning we continue our series of sermons for Advent under the theme: ***“The message of Advent is ‘Come.’”*** So far we have considered that the Holy Spirit has created in the hearts of believers of every era of history an earnest longing for the Lord to come and satisfy the all-important needs of their souls. We considered the *method* by which the Lord kept alive the messianic hopes of His people, namely, through the many prophecies He gave to His people all through those years. We marveled over His ability to orchestrate the events of history, even down to the minutest detail, so that each prophecy would be fulfilled in one Person, Jesus (which substantiates for us that He truly is our divinely appointed Savior).

Isaiah the prophets writes in his 55th chapter that the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are His ways our ways. His way of accomplishing the things He wants to accomplish, are way different than ours. This morning we'll see how this is borne out by the circumstances surrounding our Savior's birth. We will also consider the question: who are the beneficiaries of the priceless blessings the Christ Child brought down to our world from above?

1.

First, let us recall the unusual circumstance that surrounded Jesus' birth. A few examples of this are ...

- The city God chose for His Son to be born in, the little town of Bethlehem. We might think it would have made a lot more sense to have Jesus born in a “happening” metropolis like Jerusalem. Or perhaps: Caesarea or Joppa, two other leading cities of the day. But, no! Christmas did not happen in any of those places. God picked a tiny hamlet tucked away in the hill country of Judea. The farthest you can get from a “happening” place!
- And what about the family God picked for His Son to be born into? Again, human reasoning would say that God ought to have chosen a wealthy, high-ranking family. But, no! He selects a lowly virgin girl to be Jesus' mother. And Joseph, a humble day-laborer-

carpenter (who has to struggle to make ends meet) to serve as His step-father.

- And what about the location where Jesus was born? Not indoors in a warm, dry, well-kept up, nicely-furnished inn! Our King was born in a structure open to the elements, whose purpose was to provide shelter for animals, with no furniture or modern conveniences.
- Then, there was the manger that served as Baby Jesus' first bed. He wasn't laid (as we might have expected) in a beautifully crafted cradle lined with cozy blankets, with "velvets soft and silken stuff" (as the Christmas carol puts it) but in a feeding trough for cattle lined with "hay and straw so rough."

**Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!**

(Romans 11:33)

+ + + + +

Another example from the Christmas story that shows how God operates on a totally different "wave length" than us humans, to accomplish His purposes. Who were the first people whom He chose to let in on the news of the Messiah's entrance into the world? Not high-born citizens of society. Not bigwigs and VIP's. Peasant shepherds ... busy with the work of tending their flock in the middle of a cold dark night.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8).

+ + + + +

And the *reason* for it all? *Why* was God's Son born amidst such ignoble circumstances, so different from we would have thought good and proper? God wanted us to know ... indeed, the whole world to know ... that the work this Child would undertake in His future life on earth would be different in scope and nature than the work that any other person has ever done ... or ever could do! Consider:

- The kingdom Jesus would establish. It would be more glorious than any kingdom founded by men, for it would span the entire globe, taking in people from every race and language and nation. And it would have no end continuing on perpetually!
- The advantages His people would enjoy would be different from those that people who are citizens of earthly kingdoms enjoy. Jesus would bestow on His people spiritual gifts like: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. An eternally secure future in heaven. Perks and comforts that don't have only passing value but eternal value!
- His method of ruling would be extraordinary. He wouldn't use brute force, as earthly kings typically do, but He would set up His reign in hearts by the "still small voice of the Gospel."
- The enemies He would face wouldn't be like those that earthly rulers fight against. The foes He would meet in battle ... and vanquish! ... would be the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, with Satan as their

commanding officer.

- His greatness would not be judged by the size of the jewels set into a magnificently-crafted crown or by the luxurious fabric from which His clothes would be tailored ... but by the kingly crown of holiness He wore and by the scepter of humility He held, and by the robe of righteousness He would be dressed in ... in which He would also clothe all those who believe in Him. What an exceptionally wonderful King!

+ + + + +

This is why He lies in such mean estate where donkeys are feeding. This is why the circumstances surrounding His birth are different than ... are the very opposite of ... what worldly wisdom would have chosen for the birth of a magnificent Ruler.

“God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:27-31).

2.

And who now are the *beneficiaries* of the blessings which this unique Child would bring to earth?

Christmas-time is often pictured as a season of miracles. Presentations on the Hallmark movie channel ... motion pictures produced by Hollywood (such as: “*It’s a Wonderful Life*” and “*Miracle on 34th Street*”) ... often center around supernatural phenomena that happen at this time of year. Such stories (in which people are given the ability to see the world as it would be, as George Bailey did, if they had not been born ... or the ability of Kris Kringle to grant special holiday wishes to a little girl) are entertaining, but they’re only fantasies.

The story of Christmas, as presented in the Bible, presents a real miracle! The miracle of God coming to us in human flesh, born in lowliness to save us. Another real miracle of Christmas is the faith God gives His people to see past the lowly circumstances of the Christ Child’s birth, past the swaddling clothes with which He is enwrapped, past the humble maiden girl, Mary, and the poor carpenter, Joseph and those peasant shepherds. And to behold *the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth* ... a Baby born to raise the sons of earth, born to give us second birth, so that we may look forward to eternal Christmas in heaven.

How stupendous a miracle this is can be seen as we consider that so many can’t see the reason for the season. How many there were on that holy night ... townfolk of Bethlehem who ... when they heard what the shepherds said, thought to themselves: “Fiddlesticks and nonsense! Nothing these lowly shepherds can tell us could be so wonderful.” So they missed out on the blessings Jesus came to bring them.

Still today the majority let Christmas pass not realizing wherein its true glory consists. They celebrate it after a fashion with its external trappings (with presents and decorations, lights

and tinsel). They listen to carols. They go to parties. But they're able to enjoy its benefits and experience the genuine Christmas joy because they don't recognize the identity of the Miracle Child ...and why He was born ... that He was born *for them*.

Praise God for the miracle of His grace that you do believe it! You've become a beneficiary, through faith, of the indescribable Gift of the Savior born at Bethlehem. You also know and believe (this is yet another miracle of the Holy Spirit!) that He's coming again. That is a part of Christmas we should also remember and rejoice in:

Not in that poor, lowly stable With the oxen standing by
Shall we see Him, but in heaven, Set at God's right hand on high.
Then like stars His children, crowned, All in white, His praise will sound! [LSB 376:5]

+ + + + +

It was dark winter of the year 1864. At Petersburg, Virginia, the Confederate army under the command of Robert E. Lee faced the Union divisions of General Ulysses S. Grant. The war was three and a half years old and the glorious initial charge had long since given way to the muck and mud of trench warfare. Late one night one of Lee's generals, George Pickett, received word from home that his wife had just given birth to a son. Up and down the battle line of the Southerners bonfires were built to celebrate the happy event (bonfires that did not go unnoticed by the soldiers of the Northern camp). A nervous General Grant sent a patrol out on a reconnaissance mission to see what was going on. The scouts returned and gave the report: "General Pickett's wife gave birth to a baby boy and all the fires we're seeing along the enemy line were lit to *celebrate*." Grant and Pickett had been classmates at West Point and were good friends. To honor the occasion Grant ordered that bonfires be also be built along the Northern battle line. It was a peculiar night of the war. For miles on both sides fires were set ablaze. No shots were fired. No one did any fighting. There was only light celebrating the birth of a baby. Of course, these fires didn't last. They eventually burned down and the darkness took over again (both the darkness of night and the darkness of war).

The good news of Christmas is that in the midst of the darkness of this sinful world there was a Light that started shining from the manger *which no darkness will ever overcome*. Still today it radiates the beams of God's love for the world. When there are times when we may *feel* like things are getting dark (in the world around us ... and in our own lives), let's remember the miracle of Christmas and the glorious meaning it holds for each one of us:

He came down to earth from heaven, Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable, And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor and mean and lowly Lived on earth our Savior holy.

And our eyes at last shall see Him, Through His own redeeming love;
For that child so dear and gentle, Is our Lord in heaven above;
And He leads His children on, To the place where He is gone. [LSB 376:2,4]
Amen.