

The Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Eve

December 24, 2012

Luke 2:1-20

“Good News”

“Beloved in Christ, be it this Christmastide our care and delight to hear again the message of the angels, and in heart and mind to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, and the Babe lying in a manger. Therefore let us read and mark in Holy Scripture the loving purposes of God from the first days of our disobedience unto the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child” (Bidding Prayer for the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols). Gathered here in the house of the Lord amidst candlelight and beloved carols, it is our great privilege and joy again on this Christmas Eve to celebrate the birth of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, born so very long ago in Bethlehem’s stall and yet born anew in the hearts of all who receive this good news of great joy, and who trust in him. It is those words of the angel to the shepherds on that first Christmas night that form the basis of this sermon: **“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:10-11). “Good News” is theme for the sermon on this Christmas Eve. May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing be upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Good news – that’s something we all long for, especially now. Where is the good news in our war-weary world, in unsettled places like Egypt, Syria, and Afghanistan? Where is the good news in Newtown, Connecticut where the final funerals were held on Saturday for the 26 victims of the school shooting? Where is the good news here in the shadow of the nation’s capital as we wait for our elected leaders to act and provide a way-ahead for the fiscal cliff? Try as we might to ensure a safe and secure environment for ourselves, our families, and our communities, there is no guarantee. As blind and deaf author Helen Keller (1880-1968) once wrote: “Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.”

My friends, the good news of Christmas takes us beyond lighted trees and gifts, beyond cozy fireside gatherings and festive dinners. The good news of Christmas is that Jesus did the very thing which Helen Keller described. Rather than avoid the danger of entering into our sad and broken world, Jesus who is true God and true man willingly entered into our existence in order to experience fully what it means to be human, save for sin. That “outright exposure” to life’s injustices and insecurities of which Helen Keller spoke began already at his birth – even before his birth. His mother was a young girl betrothed but not yet married, pregnant and far from home, forced to give birth in a cow stall because no one would give up their bed to help. We can well imagine all the gossip and mindless chatter that must have been flying around. This was the world and these were the circumstances into which Christ was born. It is love that compelled Jesus to be born of Mary and enter into our insecure and unjust world. Many things have changed from that time until now, but one thing has remained constant: love always prevails, even when it looks otherwise. The searching and saving love of God that moved Jesus to be born of Mary in Bethlehem would move Jesus to love us all even unto death – to give his very life upon the tree of the cross and shed his precious blood as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Love always prevails, then and

now. As nineteenth-century English poet Christina Rossetti wrote: “Love came down at Christmas; Love all lovely, love divine; Love was born at Christmas, Stars and angels gave the sign.”

The old phrase is, “No news is good news,” which means if we don’t hear from someone we can assume all is well. If it weren’t so, we would have heard about it. But the reverse is also true: “Good news is no news.” Good news typically doesn’t make the headlines or the lead story on the evening news. In the midst of a bad-news world, we long for news that will uplift and inspire; news that will restore our hope for the future and our confidence in humanity. But such news is hard to find. **“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:10-11). That was the message of the angel to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night so very long ago, and it is the same message to us today – good news that not only has the power to uplift and inspire, but good news that has the power to transform lives now in this life. This is the good news that has the power to make an eternal difference in the lives of men and women, youth and children – news that assures us that through Jesus’ birth, his life, death and resurrection, we have the certainty of the forgiveness of sins, life and eternal salvation, so that even when we die, yet shall we live (John 11:25-26), and that **“tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword”** – in fact, that **“nothing in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 8:35, 38). This is that good news of great joy that is indeed for all people. This is that good news that doesn’t stop when Christmas is over and all the decorations are taken down. This is the good news of Jesus that our world needs now more than ever.

Good news is not only compelling, it’s also contagious. When we have received good news, we simply have to share it. We cannot keep it to ourselves! My friends, we stand in a long line of those who have received this good news of Jesus’ birth, beginning with the shepherds on that first Christmas night. After the angel announced to them the birth of Jesus, **“they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them”** (Luke 2:16-18). The shepherds were the first ones to serve as bearers of the good news of Jesus, and God calls us to do the same today – to give away what we ourselves have received. As we share the good news of Jesus’ birth, people may wonder about all of this just like the people the shepherds first shared it with. Let us go out into the world that God dearly loves, and share the good news: Christ is born. Amen.