

## Let Us God and See the Child

"Do not be afraid." Those are the opening words from the Angel of the Lord. They begin the gospel proclamation of good news to all people. What a counterintuitive way to open the greatest story ever told. But maybe it is the right way to start, not only because he is a fearsome angel splitting open the night sky, but because he has come to tell them that the world is changed, fundamentally and in an unimaginable way, and our normal human response to change of such magnitude, to all great unknowns, is generally fear. We fear the future, we fear those unlike ourselves, we fear the darkness of the night. It is normal to be afraid. But this is no normal night. It is human to be afraid. But this messenger came to announce one who is more than simply human. One who was calling us to be more than our normal human selves. The angel and his heavenly host have come to tell of the wonderful work of God among us, and even within us. They are beckoning us to come and see, but they begin by telling us, "do not be afraid."

Do you want to see the face of God - to behold him with your own eyes, to grasp him in your arms and be embraced in return? Then you have to leave fear behind because this child of perfect love is casting out fear. You must enter his space with boldness. Isn't that the message that we are taught every week when we come in prayer to the communion table to be with God - as our savior Christ has taught us we are bold to say... There is only one way to come into the presence of God and it is not cowering, but with confidence. Not arrogantly, but with the courage born of hope beyond all measure. We are human, and God loved us enough to become incarnate in our very flesh. God became like us so that we could understand. But more importantly, so that Jesus could teach us to be like him, in our very human bodies, to make his kingdom present and real right here on earth, in our own city, in our own time, in our own homes with our own families, in our own hearts and souls. That hope casts out fear and beckons us on, to leave all else behind and enter into God's presence with boldness, just as it did to the first hearers of gospel message.

This is the "good news of great joy to all people:" God has come to us meek and lowly, so to gather all up and restore them in God's own image. And the angel made this known by first announcing it to the shepherds in the fields. Shepherds, unlearned, unwashed herders of dirty animals, living on the edge of civilization, literally outside of the community, far out in their fields at night, the message comes first to them.

To those who have walked in all manner of darkness – the poor, the outcast, the fearful, the overlooked and the hopelessly mundane – the army of light has arrived to announce something new and wonderful. The world is changed and the last shall be first, the downtrodden lifted up, and the lowly made rich in the kingdom of the Lord because God has broken into our reality by entering as a baby wrapped in strips of cloth lying in the animal's feeding trough in the stable behind the inn. The all embracing arms of God gather in those at the margins first, and pulls them into his love so that joy for all people literally means all people. This is the sign - he will be the one you would never guess, in the place you couldn't imagine the king of glory. This

is this miracle that teaches our souls to sing the Gloria. This God will make his home among the homeless, will use those in dead-end jobs to fulfill his purpose, will create his community with the friendless. Glory to God in the highest heaven because the joy of restoration has come among us on earth.

And that child is ushering in a lasting peace on earth. Not the sort of peace proclaimed by the great Roman Empire. The Pax Romana was won with scorched earth and held with fear. Devastation and intimidation were its marks. But the peace on earth that the Christ child is bringing comes with the beauty of angels, and the warmth of light. Its hallmarks are invitation and reconciliation. Its touchstone was not the love of power that Emperor Augustus brought, but the power of love that was taught to us by the king of kings and lord of lords lying helplessly in a manger. It did not display its power with the Emperor's census taking action to announce the world is mine and all will know it. This peace came to be with us in a way that made all creation rise up to sing its praises, and spread with an unconquerable, irresistible groundswell love.

This peace of Christ is not a peace that can be waged, like war. It is a peace that is fostered, a peace that is kindled like a small fire into a great blaze. Its origin is a little child that teaches us how to love in the way only a baby can, calling forth intimacy and tenderness.

But the best news of all is tucked away right in the middle of the message. "To you" is born this day a savior. Not to people luckier than you, not to people better than you, not to people more deserving than you - to you is born a savior who redeems you with his love. One who says, "no matter how long you have walked in darkness, I am bringing light," "no matter how far out on the margins you live I am pulling you into my embrace," "no matter how tumultuous your world, peace and goodwill are my gifts to you."

Our everlasting hope is this: our future is not our own. God has become intertwined with us in a way that can never be separated. Nothing can separate you from the love of God because God has come to dwell with you in the flesh, so that you might live with God. Once you have beheld the Christ child you are forever changed because like a little baby he worms and wiggles his way into your very heart and there sets up his home there. And the darkness and fear cannot separate you from the light. The mistakes and the failures cannot make you unworthy. The tumult and the distress cannot overwhelm the peace. Because his plan was perfect, and it is now being perfected, made whole and complete in you, and through you, and all around you because to you is born this day a savior, who is Christ the Lord. The promise could not be any more beautiful if we heard it from the lips of the angelic hosts.

So let us go now and see the baby in the manger; let us experience all that has been made known to us. Let us be lifted into the presence of God. Go boldly, go joyfully, go in peace, because God has come to you this night, as a little child to lead you, to inspire you, to fill you with love beyond your human capacity. Tonight God has promised to be with you, so come and be with him as we worship the newborn king. Amen