



## **CHRISTMAS 2009 ARE YOU READY?**

This morning we leave the world behind, and we travel together on a long journey. It is a journey that leads beyond Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and gift giving. This journey leads us to the quiet, sleepy town of Bethlehem.

This morning we stand with the shepherds huddled around the manger. We stand, straining our eyes, trying to look inside, trying to catch even a glimpse of this Child—the Child whom all creation was awaiting, the Child foretold by all the prophets. The Savior of the world, incarnate in human flesh, has come.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. . . . And the shepherds returned,

glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:16, 20)

Have you ever wondered what it would feel to have been there on that blessed night? Journeying with the shepherds to see this Child who was born. Standing out in the fields, tending your flock by day and by night.

The beauty and majesty of the stars in the sky, the peaceful night air, the clouds dancing across the moonlight sky. And not a single sound—only blissful silence while shepherds and sheep are bedded down for the night.

Have you ever wanted to be a shepherd? Have you ever wondered what it was like on that night? When the still silence of the cold evening air was shattered by a voice that must have sounded like thunder; when suddenly the bright brilliance of the glory of the Lord shone around them.

What would it have been like, standing there that night with the shepherds? To hear the voice of an angel of the Lord: **“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:11). To hurry off to see this Child who was born in such low estate, yet born the King of the world.

*Have you ever wanted to be a shepherd?* To be honest, I do not know if I would want to be a shepherd. I picture it as a rather filthy job. Leading around a flock of smelly sheep does not sound like a great life to me.

*And shepherds, who were they?* They were poor, not folks of noble birth. They were people of low esteem in the sight of many.

Not much power—honor—not much glory and wealth in being a shepherd. They did not rule over lands or rule over peoples. They just tended their smelly sheep.

But, despite their lowly status in the eyes of the world, the shepherds did something amazing that night.

The shepherds hurried off—immediately. They did not waste precious moments bickering over the quickest route to take. They did not first rush home to tell their families where they were going. They did not find it necessary to get cleaned up from working in the fields. They did not pack extra food. They did not take a spare set of clothes. They simply hurried off, leaving everything behind—including their flocks—unprotected, with no one to stand watch over them.

And they went because they had to see this thing that had happened. This miracle, the child, who is Christ the Lord born of the Virgin—and there was nothing in the world that could keep them from seeking Him.

I often wonder if we would be so quick to follow after the Child. *Are we prepared to drop everything and hurry off to see this miracle?* I wonder if we are prepared for this Child who has come. *Are our hearts and minds ready for the infant King?*

Most of us have already spent endless hours getting ready for Christmas: there is the usual list—hanging lights, baking cookies, trimming the tree, shopping for and wrapping gifts, decorating the yard—and the list goes on and on.

*But are you ready? Are you ready for the Child who has come? Are you ready to learn from the shepherds? Are you ready to drop everything and go immediately to see the Child?* David's Son now come as David's Lord—Emmanuel, God with us, Christ the Lord.

If we believe we are ready, then we should be prepared for what we will see. As the world has been preparing, the majesty of it all seems to be greater than the Child who has come.

When the shepherd arrived in the stable to see this glorious Child, they found Mary and Joseph without much preparation.

No light. No fire in the dead of the night. Few came to their assistance. The Child was not wrapped in a royal purple silk but was wrapped in rough pieces of cloth. He was not laid in an ornate, gold bed but laid in a stone-feeding trough. There were no princes and kings standing near to offer their praise and worship; only the cattle lying silent in their stalls.

That is what the shepherds saw. That is what they hurried off to see. Not glory and power by the world's standards, but the glory of God incarnate in an innocent, humble, and helpless child.

*Do you really want to be a shepherd? Is that what you want to see? Is this the Kingly glory that you desire?*

The shepherds teach us a great lesson: in their simplicity, they simply go. They heard the proclamation of the Lord, and they knew that His Word and promises are full of salvation, even when they appear to be humble and frail.

When the shepherds had seen the Child, when they had spoken with Mary and knew of His greatness, they went home. They went back to being simple shepherds. Despite the miracle the shepherds had seen, they still had their everyday work to attend to. The smelly sheep still needed to be looked after.

All of us might think—or hope—that these shepherds would have decided to do something different. They were, after all, the first ones to see the Child. Surely there were people to see and stories to tell. No, they returned home. And again, in their simplicity, the shepherds teach us so much about our daily life in Christ.

Maybe all of us should be more like the shepherds. We should hurry off to see this Child and then return home—changed and different because of this Child—changed because of what we have seen!

This Christmas day we travel with the shepherds to see this King of glory—the King of the Jews—the Child who came to bear our sin and be our Savior. Yet, with all of our fears and anxiety, even with our sins, the Child still desires to come into our midst. And not only in the manger so long ago, but He still comes to us this day.

This is the true miracle of the incarnation: that our Lord still comes to us. And He comes in ways that seem humble, weak, and even lowly.

The Christ Child comes into our midst. He comes in the preaching and proclamation of His Word. For where His Word is—there also is His Spirit. He comes in Holy Absolution—forgiving our sins and remembering them no more. He comes among us in simple water that is joined together with His Holy Word—water that now brings the gift of faith.

And He comes to us this day in perhaps the most humble and lowly way of all: in simple bread and wine that He proclaims to be His body and His blood, given for us Christians to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of our sins—life and salvation.

This is how our King comes to us—in ways that the world may never understand. And with His presence comes the invitation to his feast. Not only to see Him as the shepherds did that first Christmas, but now to dwell with Him in the most intimate way possible: through His holy body and blood. When we see our Savior this day, when we touch and handle things unseen, like the shepherds we are changed forever. We are prepared to return to our own homes glorifying and praising God for the forgiveness that He has won for us.

Soon all of the glitter of Christmas will be over. The decorations will be taken down, and life will go back to normal. What then? Maybe we do not want to go back to our everyday lives—to the pain and suffering, the boredom and monotony. Instead, maybe we would like to go and be with those first shepherds. But we cannot turn back the clock to be with the shepherds, and we do not have to. The Lord invites us to something even better. He has blessed each of us with opportunities to serve Him and our neighbor in this life. Instead of leaving here sad that the celebration is over, we can return home, giving thanks and praise that as He once came into this world, He still comes to us, through His word and His sacraments, and that He is truly making every day of our lives Christmas. Amen.