

Christmas Eve – 2025

Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:1-11

Luke 2:1-20

They had been taught that He was coming. Long had they waited, expectantly, faithfully. Messiah would come. Messiah would deliver. Messiah would bring His reign and usher in a new era. They had been taught that He was coming. The Scriptures taught it. The sacrificial system taught it. Messiah, the Christ, was coming and the people waited; the shepherds waited, the baker and the vintner waited, the priest and the fisherman and the beggar waited. Isaiah and many others had prophesied it. The worship life of Israel was built on it. The prayers of the faithful *pleaded* for it. But they never expected this!

King David was a shepherd, but that vocation wasn't exactly the pride of Israel. Shepherds weren't wealthy or influential. And yet they were chosen deliberately, divinely chosen to receive the crowning revelation of Immanuel – God with us. Dispatched by God to bring news, the angelic host was ecstatic, overjoyed and overwhelmed by the glory that they witnessed. The shepherds receive angelic gospel. “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). It may sound one way to your ears, but it sounded entirely different to the shepherd's ears. The angelic host, the power and majesty of those who stand in God's presence, that *alone* would've put the shepherds on their knees and pulled their hearts upward. The announcement of the Messiah, the Christ who is now come, that *alone* would've thrilled the shepherd's minds, awakened their joy. But they heard something deeper, richer. Not only had Messiah come but Messiah was God Himself – Christ, THE LORD! God is *born*? God is Messiah? God is in Bethlehem, in a manger, wrapped in cloth strip? That's what they ran off to see. They ran to see YHWH, I AM.

When Jesus performed a miracle there were people standing nearby who didn't know what they were seeing. To be sure, they witnessed the miracle. Their eyes widened, their mouths agape. Quickly, their eyes moved from however the miracle had unfolded to the man who performed it. What? Who is this? What manner of man is this? The angels sang of God's glory and the shepherds ran with haste to see this thing that the Lord told them about and what did they see? “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity! Pleased as Man with man to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel” (Hark! The Herald Angels Sing). There are no more sublime words in any hymn ever written than those words. All of God's glory is found in that baby. All of God's power, all of His wisdom, all of His love is wrapped in swaddling cloths, and lying in, of all things, a feeding trough for barnyard animals. No Israelite expected this.

Mark Twain wrote a novel titled *The Prince and the Pauper*. It's about two young lads who bear an uncanny resemblance to each other. Edward is the prince, son of King Henry the VIII. Tom is a poor Londoner. They happen across each other and decide on a whim to trade places. Edward learns of the harsh life of the poor while Tom is pampered in luxury. At its core, it is a Christmas story. There is a blessed exchange that happens this night. No matter where you are, no matter what your circumstance, no matter how old, how young, how naïve or how jaded you may be, Christmas brings a compelling and transformative Word to bear on you. God sends His Son to take your place. The Prince of Heaven is not just born into poverty; He comes to be your

innocent substitute. Unguarded, God comes to contend for your life and establish His kingdom. Birth and death mirror each other and in between is a ministry of salvation, a life of glory.

Birth and death; you are here because Good Friday and Easter stand sentinel this night. Birth and death; they reflect and interpret each other. Listen and compare the rhythm of these two statements. And she "...wrapped him in cloth strip, and laid him in a manger because there was no room in the inn" (Luke 2:7). And he "...wrapped him in linen cloth, placed him in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had yet been laid" (Luke 23:53). You are here celebrating this priceless moment because God has revealed His glory to you in the death of His Son. Christ THE LORD is your advocate. Christ THE LORD is your Savior. He was crucified and triumphant and He is risen. Peace; that's what the angels announced. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14). When Christ THE LORD rose from the dead He appeared to His disciples and He announced the fulfillment of His mission. He showed the disciples His hands and His side and He said: "Peace be with you" (20:19). Good Friday and Easter stand sentinel this night.

You and I are paupers. What makes us poor isn't economics. What makes us poor isn't our income or our lack of physical assets. What makes us poor is sin. Sin brings death. Sin is a prison. Sin is a grave. Sin is poverty and shame and guilt and judgment and a verdict that is both just and uncompromising. Sin is squalor. Sin makes us poor. And love compelled God to act. Born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the LORD. This infant Son of God came to act. In fierce solidarity with us poor sinners, Christ came to act. His holiness is the asset that He came to unleash. To destroy the works of the devil, to atone for sin, to pay the price that God demands with His precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, Jesus is a mighty warrior. He contends for us by taking our poverty into His person. His Love is so extreme, so self-giving, Christ the LORD takes our sin into His holy flesh and He dies bearing it. **Today** a Savior is born to you is mirrored by Jesus' declaration to the penitent thief: "**Today**, you will be with me in paradise." Birth reflects and anticipates death. Death clarifies and interprets birth.

Satan was shocked that Jesus rose from the dead. Over and over, Satan had contended with man and death was his grim weapon. And then he died, and then he died, and then he died – so goes the mournful genealogy in the book of Genesis. And Jesus on the cross looked no different to Satan. Evil snatched at Him. Evil snatched at man and discovered God. By death, Christ the LORD crushed the head of the serpent. Christ the LORD's holiness, the glory of His sacrifice, broke the bond of death and He rose. "Light and life to all He brings, ris'n with healing in His wings." Resurrection is the unseen power that permeates this holy night. We are free. You men are princes of heaven. You women are princesses of heaven. We are not held in bondage to the poverty of our sin, we are free. We are the forgiven children of God. A new humanity is born on Christmas. Jesus is the progenitor of a new birth, new wine that is found in the new wine skin of Immanuel.

Glory – what a marvelous word. Glory to God in the highest. The glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The Son of God has come crashing through man's barriers of sin and death to save us, to grant us His life,

to return us to Paradise. It's a movement of love, a movement of mercy, a movement of Divine Service. Rejoice, dear saints. Let our gladness have no end. For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given (Isaiah 9:6). Christ the LORD, Messiah the LORD has revealed His sacred face. Of His kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:33).