

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2009
Luke 2:10-11

For Christians these words explain what our holy day of Christmas is all about. They tell us the birth of this one Baby rightly should bring great joy for all people, for us, too.

Perhaps for everyone here these words are very familiar, well-known, maybe memorized many years ago.

They can never be known too well. In fact, as well as we know the words, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord." We need to ask ourselves, do we know these words internally? This is how we need to know them. We can know them by heart – as we say – and yet not know them in and with our heart.

"A Savior has been born to you." To whom do the words, "to you" refer? Well, of course, to begin with 'to you' referred to those shepherds. As shepherds over 2000 years ago, they were undoubtedly a sturdy, self-reliant, practical, strong bunch of men. No one would have thought of them when words like 'weak' or 'dependent' were bandied about. Yet, these men needed that Savior. That Savior has been born to them, for them.

The first words out of the mouth of that very privileged angel that night show us the kind of Savior they needed. Merely being in the presence of the Lord God's angel and the Lord God's glory terrified these strong, generally fearless shepherds. The bright, shining light of God's holiness, His goodness, His righteousness automatically terrorized those men and everyone else to whom it ever appeared. Actual perfect goodness scares human beings. That clearly is because all people are the opposite of perfect, holy, good and righteous.

The shepherds did not need to learn to react with fear to God's bright glory. It was a natural reaction. People are by nature not holy, not good, not righteous.

That's clear in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve first sinned. Adam and Eve were all the people there were at the time. And they had sinned. That sin has passed down from generation to generation. God created Adam and Eve in God's image and likeness but after Adam and Eve sinned, son Seth was born in Adam's sinful image. David clearly reminds us that Adam's sin becomes ours already by conception and at birth.

God's Word sums it up, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," so short of it that, it suddenly in the presences of God's glory, all sinners react with terror.

Yes, this included those shepherds. It included the religious men who knew the answer about where the Savior was to be born but then, apparently, did not bother to go and see. And it included the wise men who sought the information and did go and see. It included

King Herod. Maybe it is too easy to see in his case. But it included even the pious, humble mother of the Baby. She did call God her Savior.

The angel announced the birth of the Savior and said "Don't be afraid!" This Savior could take away the fear because He had come to take away all the sin and to earn forgiveness for all people.

He is Christ, Messiah, the Anointed One, Anointed by God the Father for this holy work of rescue. Jesus is Himself the Lord. The Lord's glory scared them and scares us but the Lord Himself is the Savior. Now that is comforting! As we heard it made clear in the prophet Zechariah this evening, the LORD sent the LORD to live among us, to deliver us. The Father sent His Son. The LORD is the sender and the sent.

Not only do all people need this Savior, the angel, the prophets before him, Jesus Himself and His Apostles afterward assure us that the Savior born that night is for all the people. That includes all the people of Israel. The shepherds were Israelites. I'm sure they thought of their people first when they heard the angel's words, 'all the people.'

But God makes clear in the Bible, His Word, that "all the people" also includes "all the Gentiles." Isaiah spends whole chapters describing the Savior's blessings reaching the far reaches of the Earth. Hosea, the prophet, told how those who were "not God's people" would be called "You are My people." John the Baptist reminded Israel about how the Lord can turn stones into His people. Jesus is the Light of the world, including specifically "a light for revelation to the Gentiles."

Do we appreciate this? God called the Apostle Paul especially as the Apostle to the Gentiles. We needed that. We needed the Savior. Jesus is the LORD our Savior. Do we appreciate this? Do we appreciate our genuine need for forgiveness? We confess that our sins are red like crimson, in Isaiah's words. Do we also believe that internally? It's so easy to downplay our sinfulness. We use super euphemisms like "Nobody's perfect." Rather, join St. Paul in saying, "I know that in me, that is, in my sinful nature, lives no good thing." Nothing good! No good! So, if there's no good, it's all bad. That's me. That's you. That's all people, on their own, by nature.

But the very same "all" who have sinned and fallen short of God's glory are the all about whom Paul added "and are justified (declared innocent) freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

That Savior, who is Christ – Father anointed with the Holy Spirit to do His work of saving – the Lord, the eternal, almighty, holy God, is the Redeemer. That's why He came here by birth, came here in the flesh, came here a little Baby. It was so that He could obey as one of us for all of us. It was so that He could die in the flesh on the cross as our Substitute under our sin and condemnation. It was so that He could raise Himself to life in body, to assure us that in Him we will be raised bodily to eternal life with all of our sin taken away by Him.

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Be part of the great joy of having this Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord. Do what this angel did; bring this good news to others, because all other human beings need this Savior as much as we do. Amen.