

Friday, December 24, 2010
Nativity of Our Lord (I), Christmas Eve 4 pm

Luke 2:1–14 [15–20]

I.N.I.

The birth of the Messiah, the one who comes to save, is the story told. It is a well-rehearsed story, and continues to light up the place, whether it's from a children's picture book or from the lips of Linus in "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

The light is over the stable. The light is blaring above the shepherds. The angel announcement, in all its **glory**, shines so brightly, brings **so much, too much glory** that it scares the pants off the unsuspecting poor shepherds watching their sheep.

To the unsuspecting poor shepherds watching their sheep, the angel says, as announcing angels always say after scaring the pants off someone, "Do not be afraid."

And it gets better. The regally-sounding messenger in the sky brings it home, saying the Messiah is born, saying the sign is a feeding trough, bringing God to earth.

Do not be afraid.

The sky, and our church, and our homes, and our world benefit from God's arrival.

There is plenty of poverty still. There is too much darkness that threatens. There continues to be taxes applied, censuses taken, all designed to benefit a "common humanity" but too often squandered by the elite ruling classes.

So I'm rooting for the shepherds tonight. I'm watching the couple seeking shelter for the night, so that the baby has a chance to live where it's warm. I could use a good scare from an angel brokering God's ways of peace in the city of New Haven and the surrounding area, in the intractable Middle East, and in my family's crazy moments.

Christmas is all about the divine presence crashing into our sorry existence in a way we could never dream up.

Tell, me if you were told to look for true holiness, wouldn't you come to church? Or would you climb up the hill to the Div School? Or would pray as fervently as you possibly could?

Don't get me wrong, I am in the business of inviting people to church. I support theological education and the formation of pastors at schools that offer wisdom and insight. I'd be thrilled if two or three people came to me asking to form a group that would explore prayer.

But these things, as good and godly as they certainly are, are in addition to where God already is, where God already has been, where God in Jesus came, to be born, to live, and to die, for us.

The birth announcement came to those under the radar of the census, the shepherds. The divine God coming down to earth speaks loudly to those in desperate straits, to those in the back, those in the cracks, those on the bottom, those left out.

God uses the material of ordinary human birth and human striving to find those in need of saving.

Rather than us going to the top of the mountain or the center of the universe to capture glory, it is God's graceful inclination to come to us where we are, in the middle of our lives, and to make a home with us.

Glory in the highest. Peace on earth. Do not be afraid.

Welcome the Christ. See the child. With eyes open, feet at the ready, hands extended, receive Christ in story and song, in the peace extended from a neighbor, in good news that we speak and that we know. With just a morsel of bread torn from a loaf, with just a taste of wine, we look for and expect Christ to come to claim the universe and fill it with the life and light of God, in us and through us.

Merry Christmas. Blessed Christmas. Christ the Savior is born.

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