

We enter this scene set by the Gospel writer, among shepherds, who live outside of Bethlehem, living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. We enter into a scene of near total darkness, away from Bethlehem, away from the crowded city to a scene of isolation, among a group of men separated from their people, whose only community was the sheep they tended. Among these rough and dirty shepherds, who had to fear both man and beast, waiting in the dark, hoping and praying to make it through the night. And then suddenly, to this group cut off from everyone but their sheep, an angel appears. And the darkness is broken into by the glory of the Lord. The deep darkness of night, the deep darkness of their loneliness, the deep darkness of their fear, is overcome by the glory shining all around them. The glory of the Lord bursting forth, filling the fields, driving back the darkness. Imagine the incredible sight, the darkness of their lives lifted not by the dawning of a fading day but by the never ending glory of the Lord shining around these gruff, and now very frightened, shepherds.

The angel said to them do not be afraid. You no longer have to be afraid, never again will you be dehumanized by fear, never again will you be without hope, because I bring you good news of great joy, for all people. To you, to us, to all of us, is born this day, a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord. If we ask, for whom was He born and who's Savior and Lord is He? The angel declares to each of us that we can all say, to us, for me, my Lord has come, my Savior has been born. To me even though I am a young mother living in poverty, and to me even though I am a foreigner, and to me even though I am a despised and dejected shepherd, to me my Lord and Savior has come. To us this very day comes the Savior that we need to free us from fear and trembling, the Messiah we have been waiting for, the Lord who created us has been born this day, entering into the Creation. The Lord of all Creation is in our midst.

This is the news which shines into the darkness, which fills the emptiness of our lives, it is the only news which fills us with great joy. Your Savior, your Messiah, your Lord has come to fill your entire life with this great joy at the sounding of this good news. The God in the highest heaven who the angels praise, has come, as a baby wrapped in bits of cloth, lying in the lowly manger, to bring peace to all. This is the Good News which makes the heavenly host sing, the Lord has come to us as a child, God enfleshed, calling all of us who toil in the dark, to Himself, to His light. To meet the God we can touch, the God we can hold. The God who has come so that we may have peace from our fears, so that this great joy may never leave us but define our lives forever. This is Good News, which makes ruins sing for joy.

Once the angels had left them, continuing to sing endless praise to the Lord, the shepherds went into Bethlehem. Called out of their fields, to gather before the Christ who calls all to Himself. So with great haste they left their flocks and their fields to go to Bethlehem the tiny town, to find their tiny Savior. And then among Mary and Joseph they found the child. They approached the cradle of Jesus, as we all must, collapsing under judgment and rising knowing the mercy of God directed towards each of us.

When we come on this night, each year to gather, and proclaim this message we do so not with exaggeration. We do not just speak of a pretty and pious legend which gives us fleeting comfort one night a year, we know that darkness continues to exist, we know that there are a host of reasons to still be afraid. But we also know that no darkness will overcome this great light, and we speak of Good News which fills our whole lives, our entire selves with peace and marvelous joy! This is why we keep coming year after year. For we are gathered by the call of Good News, around God Himself, Lord of all Creation, who is so small here, who is hidden here in a manger, in poverty, who enters into the lowliness of the world and calls to kings and

shepherd alike, who calls to us. Who meets us as a helpless and defenseless child so that we may know Him. Our God comes and makes His throne not on human thrones but in human depths, in a manger. Surrounded by these wild, dirty shepherds, who cannot get their fill of this miracle. Surrounded by us who come year after year to witness the mercy of God shining into our lives, surrounding us with the glory of our Lord, in the lowliest of places. Surrounded by us, who continue to proclaim that darkness will never overcome this glorious light, even in the darkest of places.

We come with the shepherds to witness the grace of God, who comes to us in the manger and we must go with the shepherds, back to our fields, not to wallow in darkness for another year, we go out into the world glorifying and praising God, for all we have seen. We leave the cradle which calls to us all, as people who have witnessed our Savior, our Messiah, and our Lord in the flesh. We go into the world as people who have heard the Good News and now have a great joy, let us go out into the world glorifying and praising God, our newborn King. Let us go into the world without fear, relying solely on the grace of our God, worshipping our Savior, our Messiah, our Lord.