



## A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

### In the Presence of the Glory of the Lord...

#### Luke 2:4-19

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:4**...And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup> ¶ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" <sup>15</sup> ¶ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, send now your blessed Holy Spirit to come and, as this word's true author and therefore its infallible teacher, instruct us as to what it means and why it matters. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, and to instruct how we are to live in light of what you have done. In Christ's name, we pray, Amen.

Mary knew they were close. They had already passed alongside the hills outside Jerusalem. But know every time the donkey stepped, Mary was reminded of just how close she was to bearing her firstborn child. It had been an endless trip. Her back ached and her feet were swollen and though Joseph had been compassionate she wished there was a woman companion with them. It was a trip she knew only a woman who had borne children herself could appreciate.

She was a full eight months plus into her pregnancy and the trip was ninety miles one way over difficult, mountainous terrain. It was not a trip they had wanted to make but Caesar Augustus had ordered it and when he gave the order they had dutifully obeyed. What else could they do? Caesar, so far away in Rome, was oblivious to the suffering he caused but they had become accustomed to suffering. And now Mary bore with grim determination her suffering knowing that the joy of bringing a new precious little baby into the world was not so very far away.

Mary knew, of course, that it was a boy. She had quoted to herself many times the words that the angel had spoken no so long ago.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 1:30**...And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear

a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Her heart was expectant but her mind still reeled with those words. As they plodded them along she rolled them over and over in her heart trying to make sense of what they meant. Had it really been only eight months ago? It seemed to her now on the winding trail to Bethlehem as if it had been longer, much longer. Still they plodded on. They had been ordered to return to Joseph's ancestral home to register for a whole new round of Roman taxes. She smiled at the thought of paying more taxes. They did not have very much now and the expense of making this long trip meant they would have even less. And then as they started down an incline she heard Joseph's tender voice. He was saying something about Bethlehem and when she looked up she could see the flickering lights of the little town down beneath them.

Bethlehem...the word struck a warm place in Mary's heart. It had been the birthplace of the great king, David. He had been born in obscurity and yet had ascended to the throne of the nation. Apart from the Abraham and Moses no name was known better. Certainly no name, including that of Abraham and Moses, was better loved. Her mind drifted back to the words of the angel...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 1:32...** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,...

Mary steeled herself with the angel's words. She knew she had to be brave. She wanted to be brave for Joseph and she longed to impart to her yet to be born son something of her resolute, devoted and obedient heart.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:6...** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

They had applied at one inn and then another but everywhere they turned the rooms were filled. Innkeepers offered their sympathy but when rooms were filled they were filled. They opted instead for privacy. At last they found a place with no people and only a few animals. Mary lay down on a pile of straw and tried to ease the pain in her back. She was exhausted but they were satisfied at least that there were no prying eyes.

Joseph knew and Mary knew that he knew that she was concerned about her modesty.

Before long she felt the great muscular spasms rolling across her abdomen. She was close and she knew it. She welcomed the contractions knowing that each one was bringing her closer. After a few hours, the baby was born. It was a normal birth and she wondered what she had expected. The baby was so small and frail and the cold night air caused Him to recoil and to shiver. Joseph tenderly laid the baby on her abdomen and Mary began to gently clean Him as best she could in so primitive and dirty an environment. They had brought cloths to wrap the baby and they did so.

And then, she held him to her breast and marveled at His beauty. Finally, when the weariness of the trip and the weariness of the birth forced her to rest, Joseph drug over a feed box and gently took the baby from her arms, wrapped it in the warmest garments they had and laid it in the manger. Mary lay back on her

straw bed. Warmed by the fire Joseph had built she watched the baby sleep and smiled as she finally closed her eyes.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:8**...And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

Two or three miles away, in the hills just outside Bethlehem, shepherds were gathered around their own fire watching after their flocks. The night was dark and the stars above their head offered them little consolation as they huddled around the fire to ward off the cold. They had eaten their shepherd's rations and their stomachs growled with a hunger that had come to be something like an old and constant friend. They sang to their flock and to each other keeping a wary eye for the movement of wolves and wild dogs in the brush. They comforted themselves as only poor men can do in the fact that their vocation was a noble one. It had been the calling of Abraham and Moses and even the great King David. And while, their vocation had become much less respected they guarded their flocks with all the vigilance they could muster knowing that their livelihood depended upon their diligence and knowing even further that many of the season's young lambs would find themselves moving up to Jerusalem later in the spring.

And then it happened. One moment, they had been surrounded by darkness with the pale light of their fire flickering off their faces and then in the next moment it was as if someone had switched on the sun. Their eyes burned with the brightness and they being good and godly Jewish men had no need for someone to tell them that the being standing in their midst was an angel of God.

They all men of resolute courage having fought off thieves, wolves and wild dogs now fell on their faces and shook like little boys. They were not just afraid; they were terrified.

They were not theologians but they knew enough of their Bible to know that when God, may His name be blessed forever, sent one His angels to earth it could mean only one of two things and one of those was bad, very bad. Had they been teachers of the law or scribes, they would have known that the glory of the Lord that now surrounded them had not made its appearance since the days of Ezekiel. They would have known that in the days of Ezekiel, the glory of the Lord, heartsick with the sinfulness of the nation had lifted itself from the Temple of God moved out to the eastern gate of the Jerusalem and then lingered in the hills outside of the city before it slipped unseen back into heaven. Had they been scholars, they would have known that the glory of the Lord that surrounded them had not made its appearance for some six hundred years and that now it had appeared to them, men of low estate. But had they known all that, they would have been even more terrified than they already were.

But their minds were not working that way. Their minds were not, in fact, working at all.

The only thing they were aware of was their dirtiness.

Their unkempt clothes and their dirty faces embarrassed them. As shepherds they had always felt exposed. They had felt exposed to the elements and to the dangers lurking in the brush. They had felt exposed to the disdain of those who lived softer lives but this was different. They now felt exposed to the holiness of

the presence of the glory of the Lord. It was a difference in kind and in scope. They were dirty and the brightness of the glory of the Lord made their dirtiness feel all that much greater. The light that surrounded them was searching them out, searching to the deepest recesses of their sinful hearts. They forgot about everything else around them except the unrelenting brightness and their unrelenting sinfulness. They buried their faces in the sand the Bethlehem hillside. On the one hand, they wanted it to end. On the other hand, it was such a glorious thing to be in the presence of the glory of the Lord that they wanted it to never end. It was the kind of thing that if one survived would keep one warm on the coldest night. They were torn between fear and exultation. And then the angel spoke to them...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:10**... And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God...

It was voice like they had never heard. It was rich, warm and resonant like the sound of a hundred soft flowing brooks. And while the voice was wonderful the words it spoke were even more so. **"Do not be afraid..."**

How they loved those words. They listened with rapt attention but every word, every majestic syllable, was filtered through that first opening phrase. They were in the presence of the glory of the Lord and yet they were going to live. There was no word of judgment; there was no condemnation. The words were... the words were wonderful.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:10...** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

It was good news, wonderful good news. And it was good news for all the people not just the sanctimonious scribes and Pharisees at Jerusalem. They were the recipients of God's own good news and it was not just good news it was news of great, even extraordinary joy. And it was for all the people.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:11....**For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Even with their lack of sophistication, they knew what that meant. The Messiah had come. Messianic expectation had filled the heart of every good, Jewish boy since birth. It meant deliverance from their enemies. It meant the wiping away of oppression and injustice. It meant deliverance from sin. And all of that had happened just below them in the sleeping town of Bethlehem.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:13...**And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

And now there were other voices. Hundreds of voices like the choirs in the temple. But voices so majestic, so glorious as to make the hairs on the back of their sunburned necks stand on end. And then they dared look up and they were astonished at what they saw. Floating above them in the brightness of the midnight sky were hundreds of celestial creatures. They were fantastic. Like giant, flaming fireflies lighting the sky above them, shouting out with strong, manly voices...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:14...**"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

They wept like little boys. Their tear stained grimy faces had seen the glory of the Lord. They had heard God's holy angels proclaim His own good message to them. They had seen heavenly choruses shout forth the glorious news of the Messiah. They watched now with rapture craning their necks and wiping their eyes as the heavenly throng receded slowly upward into the dark Bethlehem sky. They watched as it dimmed, flickered and finally went out. They were alone now in the darkness lit only by the dim, pitifully dim flickering light of their campfire.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:15...** When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

For the first time they became aware of each other. They looked at each other and laughed out loud at eyes like saucers. They trembled as they laughed at their disheveled hair and streaked faces. They were, to a man a mess, and they, to a man, no longer cared. One man finally spoke, **"Brothers, I am going down to Bethlehem."**

**"Me too"**, another answered,

**"Perhaps, one of us should stay."**

They looked at each other and laughed knowing full well no one was going to stay. They picked their staffs and their shepherd's bags and started down the hill toward Bethlehem. They had started off a fast pace but each step seemed to grow

faster and faster. Soon they found themselves running. When they reached Bethlehem they ran from enclosure to enclosure.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:16...** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

Joseph heard them before they actually got to where he and Mary and the baby were. He could hear shouting verging on hysteria.

**“Is he in there?”**

**“Check, there.”**

**“No, there’s no one in here!”**

Joseph at last was able to put a face to the shouting. A sheepish, grimy faced peered around the corner of the small enclosure where his family lay sleeping. His heart was racing. The man was a mess. Clearly, he was a shepherd. He shouted something and then suddenly there were other faces, all similar, peering over the man’s shoulder at him in the darkness. They moved as group slowly toward him craning their necks to see Mary laying in the straw but even more intent on the baby in the feedbox.

The men fell to their knees and they began talking almost shouting. Mary awakened with a start but the men just kept on. It was obvious to Joseph they meant no harm. And they were talking almost as chorus now. They were frenzied; they were ecstatic. It was hard to put it all together. Clearly, there had

been a light and angels and the angel had spoken and then there were more angels and they kept saying something about **“glory to God in heaven and peace on earth to men with whom God is pleased.”** It was too much. It was too frenetic.

They were all talking at the same time and they were laughing and weeping and praising God to the limits of their poor shepherd’s hearts. They carried on and on until in the wee hours of the morning they simply ran out of steam. And as the time passed, they kept turning their eyes toward the baby in the feedbox. Could they see Him? No, they did not want to touch or hold Him. To see Him was enough. Well, perhaps they would just touch the tips of His little baby fingers. Perhaps, then they could say they had touched the strong right arm of God. They knew He was destined to be great in Israel and they were so close. They felt they were in the presence of a sleeping lion and they were right.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:17**...And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

As the shepherds rose to depart the enclosure they did so with renewed humility. But somehow, keeping sheep would be easier now. Isolation and loneliness and even danger would never be the same. They had seen something that no men had ever seen and in the future whenever they tended their flocks their minds would inevitably drift backwards to this night. They walked out of the enclosure, arms interlocked, singing the Psalms they sang when they took their precious, spotless lambs up to the temple. And when they ran across anyone, they broke out as a chorus into their story and into the words...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:14**... "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 2:19**... But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Back in the enclosure any hope of sleep was now gone. Only the baby slept resting quietly for the arduous task set before Him. Joseph was solemn as all new fathers are but even more so in light of what he had just heard. The weight of the stewardship to which he had been entrusted pressed down on his simple carpenter's heart. Mary too was quiet, rolling the events of the night over and over in her mind, treasuring each moment, letting each word of confirmation of the great thing that happened bring her closer to the reality of what these things really meant.

And, brothers and sisters, that is what I desire for you.

No doubt, this great and glorious day has already brought its distractions. There are, after all, families to be pacified. There are responsibilities to be fulfilled and there are expenses to be shouldered but may I ask you, may I plead with you to let something of the glory of this day and all that it means encompass your hearts and minds.

God has entered into this sinful world of ours taking unto Himself a human body. He was despised for His righteousness yet He lived sinlessly. And He did what He did for our benefit not His own. He entered the world to turn aside the white-hot wrath of the justice of God and He did so that we might be declared righteous before the Father.

We celebrate this day not because we are enamored with glory of childbirth, though we are. We celebrate this day not because we enjoy the company of our families, though we do. We celebrate this day because it marks for us the beginning of the greatest event in all of human history. We celebrate this day because on this day the Son of God took to Himself human flesh in order to redeem us from our sin.

And because of that truth, brothers and sisters, I have a word from the Lord for you. If you have placed your hope, your confidence, your trust in Him you will never be disappointed. We know that because of what He has done...

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Peter 2:24**...He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

We know that because...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Galatians 3:13**...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "**Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.**"

We also know that from His own good promise.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Matthew 11:27**...All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 6:37**...All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

How could Mary have known when she wrapped Him in cloths that night long ago in Bethlehem that one day His own perfect, imputed righteousness would

wrap us in eternity in the same way? How could she have known that that righteousness would allow us to stand in that day that awaits every one of us when we too shall stand in the presence of the glory of the Lord? But it does and it will. And to that my brothers and sisters, I say **“Rejoice and be glad for unto us a Savior has been born and He is Christ the Lord.”**

Let's Pray...