

# Sermon for Advent Midweek Service III

**Date:** December 19, 2018

**Location:** St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

**Psalm:** Psalm 66

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 2:1-20

**Sermon Text:** Luke 2:1-20

**Sermon Title:** Angels and Shepherds

## Hymns:

LSB 349 – Hark the Glad Sound

LSB 358 – From Heaven Above to Earth I Come v1,2,3,6,15

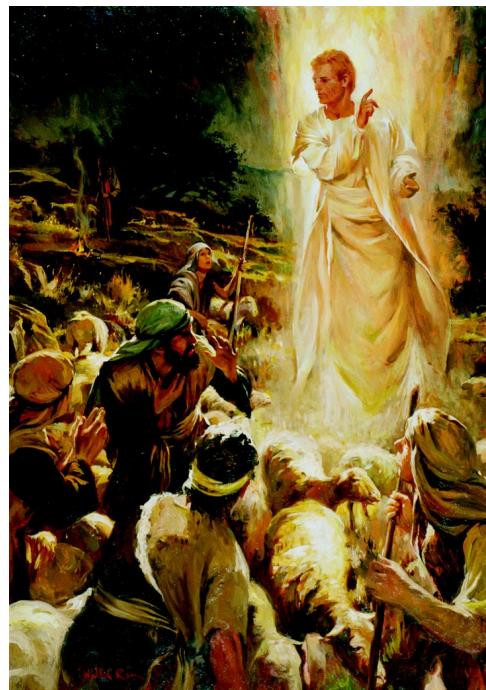
LSB 331 – The Advent of Our King

LSB 933 – My Soul Rejoices

LSB 350 – Come, Thou Precious Ransom, Come

## Liturgy:

Divine Service: Special



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**Text: Luke 2:1-20**

<sup>1</sup> At that time the Emperor Augustus ordered a census of the Roman Empire. <sup>2</sup> This was the first census taken while Quirinius {kw-EYE-rin-ee-us} was governor of Syria {SEER-ee-ah}.

<sup>3</sup> All the people went to register in the cities where their ancestors had lived. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph went from Nazareth {NAZ-ah-reth}, a city in Galilee {GAL-li-lee}, to a Judean {jude-EE-an} city called Bethlehem. Joseph, a descendant of King David, went to Bethlehem because David had been born there. <sup>5</sup> Joseph went there to register with Mary. She had been promised to him in marriage and was pregnant. <sup>6</sup> While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her child. <sup>7</sup> She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because there wasn't any room for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup> Shepherds were in the fields near Bethlehem. They were taking turns watching their flock during the night. <sup>9</sup> An angel from the Lord suddenly appeared to them. The glory of the Lord filled the area with light, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, a message that will fill everyone with joy. <sup>11</sup> Today your Savior, Christ the Lord, was born in David's city. <sup>12</sup> This is how you will recognize him: You will find an infant wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly, a large army of angels appeared with the angel. They were praising God by saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those who have his good will!" <sup>15</sup> The angels left them and went back to heaven.

The shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about." <sup>16</sup> They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph with the baby, who was lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw the child, they repeated what they had been told about him.

<sup>18</sup> Everyone who heard the shepherds' story was amazed. <sup>19</sup> Mary treasured all these things in her heart and always thought about them. <sup>20</sup> As the shepherds returned to their flock, they glorified and praised God for everything they had seen and heard. Everything happened the way the angel had told them.

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Pronunciation for difficult words are contained in { }

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Grace to you in the name of Jesus, and peace to His people on Earth. Amen.

We don't know much about the shepherds or the angels that came to be recorded in history at the time of Jesus' birth. In fact the Bible gives us no information at all, other than the shepherds were in the fields and the angels were in Heaven. Beyond that we are told nothing. Perhaps we can still learn something from them however, by taking what we do know and making some educated guesses about what could be. Then maybe, just maybe, we could see what might have happened that night.

The time was near. All of Heaven was bustling with anticipation and excitement. Decoration and preparation for the celebration were happening everywhere. Some of the angels had gotten a little over zealous in their decorating.

“Gabriel.” The Lord's voice crashed through the foundations of the Heavens.

The arch-angel Gabriel made his way into the throne room. His voice rumbled deeply. “Yes, my Lord?”

The Lord's voice again shook the palace. “What is this on My throne?”

“Tinsel my Lord.” Gabriel's voice echoed through the great throne room hall.

“Why is there tinsel on My throne?” The Lord's voice crushing the air as He spoke.

“I believe some of the angels have gotten a bit over zealous with the preparations my Lord.” Gabriel's voice continued to roll through the air of the palace. “Angels!” He spoke, though not raising his voice. A general of the Lord's armies never has to raise his voice. (Trust me, you would not want to be there if he did.) “Remove the decorations from the Lord's throne. No one is to touch the throne. Is that understood?”

“Yes Gabriel.” a few Seraphim sang, and quickly went to the throne to remove the decorations. (Which, by the way, really did clash with the emerald rainbow,<sup>1</sup> and fountain flowing out from under the throne.)<sup>2</sup>

The decorations were removed and Gabriel led them out of the throne room. The mighty doors closed behind him with a boom. The angels were all so excited, so filled with energy, and wanting to shout to the whole Earth, 'Your Savior is with you!' “Is it time general Gabriel? Can we tell them now? It is time yet?”

He voice rolled again. As he began to speak everyone fell silent. No one interrupted general Gabriel. No one knew what would happen if you did, and no one was going to test him to find out. “No, it is not yet time. You will know it is time when I tell you it is time. Now the Lord God desires His peace and He will not be disturbed. Is that clear?”

There was no answer. There was no need for an answer. Gabriel's commands were always obeyed without question. One Seraphim simply unable to contain his excitement said, “It is time now?” His voice was kind, excited, and sung like a golden bell as he spoke.

Gabriel looked at him and said, “I will tell you when it is time.”

1 Revelation 4:3

2 Revelation 22:1

“When it is time, can I tell them? Can I tell the Lord’s children? I want to tell them Gabriel.”

Then all of them started, “I want to tell them too! I want to tell them too!”

Gabriel spoke and silents instantly fell as his voice thundered, “When it is time I will choose who will tell them...”

There was a quick inhalation of excitement that could be heard from some distance away. Gabriel’s eyes glared at the multitude and all of them held their breath. (That was the closest any of them ever got to interrupting Gabriel. No one has ever come that close since.) “That is all.” Gabriel said, and turned to go back into the throne room. The angels let out their breath and continued the excited chatter and the preparations.

“My Lord, the angels have been instructed to avoid bothering you. They are very excited my Lord.”

The Lord’s voice crashed through the throne room, “I know Gabriel. They serve Me well. I am not angry. The time approaches. Have you selected who will go to tell My people of the birth of My Son?”

“I have my Lord.” Gabriel’s voice echoed, “I have decided to send all of them. Though I have not told them yet. They are excited enough and I want it to be a surprise.”

“All of them?” The Lord asked, the tone of His voice suggesting the decision might not be the best.

“Your children deserve the best my Lord. I am sending Cherubim to show Your might and strength, and Seraphim to sing Your praises my Lord.”

“You have chosen well Gabriel.”

Gabriel bowed low as he left.

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*[In fields near Bethlehem]*

In the fields<sup>3</sup> near Bethlehem<sup>4</sup> a shepherd spoke to another. “I really enjoy working the flocks of Bethlehem. This bread we get is so good.”

The other replied, “Especially when it’s warm in the early morning. Oh and the smells coming from the city. It reaches all the way out into the fields.”

It was now already early evening and the Sun and gone down. A few sheep bleated in the distance. It was an unusually quiet and peaceful night. “It’s strange for the flock to be so quiet. There are always wolves about. Even if they are far off some of the sheep are usually aware of them. They all just seem so peaceful tonight.”

“Normally I’d long for a good night’s rest but I’ve slept so well these past few days.”

“As did I. Things have been going very well.”

3 Luke 2:8

4 Bethlehem is a Hebrew word which means “House of Bread.”

The shepherds sat down to eat their bread and tell stories around the campfires. It was perhaps the best night they had ever known. At least the best anyone could remember.

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*[In Heaven]*

The time was near. There was concern on the face of God and Gabriel. “They are in a stable my Lord. No place for Your Son. Let me go down and take care of things.”

“No Gabriel,” the Lord’s voice commanded. “Things are as they must be.”

“Will the angel’s be singing in an animal stable my Lord?”

“No Gabriel. They will not. They will not go to any city or sing to any king or governor.”

“What is Your desire my Lord?”

“They will go out to the fields and tell the lowest of my children. They will tell only the shepherds.<sup>5</sup> You will see to that personally.”

“My Lord, I have served You for thousands of years. My wish today, is as it was the first day, only to fulfill Your command. It will be done.”

“The time has come Gabriel. My Son, He is born. My Son!”

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*[In Bethlehem]*

As Mary held Jesus, the Son of God,<sup>6</sup> in her arms, Joseph sat near her.<sup>7</sup> He did not let her see his nervousness. She only saw his strength.

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*[In Haven]*

Gabriel bowed low and left the throne room. The great doors did not close behind him. He spoke and raise his voice so that all of Heaven would hear. It crashed though the skies and shook the foundations.

“THE SON OF GOD IS BORN TO MAN!  
GIVE GLORY TO THE LORD MOST HIGH!”

Everything that could make sound exploded with anthem and praise to the Father. All of Heaven rang out with glory. The Seraphim choirs sang throngs of jubilee and joy. The sound was deafening but glorious for all who beheld the wonder of it.

As the throng subsided Gabriel spoke. “You...” He pointed to one Cherubim. “You will go to tell the children of God.” All the company of Heaven looked at him with wonder, excited for him. He was chosen to tell God’s children. “You will go to the fields outside of Bethlehem and

5 Luke 2:8-9  
6 Luke 1:32  
7 Luke 2:6-7

announce the Messiah's birth. Go gently now. God's children are not accustomed to such throngs as we have here in Heaven. Do not frighten them. Take care as you tell them. Go now... the others will follow you in a moment."

Gabriel sheepishly smiled. Even the great arch-angel, commander of the Lord's armies, could not contain his joy. He saw the wonder on the faces of them all as the one angel left. He saw the question they did not dare to ask, "...others?" Then he spoke. "You will all go to sing of the Messiah's birth."

Heaven exploded again with anthem and song. Gabriel had to lift his hand for quiet. (A gesture he later warned them he would never be required to do again.) Respectful silence fell as he spoke. "I remind you again, contain yourselves. God's children have not seen such wonders. Do not frighten them!" He paused for affect... then spoke, "You may go."

The power of the wind as wings spread, and song rang, was a force unmatched by any gale on Earth. Yet even over the roar Gabriel's voice could be heard. "Send them to Bethlehem, to a manger.<sup>8</sup> ...and take care of their sheep."

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*[In fields near Bethlehem]*

The one cherubim appeared to the shepherds:

"Fear not, for behold,  
I bring you good news of great joy  
that will be for all people."<sup>9</sup>

He spoke softly at first. He tried so hard not to let his excitement get the best of him, but he just couldn't help himself. His voice began to ring out:

"Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."<sup>10</sup>

Suddenly all around him the skies were filled with multitudes of angels. Cherubim and Seraphim singing, "Glory to God in the Highest, and peace to His people on Earth!"<sup>11</sup> They sang it over and over again. The anthems of Heaven sung over the skies of the fields just outside of Bethlehem.

The shepherds were afraid and amazed, but ultimately the angels watched their sheep, and the shepherds did walk into town.<sup>12</sup> This time however, it was not to get that wonderful bread for which Bethlehem was so well known. This time, unbeknown to them, they were looking at the Bread of Life. As they came to a stable and worshiped a King, declared and decreed by Heaven itself, as Heaven looked on. As they talked with Mary and Joseph about what they had seen and Mary and Joseph told them all they had seen you can imagine how they all felt. You

8 Luke 2:12

9 Luke 2:10

10 Luke 2:11-12

11 Luke 2:14

12 Luke 2:15

see looming in the North, all lit up with torches and fire to warm the soldiers, was Herod's castle.

How they must have marveled at the wonder of evil King Herod, just miles away, and here as proclaimed by the angels of Heaven the King of all creation. The Messiah, the Christ, the One who would set God's people free.<sup>13</sup> It would not surprise me at all to hear that the Shepherds sang praises to Jesus that night. Maybe even songs taught to them by the angels who sing them still today, this very day in Heaven. While we wait for Christmas Day, and the celebration of the birth of the Son of God.

You see our God is powerful and almighty. He is worthy of, and commands, our respect, but His heart is soft and He loves us dearly. Dearly enough that He sent His own Son to save us.

Amen.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18