**12/24/24**

**Christmas Eve**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 2:1-14 [15-20] (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

You know, as I began my studies for this Sermon, I actually looked back in all the folders on my computer to see if I had shared on this message before. Now, mind you, I had no intent to reuse or recycle anything I had done in the past. However, I wanted to see my viewpoint and my approach, and I also wanted to come at things just a little bit differently to be honest. That of course is the fun of learning, and that is the fun of looking back on our prior work. So, believe it or not, this is the third consecutive year that I have preached on this same exact message. Quite honestly it is hard to believe that I have been helping out for so long, and have been appointed in this position as Vicar by the Bishop for some time now as well. However, I will confess that other times it feels like I have been doing this forever, and I wonder when my all my requirements will be met and my Ordination Day will come. One thing I do know for certain is that if I keep serving the Lord, and serving people in and through the Church and the Community, then everything else will fall in place in due time and due season. That is the brilliant and amazing part of faith and belief, for we know that God has us and has the plans in order no matter what we may or may not see right in front of us.

So, this brings me to this baby boy that is right in front of us in the manger wrapped in bands of cloth, that very baby boy that we celebrate at this time every year. Now, one may think that coming back to this very place to celebrate our Savior’s birth each year may be very repetitious or mundane, but by no means is that the case at all. For every year that we come to celebrate our Savior’s birth there is something else to magnify, there is something else to rejoice in, and there is just simply another reason to find comfort, trust, love, appreciation, admiration, respect, and so much more. To think our Savior would humble himself and come to each and every one of us as a human being, and live the life that we all live is remarkable. Our Savior is no pie in the sky, he is not someone that we cannot relate to, he is not something imaginary, he is real, he is present, he is indeed one of us! Thanks be to God for that!

Alright, let me press pause here, and let me not forget to conduct my ordinary business here before we press on with this very message. Now, if you do not know me well enough, or if this is one of those few times a year that you happen to join us in our pews or on our conference call, that is quite alright. Let me tell you that this is the very time that I thank each and every single one of you for joining us. For we are the church, and we are truly better together, and for that fact we were built to be together. That little infant who lived to be some 33 years of age, that very man that came to this earth to conduct his ministry, showed us the power and the importance of being together and doing so for and with one another. So; whether you came here and found your place in a pew or called in on the conference call, whether you did so out of respect to someone who invited you, whether you did so because this is what you do each and every year, whether you felt you needed something more this year because the grief and pain are so overwhelming and frustrating, whether you did not want to be lonely and knew you could be around others, whether you joined us from another congregation or church home because you are in town or your church service is another time, or whether you just simply did so because you are here for each and every service, I say welcome and thank you for joining us. We are a community of faith that is built on our love for God, and our love for others. I am so thankful that you came to God’s house to celebrate another Christmas together, and to make this special for each and every one of us that are present here physically or virtually. God is indeed smiling down on all of us and thankful that you came to witness, experience, and celebrate the very birth of his baby boy.

Now, as we move back into our focus on the Gospel Reading here, I must say there are several distinct parts we can chose to pay attention to. The one thing I always want to remind all of us of is that the message is the Living Word, and we can actually interject ourselves into it. That is despite the very fact that we probably do not know the first things about being out in a field watching sheep, or making sure that a stable is safe enough to birth our child. However, what we do know how to do is observe, to look on, to listen, to experience, and to go and share what we have seen and heard. But sometimes we need an extra nudge, or a sense of conviction, and I truly believe that is what coming back to this stable each and every year brings to every single one of us. Because it is a story that we are all rather familiar with, and it is a story that does not take some lofty imagination or expectation. Plain and simple; Christ is born, his parents care for him, several people come and surround them, and most importantly; everyone knows and feels that this is something special. Their faith and belief, their excitement and wonder, their love and awe become ours this very day!

Now, I can probably end things off right there and put one of my shortest sermons in the books from my 10 years of preaching and teaching. However, I would be doing all of us an injustice, and I would not be respecting our Lord. With that said, there is indeed more to highlight and talk about form our Gospel Reading, and we will do that together. However, there is also one thing that is for certain, and that is that we will all be singing Silent Night together as we close out our service here. A familiar song and tradition for sure here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, when you are in the dark holding a candle, it definitely has a way to evoke that feeling of Christmas and love before we depart from one another and go back out there into the world.

So, as you all sit there and listen in you might be asking yourself what else might I have to say when I told you that I summarized things up pretty well, and that we could have already been done. Alright, so what about all this business about a royal decree and registering? Is that really needed in our Christmas story? For many years I would have sided with many of you and said it was not. However, after more time in seminary, and more time studying various things, I have found the importance and relevance of it. For a story to be part of history, and not just some folklore, we need these very fine details to confirm time and location. Then, and only then do we get to the preparation for the very birth of this baby boy.

Now, one might ask why no one had an extra room in their house to offer them. Let’s think about it, or put it in real perspective here. How many of you are just going to offer someone a room in your house that you do not even know? How many of you are going to say stop wandering about and come stay with me? How many of you are going to offer them that room nonetheless when they might make a huge mess because the lady is quite frankly about to pop at any moment? How many of you would not have been fearful of the government or any judgment because you let a couple who was not wed and having a child stay in your home? Then, let’s take a look at this picture from the Manager or Owner of the Inn or Motel. If your rooms were full, it was not like you could kick anyone out, or just make a room somewhere for these folks traveling that did not have reservations. The town was busy, and any rightminded person coming from out of town to register would have ensured they had reserved a room, correct? Shame on you Mary and Joseph for missing out on that detail! To top it off, who is to say that the Manager or Owner of the Inn or Motel would not be fearful of the same government or the same judgment of letting a couple who was not wed and having a child stay in their place of business? There are so many things to ponder right there on their own. So, to the manger they go. Hidden away from sight. At least they have some cover and a place to lay down, despite it being on hay or around a bunch of barnyard animals.

So, now we get a baby born, and we managed to get all that history and those questions and concerns out of the way. We now move on to these shepherds who have the Angel of the Lord descend on them at their campfire after a long days’ worth of work. The angel is shining, and then all of a sudden speaking to them as well. It is a wonder how in the heck they did not manage to run off, or think they were just hallucinating after being out in the sun and the fields all day watching over their flocks. To top it all off, if things could not even get more awkward, we hear that a multitude of the heavenly host arrives on the scene as well and is praising God. Okay, so these shepherds, who are not those Magi or Three Kings we will hear about in a few more days, are now trying to process all of this. I am not sure what you or I would have done quite frankly if we would have had been in their sandals and had an experience like this. However, I know for certain that it would have either had us afraid, confused, or possibly just wanting to follow the very orders given because we would be fearing something else much more awkward or crazy might happen. So, that is the very case for these shepherds we hear about in our Gospel Reading.

As we move on and get ready to close things up with this sermon and experience here, we actually get to hear what the shepherds were actually thinking after all that. With no GPS, no trip ticks from their local Triple A office, not even a map, much less no exact location, and no benefit of a star that the Magi would have to follow in a few more days, they would manage to just go. They would forget about the very sheep they cared for and made a livelihood off of and the shepherds would follow the very words and commands of the Angel of the Lord and the multitude of the heavenly host. They would set out and go without any delay or reservation, that is of course what haste means in our Gospel Reading, and they would make it a point to search high and low to find these folks with child in a manger. They would not just go there and observe or check things out, but they would share what had been told to them, and the very experience they had as well. They would tell Mary and Joseph why they were actually there. Now, Mary and Joseph may have easily thought that these shepherds were drunk or caught with heat stroke, but that is not the case at all. Mary and Joseph were prepared for this moment, and several others to come, because they realized their very child was a blessing that they had right in front of them and with them. We even hear that Mary treasured their words and their very presence, and took them to heart. We then hear in verse 20 that, “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.” There actually was no silent night here folks! Those shepherds became the very messengers of the Lord, and they were proclaiming and sharing all they heard and witnessed with others as they traveled on their way back to their flocks.

So, as you leave these church doors tonight, or you hang up on the conference call, I challenge you to go out into that world and share and proclaim this very message. Let others know what you heard and experienced tonight. Share with others who may or may not realize that they need it or not. Filled with the light that shines in our lives, I challenge you to go forth and share that very light of Christ and care for others. This is not a one-day experience, and this is not just a message for some. This message lives on daily, and this message is for all. Go and share, and just let God handle the rest!

**Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 December 24th, 2024

 Nativity of Our Lord

 Christmas Eve

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

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(4) WorkingPreacher.org

 Christmas Eve: Nativity of Our Lord

 Have you heard good news lately?

 December 24, 2024

 Commentary on Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

 Abraham Smith

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 Christmas Eve: Nativity of Our Lord

 The temptation is to do too much rather than too little on Christmas Eve.

 December 24, 2018

 Commentary on Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

 Amanda Brobst-Renaud

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 Christmas Eve: Nativity of Our Lord

 From Luke’s theological-narrative point of view, Luke 2:1-20 is a single unit.

 December 24, 2015

 Commentary on Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

 Ronald J. Allen

**Luke 2:1-14 [15-20] (NRSVUE)**

 God’s greatest gift comes as a baby in a manger. Angels announce the “good

 news of great joy” and proclaim God’s blessing of peace.

 1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should

 be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was

 governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also

 went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called

 Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He

 went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was

 expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her

 child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth

 and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

 8 Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping

 watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them,

 and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the

 angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of

 great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,

 who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child

 wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was

 with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

  14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

   and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

 [15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to

 one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken

 place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 So they went with haste and

 found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this,

 they made known what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard

 it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, 19 and Mary treasured all these

 words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and

 praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.]