

2010 CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT (12/24/10 – *Songs of the Savior –
The Shepherds’ Song: A Song of Faith*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

We heard earlier *The Angels’ Song: A Song of Praise* – how God’s holy messenger declared the Savior’s birth, saying: ***Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord.*** [LK 2.10-11] And then how ***suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men*** [2.13-14].

The shepherds heard this word of the Lord – and received it with great joy. The last portion of Luke’s “Christmas Gospel” – as it is called – records how, at the angels’ departure 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.*** [2.15] Luke goes on to describe how ***they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Baby lying in a manger.*** [2.16] The words and actions of these shepherds proceed from faith – faith prompted by God’s Word of promise and given them by the Holy Spirit.

So we continue our celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by meditating on yet another *Song of the Savior* – this one *The Shepherds’ Song: A Song of Faith*.

Consider a moment these shepherds. They are among the poor of Bethlehem. At least they have a rather poor vocation. Staying up in the cold night, tending rather smelly sheep, and watching for thieves and wolves is not the ideal job description. Those who were shepherds as such were not among the wealthy and highly revered of the community. They are humble men – of humble (or no) education and means. Except for the wonderful service they provided in sheep for wool, meat, and sacrifice, they would have been unnoticed altogether, I suppose – disdained by many ... especially

the rich, the highly educated, and the shrew business-owners.

But it is to such humble men that the Lord is pleased to come and reveal His glory ... and the birth of His only-begotten Son. It is not to Herod ... or the High Priest ... or to the aristocracy of Jerusalem ... or to the wealthy tax collectors ... or to the mighty men of war that God sends His holy angels to declare the Savior's birth. No – but to those who are humble and poor. Once again – as Holy Scripture has foretold ... and as we heard our Savior remind John just a few Sunday's ago – ***the poor have the Gospel preached to them*** [ISA 61.1; MT 11.5]. As Christ says elsewhere: ***Blessed are the poor IN SPIRIT, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven*** [MT 5.3].

Though they are sinners – for all are sinners ... except Him Whose ***Nativity*** we celebrate – yet they are not haughty. They are of ***low estate*** [LK 1.48, 52] – like Mary and Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna. They recognize their humble estate – humble especially before God. And yet, though they would scarcely believe such a gracious proclamation regarding, say, an invitation to the king's palace, they readily believe the angels' message about the birth of the Savior Who is Christ the Lord – and immediately “pack up,” leave their flocks, and run off to Bethlehem to see what God has told them.

That – dear Christians – is faith ... and the fruit of faith. These shepherds believe God's Word – as incredible as it may seem in general ... as incredible as it was that they should be the first to hear about it (well, except for Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth ... perhaps Zechariah as well). Imagine, if you would, that some great earthly dignitary – the Queen of England – has arrived here and you are the first to be told; not the news media, not the Governor or Mayor, not even the President ... but you. The proclamation by the angels to those Bethlehem shepherds is infinitely greater. God ... God Himself ... God in the flesh has come down from heaven – just this night ... in a stable ... wrapped in scrap pieces of cloth ... laid in a manger – and apart from Mary and Joseph, you are the first to know of His birth!

But this is the way our Lord and Savior works. For it not on the basis of our character ... or our worldly knowledge or success or power ... or our works – but merely on the basis of God’s gracious revelation to us ... His coming to us in Word and Sacrament ... the Holy Spirit’s work in us both to will and to do His good pleasure ... the Holy Spirit’s work to create and sustain living faith in us that we believe and know and make haste in the deep dark of night to come to see the Savior. It is God’s holy work in us that we are here this night – hearing about the Son’s birth in our human flesh to save us. And hearing, we believe – by God’s grace.

So faith believes God’s gracious Good News – no matter how incredible it might seem. That our sins are forgiven freely by the life and death and resurrection of the One Who created us ... by the One we have sinned against! That is incredibly *good tidings of great joy for all the people* [LK 2.10]. Faith hears ... and believes. But faith also acts – and causes us to run to the place where our gracious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is promised to be. God-given faith acts – and thus we are here in this place. God-given faith hears and believes and goes with haste ... to receive God’s gifts.

And so it is this night – that your faith has heard the promises regarding this Child Who comes to save His people from their sins. Your faith believes ... and now comes with haste to see the Christ laid in the “manger” of the Bread and Wine of the Sacrament ... and to receive the gifts He came to bring: forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation.

And like Simeon in the temple – a few days hence – you depart the Altar in peace according to God’s Word of promise ... for in Christ there is *peace on earth* and *goodwill* from God *toward mankind* [LK 2.14]. And with the shepherds you return *glorifying God for all you have heard and seen* ... and *make known the saying that has been told you concerning this Child* [2.20, 17]. *For unto you was born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord* [2.11] – a Savior, Who is Christ your Lord.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]