

## THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD (Christmas Day)

Hymns: 105, 103, 84, 102, 107

The INTROIT

(Is.9:6;Ps.98:1a)

*P: Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given:*

**C: and the government shall be upon His shoulder.**

*P: And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God:*

**C: the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.**

*P: Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song:*

**C: for He hath done marvelous things.**

The COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the new birth of Thine only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free, who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

**Micah 5:2-4**

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

The GRADUAL

(Ps.98:2-4; 95:1,6)

*P: All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God;*

**C: make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth.**

*P: The Lord hath made known His salvation;*

**C: His righteousness hath He openly showed in the sight of the heathen. Alleluia!  
Alleluia!**

*P: Oh, come, let us sing unto the Lord;*

**C: let us worship and bow down before Him. Alleluia!**

The EPISTLE

**Titus 3:4-7**

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

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15. **And came to be, even as departed from them into the heaven the angels, even the men, the shepherds, said to one another, “We must journey through now until Bethlehem even so we might see this utterance, the one having come to be, which the Lord has made known to us.”**

16. **And they came with haste and they found Mary and Joseph and the infant lying in the manger.**

17. **Now seeing, they made known abroad concerning the utterance of the having been spoken to them concerning the child, this one.**

18. **And all who having heard, marveled concerning those things having been spoken by the shepherds.**

19. **But Mary all kept closely together, the utterances these, thrown together in her heart.**

20. **And they converted (overturned/returned), the shepherds, glorifying and praising God upon all those things they heard and saw just as had been spoken to them.**

Luke 2:15-20 — “All Who Having Heard, Marveled”

INTRODUCTION

I. EVEN SO WE MIGHT SEE THIS UTTERANCE

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## THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD (Christmas Day)

Hymns: 105, 103, 84, 102, 107

Luke 2:15-20 — “All Who Having Heard, Marveled”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Today is the Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Day. The appointed Gospel reading for this day is Luke 2:15-20 from a direct translation:

**And came to be, even as departed from them into the heaven the angels, even the men, the shepherds, said to one another, “We must journey through now until Bethlehem even so we might see this utterance, the one having come to be, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and they found Mary and Joseph and the infant lying in the manger.**

**Now seeing, they made known abroad concerning the utterance of the having been spoken to them concerning the child, this one. And all who having heard, marveled concerning those things having been spoken by the shepherds.**

**But Mary all kept closely together, the utterances these, thrown together in her heart.**

**And they converted (overturned/returned), the shepherds, glorifying and praising God upon all those things they heard and saw just as had been spoken to them.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### INTRODUCTION

Last night’s Gospel reading began with the same saying as we hear again today, “**And came to be.**” What came to be? In last night’s text the answer is a declaration of more taxes. So our story begins with a declaration from the ruler of the worldly empire that even more will be taken from the people in order to support the heavy hand of those who rule over the worldly kingdom. This is contrasted to the declaration of the angel of the LORD. Having brought to be that which had been declared from the beginning, God’s gift of Life and Salvation needed to be pronounced as having come to be. An angel comes to shepherds in the nearby countryside and shares that the King of kings and Lord of lords has turned things upside down. Instead of a declaration of more requirements and burdens upon the people, He has given His most precious gift in order to redeem mankind and set us all free. Today we hear of the effect that this had first upon the shepherds, then upon those to whom they told what they had heard and seen, and then the final effect upon the shepherds themselves. As we hear the same account today the question is, what effect does it have upon us?

#### I. EVEN SO WE MIGHT SEE THIS UTTERANCE

**And came to be, even as departed from them into the heaven the angels, even the men, the shepherds, said to one another, “We must journey through now until Bethlehem even so we might see this utterance, the one**

**having come to be, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and they found Mary and Joseph and the infant lying in the manger.**

Angel means messenger. The angels came to the shepherds to share with them the utterance or declaration of God’s salvation having come into the world. For centuries, even millennia, this has been foretold. This event has been awaited by those who have heard it and believed it throughout all generations. This is the greatest message ever told. This is the greatest event that has ever occurred. It even surpasses the creation of the cosmos, for in this event what was corrupted and destroyed and cursed is completely restored. Purification is a much more difficult task than creating from pure materials. This purification is the utterance that the angels shared with the shepherds out in the fields.

Have you ever wondered why the angels did not go directly to Bethlehem to share this utterance? Why did they go to the shepherds out in the fields?

This is the way of the Gospel. It is a message that must be shared through humble converts. After all, who was listening in Bethlehem? God brought His Son to Bethlehem in the manner that was prophesied, to the very place where the Scriptures say that it must take place, at the very time that the Scriptures declare that it must come to be, and who received it? When Joseph brought Mary, the mother of God, to Bethlehem, not one person greeted them and made room for them. Even the relatives of Joseph to whom he came, when they saw that the pregnant carrier of the LORD was about to enter into the travails of giving birth to the Savior of the world, did they rejoice and prepare a bed for her? Did they even show proper compassion upon the bride of their kinsman? No, they counted them as a burden and shoved them into the place where they kept their animals and allowed them to fashion a bed for themselves in the straw and hay.

If the angels had shared their utterance with the people of Bethlehem, instead of marveling at the miracle of salvation, they would have marveled at the glorious appearing of the angels, just as people do today. But the shepherds out in the field reacted differently. They were not busy with all of the hoopla of the city. They heard the heavenly message and watched the angels depart from them and began saying to one another, **“We must journey through now until Bethlehem even so we might see this utterance, the one having come to be, which the Lord has made known to us.”**

**“We must . . . we should . . . we ought . . . we need to go see this utterance!”** And what utterance did they think that they needed to see?

**And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (Luke 2:10-12)**

**“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!”** How often do the common people hear such tidings? In the midst of all of the daily struggles and turmoil, with increasing governmental invasions into our lives, with more and more taxes and inflation and unemployment and debt and poverty, in the midst of all of this we hear, **“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!”** Then, the actual tidings are told: **“A Savior is born!”** But this is The Savior, the one that God has been promising for thousands of years! This is the

one who will fulfill all of God's promises. And here is the sign for you by which you will know that it is true, you will find a helpless newborn infant wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a feed trough.

What sort of ridiculous sign is this? No flashing, colorful lights. No cathedral. No ornaments. No choirs. No vestments. No trumpets. No band. No orchestra. No candy. Nothing but a baby born to a peasant who has nothing but a feed trough in which to lay her baby! This is the sign to you! Having heard this, the shepherds knew that they had to go and see this utterance because no one but the LORD would do things this way! And so they began saying to one another, **“We must go and see this utterance, the one having come to be, which the Lord has made known to us!”**

## II. ALL WHO HAVING HEARD, MARVELED

And so they went. And so they saw. And so they believed.

**And they came with haste and they found Mary and Joseph and the infant lying in the manger.**

**Now seeing, they made known abroad concerning the utterance of the having been spoken to them concerning the child, this one. And all who having heard, marveled concerning those things having been spoken by the shepherds.**

**But Mary all kept closely together, the utterances these, thrown together in her heart.**

They came, they saw, and they told what they had heard and seen. Those who heard what the shepherds uttered unto them wondered or marveled concerning those things. This word for wondered or marveled can mean either or both. It can even carry the meaning of honoring and worshiping. It is the same today. People hear the account of the birth of the Savior and they wonder or marvel at the message. Some wonder what it means. Some wonder whether it means anything. Some marvel at the message. Some are moved to worship.

It does seem that Luke presents at least a gentle contrast between the various hearers. He says that all who heard wondered or marveled. Then he mentions Mary and says, **“But Mary all kept closely together, the utterances these, thrown together in her heart.”** This is an ongoing holding to these utterances. What about the other people? Did they hold and guard closely these utterances or did they do as most people do today? Did they closely hold these things together in their hearts, or did they turn aside and begin putting the wrapping paper into trash bags and begin to take down the decorations and tree? What will we do with these utterances? What will we do with the utterances that we have heard concerning this little man born of the virgin?

## III. AND THEY CONVERTED

**And they converted (overturned/returned), the shepherds, glorifying and praising God upon all those things they heard and saw just as had been spoken to them.**

Does it sound strange to hear that the shepherds converted? This is what the text says. It literally says *overturned*. Certainly the shepherds returned to their flocks, but is this what Luke is

uttering? Is Luke telling us that they returned to what was or is he telling us that they had been changed or converted? Were the shepherds previously glorifying and praising God for the promise of the Savior which they had heard many, many times before? Before they heard the angels and journeyed until Bethlehem and searched for the newly born Savior, were they acting like this? Moreover, would they not first go to their families and tell them what they had heard and seen? Shepherds did not usually have their families with them out in the fields with the sheep. Perhaps they went first to gather their families to go with them to Bethlehem, but this is not indicated by Luke. Moreover, this is not the usual way that husbands and fathers do. Usually they will go and check out what they have heard before dragging their families along.

So, when Luke says that the shepherds overturned, does he mean that they went back to the sheep, or does he mean something much bigger? After all, he says that they overturned, **“glorifying and praising God upon all those things they heard and saw just as had been spoken to them.”**

In connection with this, how did they find this sign of the infant lying in the feed trough? How many houses did they go to and inquire concerning this sign before they found the promised sign? Luke does not mention the star that guided the magi. In fact, according to Matthew, the star appeared in the East and moved before the magi. So not only were there no Christmas lights on the house, not only was there no one even paying attention to this poor family, not only was there no choir or billboard or music, there were many houses like this one and no star over the house. So, how long did it take these shepherds to find the house with the manger with the newborn baby Savior?

Truly they must have counted it a miracle that they found Mary and Joseph and the baby. Surely they must have given thanks to God even for this! And having seen the utterance, Luke says that they were converted so that they were glorifying and praising God upon all those things that they heard and saw just as it had been spoken to them.

Yes, this was the intent of the angels, that this utterance should convert these shepherds. Certainly their conversations were converted. How long do you suppose that they talked about this? Would some of them have been talking about it 33 years later, when the purpose for which this baby was born was being carried out, also according to the utterances that they had heard from the Scriptures? Would some of them still have been talking about this when the sun turned dark at noon and later when the earthquakes began? Would some of them have been talking about this on the day of Pentecost when they heard Peter’s sermon? Would they have talked about this during the next 33 Passover festivals until this baby fulfilled the final Passover Sacrifice?

## CONCLUSION

And what about us? Have we been converted or will we simply return to our daily grind? What purpose does Christmas serve for us today? What sign is given to us of the Savior’s presence with us? Is Christmas a retelling of the birth of the little baby in Bethlehem or is there a greater connection for us today? Are we simply rehashing the sweet story of the holy family and the angels and the shepherds, or is there a real purpose to our gathering this day? Are we gathering to traditions and rituals or are we gathering into the presence of the mighty God who comes to us today in His body to save us? He has commanded that we gather and do as He did on the night of His betrayal, has He not? Has He not said, do THIS into the remembrance of Me? Is this not what is declared through the very utterance of the name of this day, the Festival of the Christ Mass? Is this not called the Eucharist or Thanksgiving? Is this not also called the

Lord's Supper and the Holy Communion? Have we not heard the utterance from His own lips recorded for us in Holy Scriptures where He declares to us that this is His gift of His body and blood for the remission of sins? Oh yes, if we have heard this marvelous utterance we have indeed been converted! Truly this is why the Holy Spirit calls us and gathers us together, so that we may feast in the Lord's Holy Communion and be built up into Him and preserved in the one true faith unto life everlasting. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.