

## Christmas Eve (2017-18)

**Luke 2** And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

<sup>2</sup> (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

<sup>3</sup> And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

<sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

<sup>5</sup> To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

<sup>6</sup> And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

<sup>7</sup> And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup> And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

<sup>9</sup> And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

<sup>10</sup> And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

<sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, good will toward men.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

<sup>17</sup> And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

<sup>18</sup> And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

<sup>19</sup> But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

<sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

In the Name of Jesus.

My dear Christians, the fame and praise that the shepherds gave to God on account of this Child they had seen SPRINGS from the Gospel: the Good News about God's Kingdom that has no end, the Government on the Should of This Son, This Child! And This Kingdom and Child and Glad Tidings of Great Joy is such, that it belongs sung and preached and lived and prayed and spread, despite all the horror, in spite of the darkness.

I pray that you came to this Service in the same frame as before. The multitude of the heavenly host appeared so that you and I would not fear, but hear of the Savior. But just as the whole thing was set up by the Holy Spirit in Luke's Gospel by telling us who was in charge of the world at that time—from the emperor, all the way down to the mayor of Abilene—our faith has a setting; our spreading of God's fame occurs in darkness too. See it for what it is; and STILL rejoice!

Jesus will grow up to teach His disciples that this joy occurs ONLY under the cross, the daily cross: His, then our own. And the FIRST MAN the Babe of Bethlehem will remember in His Kingdom, and

pledge His paradise, was someone so horrible to this world, that they had to crucify him, beat and mock and torture him to death.

THAT is what the shepherds saw! What did they spread? What did they hurry to see?! As told, a Baby, wrapped like a baby, in a manger: no fitting cradle. And then they knew; then we ALL know! Angels and shepherds and God and men and every last demon below: the Kingdom of THIS CHILD will never get a foothold in this world; nor will His subjects, His disciples, those on whom Heaven showers its goodwill. Oh.....!

What part of me does NOT want the shepherds saying ANYTHING about this Child? Is it my New Man or my Old? I cannot decide.

It's like the documentary I watched about sending out those two Voyager spacecraft in the seventies. Not only did they have cameras looking out, to send us back pictures of the glories of God's Creation. That's fine! But it also contained a record of who we are, and what we do! And to spoil the whole thing, they made some marks and scratches on the things to let anyone out there—if there IS anyone!—to let them know where we are and where WE can be found!

And I found myself wishing the rockets sending up those things would have exploded on takeoff! Maybe there isn't anyone out there!

You do know what we would do to anyone out there, if they ever found us and came to us. You know the record of the Christ. Either they would need to fit in with Caesar and his empire, or they'd have no place in this world.

I love my country, my friends. That's why my heart breaks when I consider the end result of everything we've set out to do, from rebelling from King George, to the latest rulings from our lords and masters. And I cannot shake the horror, the BLINDING darkness of this world: to think that we set the seemingly boundless power of our government, its agencies, its armed enforcers, and the supreme judges of our land, to take gifts from God, like the Christ Child, and wipe them out brutally, by the million, year by year. It's a budget item, my dear ones! Celebrate your lowered taxes! What will make us change the way we vote? I don't know. It's beyond me!

For the few seconds I have left between food and landfill, I plead with y'all to hear me! THIS...IS...the Gospel of Jesus Christ! What the shepherds spread is what WE are called on to spread, to live from, to believe; which means, to take as JOY!

The Lord God knew what He was doing when He sent the poor Baby, all of Himself in there too, all of God, to Caesar's world, to ours. And the Gospel is only the Gospel HERE!

Where religious man is as at a loss as I am! And he asks the Lord, 'WHAT...ARE...YOU...DOING...WITH...THESE...PEOPLE?!' The same question most of you like to raise with me, when we are together rehearsing the failings of other we know. 'WHO would want to land in the midst of HER, HIM, THEM?!'

Heaven's answer, now? Christ, the LORD Himself! David's God, now David's Son!

Which means that even that pervert on the cross has the ear of the Kingdom of God; and so much more! God as Father! God as Paradise!

'Remember me in your kingdom!' 'You will be with me, today!'

What was that man? How rotten was he?

A Hollywood actor or producer?

A United States Senator?

I would question if maybe he was a clergyman; but let's not be TOO rough on the man on the cross!

You have been baptized, dear Christian, to live in this world, but in a kingdom that does not fit in this world!

Meaning: it is the very people that disturb you MOST that GOD is placing in your mind, your life, for YOU to place in your prayers, in your intercessions, and in your acts of love.

THAT is the life we read about from the Titus lesson, that sober and upright living intended for us

by our God. NOT that we try to build a rocket and escape this place, or pray for the day when we can go to heaven's kingdom and leave all the rotten people to their rotten world.

ON...THE...CONTRARY!

Just AS Christ was born to live out His glory HERE, with the likes of you, me, and those who burn your toast!—

You and I have been born anew here; and we will not shine more brightly on the Last Day than we do right here and now! For here and now is the darkness! Here and now is all that we poor sinners, in our fear, can cobble together, little sandcastles and cardboard mansions, as if we can build anything that will last.

YOU have been forgiven, dear Christian, TO forgive; not BLINKING at the darkness, but dispelling it! And, the Gospel goes on to say, to teach us to confess:

WE...DON'T...HAVE...IT...IN...US!

That's why the angels sang, and the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem, and then spread the story abroad of all that they had seen and heard! For OUR salvation, and the salvation of the WORLD, does NOT rest in us, though the Lord does indeed use us.

God's kingdom and government rests on one shoulder: of the Baby in the manger, the Child at Mary's breast, and of the One Who has risen from His Suffering, and now gives to eat and to drink His Body and His Blood:

To US! Now THAT is a news and report that NO ONE was looking for!

Merry Christmas in the Name of Jesus! Amen!