

24 December 2017  
Christmas Eve; 10:30 pm, Candlelight Service  
ILC, Wichita, KS.  
"Would you rather be a Mary... or a Shepherd"

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

My good friends in Christ.

**Merry Christmas**

*(Pause to wait for them to respond ... then try it again)*

Very good!

Christmas Eve is one of the most beautiful nights in the Christian Church Year.

It is a night that we are called to let our thoughts soar to the heavens.

For on Christmas Eve our thoughts are on the miraculous:

Now I want you to use your imaginations...I want you to look at the ceiling above the Altar in the Chancel...since we don't have windows I want you to use your imaginations... close your eyes if you need to ...

...and pretend you are looking up to the heaven...

In your minds eye... Do you see the:

- Star that shone over the manger... way up in the heavens,
- Imagine... the angels filling the skies with their presence,
- shepherds in the fields, a teenage mother and, and a tiny baby.
- Without question the Christmas Eve service is a favorite.

When I was working on my Christmas Eve message.... I grabbed my personal history book... and realized that this is the 38<sup>th</sup> Christmas Eve sermon that I have written...

Thinking about that.... I realized that on this most holy night.... There is something I have never preached upon.... And that is a form of preaching in the Christian Church that is entitled, "**Preaching Christ's memories.**"

That is, in this style of preaching, the pastor invites the congregation to place themselves into the role of one of the characters in the Gospel account.

For our time together, this evening... in order to offer you an option as to what role you might play.... I would like to reread verses 17-19, from Luke, chapter 2, which read:

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<sup>17</sup> Now when they (the shepherds) had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. <sup>18</sup> And all those who heard *it* marveled 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

And I would like to ask this question of you:

- 1) Would you describe yourself as type of Mary.... Who took all this information... this fantastic miracle... and pondered it in her heart;
- 2) Or would you describe yourself as a type of shepherd.... Who after seeing the Christ Child of Bethlehem.... Went and told everyone around them about the Christ!

So...

- Are you a ponderer... like Mary?
- Or are you a person who gets so excited... that you have to go and tell everyone... like the shepherds?

Even though we all know the account of our Lord's birth so well... let me share with you again the events that occurred.

- I. Mary and Joseph had made the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It is about 85 miles from north to south. Mary was in her last days before it was time for her to give birth.
- A. I can only imagine that just after they reached Jerusalem.... With only 6 more miles to go to Bethlehem... Mary grabbed Joseph aside... and said... "**Joseph... it is getting closer to the time of birth... you had better find us a place where we can stay.**" Joseph frantically gets them to Bethlehem... and searches high and low to find a room for them. The inn is full. But the manager tells them of a stable they could use.

Mary and Joseph hurry into the stable to get everything ready for Mary to give birth.

While this is going on... Luke moves us to a completely different scene.

II. Now we move.... out in the countryside... amongst shepherds. Those smelly, grimy, considered to be ... *at the bottom of the rung of the social order... those shepherds* ... who are tending their sheep by night... when all of a sudden an angel of the Lord appears to them and says: "**Don't be afraid!**"

- A. Have you ever noticed in Scripture's that this is quite often the first thing an angel says to the human being they appear to! "**Don't be afraid!**" Ever wonder why the angels say: "**Don't be afraid!**" ? I would speculate that being in the presence of an angel.... Is a frightening experience... because we human beings startle easily!

The angel says: "**Don't be afraid... for there is born for you this day... that would be tomorrow... in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord. And this is how**

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**you will recognize him! He will be wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”**

And then... the skies are filled with angels... those spiritual beings created by God, who are singing: **“Glory to God in the Highest, and peace to men on whom His favor rests.”** Meanwhile... back at the stable.... Mary is giving birth to the Son of God. And when she gives birth... she looks at that little precious baby... in a state of being stunned... and thinks to herself... **“This is the Son of God.”** “This is God taking on human flesh... come to save all humans in the world.”

Did you ever wonder what Joseph must have thought? I have no evidence to support this... but I am going to say that Joseph was a typical male. And he probably just stood there, gazing at the infant Jesus, thinking:

**“I don’t understand anything that is going on????”**

Meanwhile... cattle are lowing....

Sheep are ....bleating....

And donkey’s ....are braying at the newborn -- the **Son of God is born.**

The animals know... but then... animals are a lot smarter than we give them credit.

Mary wraps up baby Jesus in swaddling cloths.... Or perhaps we would call it... **a birthing outfit...** and lays the baby Jesus in the manger to sleep, eat, and sleep.

B. Joseph still stunned... when... **let’s get back to those shepherds.**

Those shepherds have seen the angels go back into the heavens... and the shepherds say unto each other: **“Come let us go to Bethlehem to see this thing which the angels have told us about.”**

And they go to Bethlehem... find the baby Jesus... and they worship him... and then ... being typical shepherds

... they get all excited... and they go all around Bethlehem telling all their friends that the Messiah is born... and we have seen the heavens filled with angels.

We hear the angels speak this news: **A Savior is born!**

There is good news!

There is hope for a better day... and hope for the future... and if this really is the Messiah... isn’t he going to change our entire lives for the better... and on and on the Shepherds, speculate and talk, and get excited.

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### In conclusion:

This Christmas Eve 2017... which would you compare yourself as:

- A **Mary**... who ponders this Good News of Christmas in your hearts and gives thanks to God, that His Son, has come to earth; and all He must do to save us from our sins;
- Or.... Would you compare yourself to the **Shepherds**... who are having a great party?

Which one to you see yourself as!

My friends... whichever one you see yourself as... the Good News is this... we have gathered this evening... the Night Before our Savior is born... to celebrate this Good News:

We know how the story ends. With the birth of the Christ Child of Bethlehem we know that He has come to bring us:

- Forgiveness of sins;
- Eternal life with God in heaven;
- And hope for better days today... for the Spirit of Christ lives here within us.

My prayer for each one of you this Christmas Eve... is that ...you will pray for someone else... someone who is not in church...

.....Prayers that ask the Holy Spirit of God to soften the hearts of all who live in our world so that they might come to know of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

A Pondering Mary... or excited shepherds... it doesn't matter.

What matters is that Christ is born!

**Merry Christmas**

***(Pause to wait for them to respond ... then try it again)***

Very good!

Amen.