

The Feast of the Holy Nativity of Our Lord
St. Luke 2:15-20: "Do You Hear What They Heard?"
December 25, 2025 | Jerico Evangelical Lutheran Church

In Nomine Iesu

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EXORDIUM

At 3 weeks from conception, the tiny heart of Christ started beating, the same heart that would feel the stress of intense suffering as He sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane.

At 4 weeks, His arms and legs began to develop, the same arms and legs that would be stretched out on the cross.

At 6 weeks, the fingers of His hands had taken definite shape, the same fingers that would close in searing pain over the nails.

At 12 weeks, brain impulses moved His facial muscles, the same face that would twist in agony as He suffered the punishment of hell.

At 17 weeks, His ears heard the sound of Mary's voice, the same ears that would hear the crowd's jeering and the sobs of His dear mother as they gathered around His cross.

It's somewhat unnatural to put Christmas and Calvary together, Christ's birth and His death. Christmas is about a tiny Baby, born on a quiet night with angels singing His praises. That is a warm picture in our minds. Calvary is where a grown Man hung bleeding on a cross paying for all the world's sin. That picture is cold.

And yet, it is the same Christ. The Baby in Mary's womb was no ordinary baby. He was God incarnate, God in the flesh! The components of His human body were developing, even as He reigned as Lord over all things. He looked so helpless, yet He was the all-powerful God. He seemed so vulnerable, yet He had come to "*destroy the works of the devil*" (1Jo. 3:8).

The unbelievers of the world laugh at this. They laugh at your supposed God-in-the-flesh. They find Santa from the North Pole more compelling than this. And we admit that this does seem foolish. Why would God spend nine months in the dark womb of a poor woman? Why would He choose to enter the world in this way, as a little Baby, in the humblest of settings? Why would He put Himself under the care of Mary and Joseph?

The Son of God came to redeem every second of your life and every inch of your person, from your tiny first existence in your mother's womb to the final breath of your life on earth. He came to live it, experience it, sanctify it—the womb, childhood, adulthood—and then redeem you through the sacrifice of His perfect life in your place.

This is what God was doing at Christmas, for you and me and whole world. Please join me in singing our festival hymn, #142:

Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn!

A Savior unto us is born,
The Christ, the Lord of glory.
His lowly birth in Bethlehem
The angels from on high proclaim
And sing redemption's story.
My soul,
Extol
God's great favor;
Bless Him ever
For salvation.
Give Him praise and adoration!

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The sermon text for today is taken from the second chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, beginning with the fifteenth verse. We read as follows in Jesus' name:

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. (KJV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, the Savior of the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and you and me, dear fellow redeemed:

What was the most fantastic sight the shepherds saw on the first Christmas night? It's hard to imagine anything more amazing than the angel of the Lord appearing while the glory of the Lord shone around them, followed by a multitude of angels filling the sky and singing the praises of God. But I don't think the shepherds would tell you that was the most amazing thing they saw. They would tell you it was the tiny Baby lying in a manger.

It wasn't so much His appearance as the explanation of who He was. The angel said to them, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luk. 2:11). As they gathered around the little Baby, they knew they were looking upon more than a Baby. They were looking upon God in the flesh. They did not know how it could be; they did not fully understand it; they did not grasp what this Child would do. But they believed, they trusted.

That is the first thing we hear about in today's reading. They TRUSTED the message that the Lord delivered to them through the angel. This trust got their feet moving: "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem," they said, "and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." They didn't take their time; they "came with haste," and searched diligently through the town until they found "the Babe lying in a manger."

The setting was not impressive. Mary and Joseph did not look like much. Jesus appeared to be an ordinary Baby. Was He really "*Christ the Lord*"? Was He really the promised Savior? Was He really God in the flesh? There is no indication that they viewed the Child with suspicion or doubt. They trusted what they had heard. They trusted that here in the manger lay their Savior and the Savior of the whole world.

Their trust was evident in what they did next. They TOLD. "*And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child.*" As unlikely as it is that these shepherds were the first witnesses to see the Christ-Child, it is just as unlikely that they became the first evangelists, the first to spread the good news about Jesus. God didn't choose the priests to do this or some practiced orators or the powerful and influential to spread the message. He chose shepherds.

But then their lowly status is consistent with the way God does His work. He chose to work through humble Mary and the fishermen disciples, and today He even works through unimpressive you and me. 1 Corinthians 1 reveals this shocking strategy of God: "*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God*" (vv. 27-29).

So the shepherds traveled all over telling everyone what they had heard and seen, but especially what they had *heard*. The angel's words about the Christ-Child were so clear and comforting. It's safe to say the people in and around Bethlehem had never heard the shepherds talk so much about spiritual things. What had gotten in to these men? "*And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.*" The message of the shepherds filled them with wonder and amazement. Could what they were saying actually be true? But why would God reveal it to the shepherds, of all people?

The shepherds did not worry about how their message was received. Whether it was received warmly or with disdain, they could not but speak of what they had seen and heard (Act. 4:20). News this great could not be kept to themselves. Call them crazy, but they would not stop telling what the angel had "*told unto them.*"

The last thing we hear about these shepherds is how they THANKED God. As they returned to watch over their sheep in the field, they were "*glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen.*" They could not explain why they were chosen for this tremendous privilege. Why should the angel appear to them? Why should they be chosen to lay eyes on the Christ-Child? It was all a gift.

God had mercy on those men, just as He has on the entire human race. He delivered a gift in special wrapping—a "*Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*" No one earned this gift; no one was worthy of it. But God sent it in love. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son*" (Joh. 3:16). The Son of God entered the world as a Baby to rescue sinners from eternal death in hell.

So we see how the shepherds TRUSTED the message of the angel and went to see the Christ. They TOLD everyone about the amazing events of that night. And they THANKED God, glorifying and praising Him that He had revealed these glad tidings to sinners such as them. My dear friends in Christ, do you stand where those shepherds stood? Do you see what they saw? **Do You Hear What They Heard?** Because the Christ-Child came for you too.

What did the angel tell the shepherds? *"I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."* The good news was not just meant for them; it was given *"to all people" – "to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* (Rom. 1:16). That means the angel's announcement was meant for you. God sent His Son to earth for you. He was born in lowliness for you. When the shepherds looked upon Jesus in the manger, they were looking at your Savior too.

Those shepherds provide a good pattern for us, a good roadmap to follow. Just as they heard the good news and received it with joy, so do we. We have gathered here today for this very purpose. We have heard the Christmas message many times before, but it never gets old. We listen in wonder and amazement what God has done for us sinners. Like Mary, we treasure all these things and ponder them in our hearts.

But we don't keep the good news to ourselves. As individuals and as a congregation, we make known abroad that a Savior has come for all people. We share the glad tidings of the forgiveness of sin and eternal life through Jesus. We tell our neighbors, no matter how disinterested, prideful, or stubborn they may seem, that the Son of God took on flesh for them too. Like the shepherds, we can't point to anything in ourselves that causes God to show us mercy, but we know that He does. The Proof is wrapped in swaddling clothes, hanging on a cross, and leaving the tomb empty on the third day.

Like the shepherds, we also give thanks today. There may be a lot of things in your life that are causing your Christmas to be less than merry. You may be carrying regret or sadness or pain. You may see no end to your troubles. The Christ was born for you. Your Father in heaven wants you to know it and hear it. Jesus came to bear your griefs and carry your sorrows. He came to redeem your soul and open the way for you to heaven.

You are not insignificant to Him, a nameless face that He does not recognize. He sees you and chose you like He chose those lowly shepherds. He has great things in store for you just as He did for them.

Now let us all with gladsome cheer
Follow the shepherds and draw near
To see this wondrous gift of God,
Who hath His only Son bestowed. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #123, v. 6)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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