

## A Holy Invitation

Isaiah 60:1-3; Psalm 33:1-5; Luke 2:8-19

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December 25, 2022

It all happened in a moment, a most remarkable moment that was like none other. God became incarnate in a newborn baby. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14a) While creatures of earth walked unaware, Divinity arrived in a stable in Bethlehem. God had come near. No silk. No ivory. No media hype. To think of Jesus in human form seems almost strange. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. But Jesus became human as God intended Him to be. He was intended to enter into the mire and the much of this world, for only if He enters into the life of this world, can He provide a way out for us.

When the angel Gabriel delivered the message to Mary that she would be the mother of the promised Messiah, he announced to her, "With God nothing is impossible." Gabriel had come directly from the throne of God with this announcement to a young girl who could never have expected such a possibility.

God, the Son, will need the nurturing care of both Mary and Joseph. Jesus will be wearing diapers, learning to walk, studying Torah, working with his hands in the carpenter shop with Joseph, multiplying loaves and fishes, touching lepers and healing them, dozing in the midst of a storm, riding a donkey into Jerusalem, washing the dirty, dusty feet of those who should have washed his, dying for our sins, rising to life on the third day, and returning to heaven to watch over all the world.

The birth of Jesus was a simple moment, a quiet moment. It was a moment that was missed by most of the world, but it was a moment that punctuated the timeline of history.

There was, however, one glorious announcement to some ordinary folk, working men, shepherds, as they watched over their flock of sheep, protecting them during the night in the shepherd's fields just outside of Bethlehem. How significant it was that the announcement of the birth of the Good Shepherd was made first to the shepherds of this world! They carefully watched over their flocks as would Jesus carefully and lovingly watch over us. For those shepherds it was an ordinary night, with ordinary duties, and then, in an instant, the angel of God broke into their lives and stood in their midst and the glory of God surrounded them and their lives were also forever changed. Luke simply records, "And they were terribly frightened!" If ever a response was understood, I suspect that one was. The glory of God has come into their midst; the angels, the messengers of God are among them. They were chosen by God to receive the first invitation to see the Messiah. It is a holy invitation to the throne of grace disguised as a feeding trough. It is a holy invitation to look upon the face of God become human, who will live and walk among them. It is a holy invitation to a celebration of life, now and into eternity.

Just as important as the invitation is, so is the response of the shepherds. Their journey could not wait until morning, could not wait until a more convenient time, could not be dismissed. They *ran* to find the Christ Child.

In your imagination enter that stable with the shepherds. You have run so fast to get there, but now, do you dare enter into such a holy place. It is just a stable out behind the house, a place to feed and bed down livestock, but it has become a holy place. Carefully, you make your way inside and toward the back, in one of the stalls, you reach your goal. Mary is exhausted from birthing this baby, but radiant in her joy. Joseph is the guardian of his new family. Jesus is bundled, wrapped in cloths to keep Him warm

and secure. What looks to the uninformed eye like a poor family in the most dire of circumstances, appears to you, who have heard the angels sing, to be the most glorious moment in all of history.

As you inch your way closer, you don't want to intrude on this moment, but you cannot help yourself. You must see for yourself this thing which has come to pass. As you look into the face of that Baby, who do you see? Perhaps you see

- Someone who can move you beyond your past;
- Someone who loves you as you are, but loves you too much not to give you new challenges;
- Someone who has the power to give direction to your life;
- Someone who will walk with you wherever your journey in life takes you, and who will carry you when you are unable to walk;
- Someone who will laugh with you at your birthday party and celebrate at weddings;
- Someone who will touch your body and bring healing and wholeness;
- Someone who will enfold you in his arms when you need to be held;
- Someone who will calm the storm in your soul;
- Someone who will give his life as a sacrifice for your sins and be resurrected so that you may have abundant and everlasting life.

The invitation of the angels continues down through the ages until this present day. We are still invited to come to the manger and look upon the face of the promised Messiah. We are still invited to come and look into the eyes of the compassionate risen Lord.

Amen.