

The Two Sides of Christmas

Luke 2:15-20

Trinity Lutheran Church

Christmas Day, 2017

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In the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In the movie “Driving Miss Daisy” you may recall a scene where she and her driver pull up in the driveway of her son and daughter-in-law’s house which has been elaborately decorated in anticipation of Christmas. Christmas cheer is dripping from pillar to post. Christmas carols are loudly blaring, and everyone has put on their Christmas best. What bothers Daisy, however, is the hypocrisy of it all. She and her family are of a different faith. They don’t believe the words of the Christmas Carols – and she doesn’t think they ought to be pretending they do.

When people from other nations visit the United States at Christmastime they’re often-times astounded by what goes on here. No where else in the world are you likely to find anything quite like what goes on in just about every neighborhood of every city and town of our great country. Almost every year there’s a Christmas special whose premise is the one guy on the block who is always trying to outdo everyone else with the outrageous Christmas decorations on his house. A few years ago I heard there was actually a man down in Arkansas who decorated his otherwise ordinary home with so many millions of lights that the electric company had to run a special line to his house because he was causing power outages in his neighborhood. In America it would *seem* that we take Christmas very seriously. Or, do we?

Visitors from other countries look at all this Christmas fanfare in amazement and assume we must be very religious – specifically, that we must be very devoted to Jesus Christ. But, you and I know that a great number of those

elaborately decorated homes are like the home of Miss Daisy’s children. The glitz on the outside isn’t necessarily matched by faith on the inside. I suspect many of your homes inside are decorated very much like ours – to the max – or at least as much you’re able. You probably love to sing all the old Christmas carols – even if you don’t always do it – and you enjoy watching those old Bing Crosby movies with tears of joy running down your cheeks. And, of course, you’re here morning because it’s the right thing to do – to remember the birth of the Savior with a traditional Christmas morning service. In all likelihood you’ve already – or soon will be – exchanging gifts with family and friends in honor of this joyous occasion. Maybe there will be a big family dinner and a grand celebration. But, what are you celebrating? We obviously take Christmas very seriously. Or, do we? Is the glitz on the outside matched by faith on the inside?

In the Christmas story, the Shepherds and the Virgin Mary are examples for us of the two sides of Christmas – the *outward celebration*, and the *inward contemplation*. Here again is how it reads in the Gospel of Luke, the 2nd chapter, verses 15 through 20:

“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. . . And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."

The shepherds, if you will are an example for us of the **outward celebration** of Christmas. They were excited because the angel had told them the Good News which the whole world had been waiting for – that the Messiah had finally come – that the Savior had been born of the Virgin even as the Prophets had foretold!

That's why the shepherds came with haste to see Jesus. That's why, when they arrived at His birthplace, they glorified and praised God – and later would make known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And, whether you and I realize it or not, that's also the reason for all **our** outward celebration of Christmas. "...unto **you** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." God forgives you your sins solely because His own Son came down to earth and was made Man – was crucified **for us** – died and was buried **for us** – and on the third day rose again from the dead **for us**. He's the One who will give to us – and to all who believe in Him – eternal life. That's the real message – the real meaning behind the outward celebration of Christmas.

"But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." The blessed Virgin is an example for us of the other side of Christmas – the **inward contemplation**. It's not enough to simply decorate and celebrate. It's not enough just to sing Christmas carols, listen to Christmas music, watch Christmas specials

on television, and exchange gifts with one another. Along with our **outward celebration** – like the shepherds – you also must have in your heart an **inward contemplation** – like the Virgin Mary. The Christmas story isn't just a quaint old fable on which this particular culture happens to base our Winter festival customs. The Christmas story is a personal message of Good News from God **to you**. "For unto **you** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!" And so – with the shepherds and Mary – you also have put your faith, hope and trust in the Babe of Bethlehem – whose birth we now celebrate – for He is the very Son of God, born into the world for the salvation of sinners like you and me.

So it is that on this Christmas Day – as well as on all the Christmas Days of your life – you, as a member of Christ's Body, the Church – celebrate once again the two sides of Christmas. First, you join with the shepherds in an **outward celebration**, such as they experienced when they "...came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger." And secondly, you join with Mary in the **inward contemplation** as you keep these things and ponder them in your heart. As a child of God you match the glitz on the **outside** with faith in Christ on the **inside**. Outward celebration and inward contemplation. Those are the two sides of Christmas which we've joined together here to celebrate on this most holy of morns. May it always be so, for the sake of our newborn Savior, Jesus. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.