

Pastoral Letter - December 20, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

It was little ol' Bethlehem, but it was big enough for God. It was quite a contrast trading the throne room of heaven for a stable, angels for cattle, and hallelujahs for a lullaby. Bethlehem had its share of visitors, but never one like this.

The prophets had been given pieces of the divine puzzle, but even they didn't understand the wonder of *this* event. The Alpha and Omega was born. The Ancient of Days had the skin of a newborn. The same voice that commanded creation into being had the familiar ring of baby-talk.

A child was born of a virgin.

It was a typical Bethlehem night. Dinner was a memory, chores were all done, and parents were tucking in their sleepy kids. The stars were out but nothing else. The weary town had said "Goodnight." It was a night like any other, yet it was a night the world will never forget.

Never before had the Eternal become so tiny, the Almighty become so helpless. He had out-muscled Pharaoh's army, but now He was held in Mary's arms. The eyes that see the beginning to the end could hardly open. The God who never slumbers was fast asleep.

Angels were dispatched to spread the word. First stop—a group of shepherds. It was Good News! It was great joy! It was one sentence, only one verse, nineteen small words: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." The announcement needed no explanation, only directions. "You'll find the babe lying in a manger." Finally the wait was over. The Messiah had come. Nothing else mattered, not the late hour, not the restless sheep—nothing. This was a party they couldn't miss, the birthday of the God-child. And yet it was open to lowly shepherds. Fear was replaced by excitement, doubts with hope.

One can only imagine the thoughts of those shepherds as they found the baby-king. There was no entourage, no fanfare. "Where's the red carpet, the music, the royal crib?" There was no need for those things. They would have been out of place. Nothing glitzy could have enhanced the wonder of God becoming flesh. Some appearances don't need an opening act.

There they were. Quiet, perhaps. Motionless, no doubt. They must have thought about Israel's future, or even the dreaded Romans. Someone probably asked to hold the baby. One confused shepherd probably wished he had paid attention in Sabbath school. Another may have remembered the prophet's words, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

Did they see the irony? They had been watching Bethlehem's sheep, yet now they were beholding the Lamb of God. For years they had supplied animals for the annual sacrifice. But at this moment God had supplied the eternal sacrifice for the sins of the world. Their business was in jeopardy, but their salvation was secure.

These eyewitnesses studied every detail and memorized every word. For years they must have told and retold the accounts.

No, Bethlehem had never seen a visitor like that before—not since, for that matter. As God often does, He used a nondescript location to change the world, a typical night to revolutionize time, a band of nameless shepherds to tell the world "all they had seen and heard."

Blessings in the Christ-Child,

Pastor Lucero