

Sermon – Luke 2.1-4 (Christmas Eve – 2021)

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

And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.

³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,

⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

⁷ **And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.**

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

¹¹ "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹² "And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed,

Hospitality is a virtue. God commands us to practice hospitality.

So, with what hospitality does the world welcome Christ? God sends His Son into the world to accomplish the mission of our salvation from sin, death, and Satan. What do we offer Him? The third verse of "Thy Little Ones, Dear Lord, Are We" tells us what welcomes our Lord as He enters this world. "Man hath no off'ring for Thee save The stable, manger, cross, and grave."

Now these are not gifts given in good will. The circumstances of Jesus' birth required Him to be born in such a lowly manner. This new mother, wrapped her son in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals! It may provide a peaceful and serene image, but a bed covered in grain wet with donkey slobber, and splatterings of manure and urine is no place for this child. Surely, Mary would have loved to have given her son a proper crib, in fact, a royal bed fitting for the Son of God! We can imagine Mary having pity for her dear child, and perhaps Joseph felt like he had failed in providing for his wife and child. Welcome little child!

And then we offer Him the cross—a gruesome torture device used to execute the worst of criminals. Oh, what is this that we offer him? What kind of hospitality is this. “Welcome, heavenly guest. Let us hate you, mock you, and nail you to this cross.” He was guilty of nothing. This is the pure, holy, and righteous Christ, who has come in human flesh to save us from sin and condemnation! Yet, because of the unbelief of the world, the desire to have no Lord above us, and the love we have for our sins, we offer this cross to Him.

And then we offer Him the grave. The world was hostile to Christ. The world wished to remain in darkness and death. We offer Him the grave, so that when it seals Him in, His light may be concealed, the chapter of his place in earth's history may be closed, and the world will no longer have to be bothered by this talk of sin and salvation, and we can go on believing that we are our gods and that we have a righteousness of our own.

But Jesus looks at the gifts of the worlds hospitality (or rather hostility), and takes them, and says “these will do. These I will use to save this world fallen in sin.”

He takes the manger as His bed, and says “In this way, I will show that I do not come with glory, might, and power to rule over the world, but that I come as a lowly servant, to save this world from its sins, that people with guilty conscience may not see me as terror to them, but that they may see that I have come in lowliness to be their help and salvation from their sins, their guilt, and their condemnation.”

He takes the cross, and says, “I was born to be the lamb of sacrifice, to atone for the sins of the world. I willingly take this cross. It shall be for Me the altar upon which I shall be slaughtered. The blood I shed there will cover the sins of the world. My life I shall give up, I give for the life of the world. And all who look up at Me for their salvation, shall be saved.”

And He takes the grave, and says, “Here shall be my bed in death, after I have taken the full wrath of the Father for the world's sins. In my death, I shall bury sin and death, but I will

not remain here. From this grave I shall arise, and shall confirm to all that the world is justified, that death is defeated, and that I shall raise all on the last day.”

Oh how precious is this child, born this holy night, who came in such grace to this hostile world! This world does not deserve to have such a gift!

But He has come, and He has accomplished our salvation. Through the gift of faith, you know Him as your Helper and Savior! You know He has removed your sins from you and saved you from its condemnation. You know that He has defeated death, and that you shall rise and enter into eternal glory.

He is your precious gift.

And thus, we welcome Him with a gift of our own, our heart and lives. It is not much, because it is dirty with sin, but it is much, because the Son of God has paid such a price for it, and has graciously made it His own treasure through baptism.

The words of the following hymn express this offer, and provides us with words of contemplation and prayer:

To Thee my heart I offer,
O Christ-child sweet and dear,
Upon Thy love relying;
Oh, be Thou ever near!
Take Thou my heart and give me Thine
And let it be forever mine,
O Jesus, holy, undefiled,
My Savior meek and mild.

What brought Thee to the manger,
O Christ-child sweet and dear?
Thy love for me, a stranger—
Oh, be Thou ever near!
O Lord, how great is this Thy love
That reaches down from Heav’n above,
Thy love for us, by sin defiled,
That made Thee, God, a child!

Let me be Thine forever,
O Christ-child sweet and dear;
Uphold me with Thy mercy,
And be Thou ever near.
From Thee I gladly all receive,
And what is mine to Thee I give,
My heart, my soul, and all I own.
Let these be Thine alone. Amen.

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.