



THE LIGHT OF
grace

A SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

Glory: Shepherds

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- The **Sermon** is delivered by the pastor **P** as narrator and two readers, **I** and **II**, as shepherds:

P Each and every year on this Christmas Eve, we come to hear this wonderful story of the Nativity of our Lord. The story begins with a decree from Emperor Augustus that “all the world” should be registered. This registration is the reason that Mary and Joseph leave their home in Nazareth to go to the town of Bethlehem—the town where Joseph traces his family roots.

But there is so much more to come from this event in Bethlehem. Through Mary’s child who is born in Bethlehem, God’s light of grace will shine for “all the world” and “all the people,” even for all its worldly rulers. Indeed, God has a plan in mind that far exceeds the plans of worldly leaders.

The story we get to hear tonight is the story of the shepherds who were in the region of Bethlehem. Their story will witness this light of grace that shines for us all.

I *We were living in the fields,*

II *keeping watch over our flock by night.*

P The shepherds seem very much removed from the powers that be. Yet living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks was their job. It may not have been all that much of an exciting job. But there would be some excitement that would unfold for them this night.

That their story begins at night is important. Night implies darkness. The shepherds may not

have reflected that deeply about the darkness of the night, but they would soon get a rude awakening as to how much they are in the dark—and we with them.

I *Then an angel of the Lord stood before us,*

II *and the glory of the Lord shone around us, and we were terrified.*

P The shepherds were not expecting any visitors. And they were certainly not expecting God to show up this night.

But how did the shepherds first react to this sight of the light of glory? They were terrified. And they were terrified because of their fear of God. Now such fear is appropriate, but it is hardly good news for any of us. For when this light shines not only upon us, but all around us, there is no place to hide.

We are all people who are held captive to the darkness of principalities and powers. But this darkness is not simply outside us, but within us—in our sin and our own darkness. And we do not—indeed, cannot—escape our captivity, our enslavement, to the darkness of our sin. When the light of God’s glory shines upon us and all around us, this darkness is exposed, laying bare the truth of our sins. We try so desperately to hide this, to cover it up, to glory in our own self-righteousness. Even Adam and Eve tried hiding in the bushes to escape notice and become exposed for their sin. We hide because we do not want to be seen as failures. And that is what we fear the most, that we will be exposed, even judged, as the sinners we truly are.

But the fact that God shows up, with his light of glory, is good news!

I *The angel said to us, “Do not be afraid;*

II *for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.”*

P The angel’s first words alleviate our fear: “Do not be afraid!” Those words are themselves already words of grace for us when we are exposed in our darkness. As the story of the shepherds unfolds, we will find that God has come to free us from all the darkness of our lives and to give us the light of grace instead.

The angel who shines this light of God’s glory bids us to “see.” To “see” means to trust. We get to trust that God has come with a purpose in mind in this message of the angel. God’s light of glory is bringing us good news of great joy for all the people.

“All the people” means that no one is excluded from this promising light of glory. Everyone may come out from hiding in the darkness, and trust that this light of glory is a light of grace in which God gives us the good news.

Notice also how this promising meaning of “all the people” is a call back to the earlier phrase