

My fellow former spiritual orphans, overseen by that diabolical warden, you have become heirs of everlasting life with God's Son born of Mary. Two Epistle lessons associated with the Christmas Gospel speak of this glorious truth of being adoptive heirs. In Titus: "[W]hen the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us ... so that we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Then in Galatians: "God sent forth His Son, born of woman, ... so that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Orphans generally rejoice when they finally are adopted and are safely placed within a family. Now sadly, adoptive parents may still treat their adopted children differently than their naturally born children, thinking somehow these adopted children are less deserving. But with God, our heavenly Father, He clearly gives to us the exact same inheritance along with His only begotten Son. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."

So in addition to celebrating the birth of God's Son through the Virgin, we celebrate how God made us to be joint heirs with His Son. Sing of your great joy of becoming a joint heir of eternal life with this holy Child of Bethlehem – Hymn #142. Please rise.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

O Holy Child, grant me sincere humility, even as You exalt me by calling me God's child *and everlasting heir with You*, I treasure the Good News of Your birth for my salvation. Call others to faith through me *as I make known the saying of what Your birth means for us all*. Amen. (The Lutheran Study Bible, CPH 2009, p. 1709.)

In Christ Jesus, the man-child miraculously born to give us life, dear fellow redeemed:

The Jewish shepherds outside Bethlehem knew the prophecies from Isaiah better than we do today, and we know them very well. "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given." So when the angel announced to them: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." they knew what this saying meant for them and all people.

After their encounter with the angelic host, the shepherds said one to the other: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." Upon beholding the scene of the rustic cradling of the Christ Child we read: "they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [A]ll who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them." What is your response this Christmas morning to that which has been told to you about what occurred in Bethlehem for you and all people? Naturally through song, creed and prayers you too **Make Known the Saying: "To Us a Child Is Born, to Us a Son Is Given."**

I

It is so natural for us Christians today, removed two millennia from this holy birth, to make it known in many ways: greetings sent to others; decorations placed inside and outside our homes; gifts given to those we cherish dearly; songs sung with great joy; worship by receiving the gifts this Child secured for us and making confession of what our Lord has accomplished for all people. But that being said, we also know the intrusions of the world so that its holiday cheer can smother our true everlasting joy of the season.

The angel broke through the mundane drudgery of the labor of those attentive shepherds. When the glory of the Lord shone round about them they were seized with surprise and fear. Then they heard the message, which even though they were waiting for it, came in such an incredible way and time. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." As a stamp of divine approval – "suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"

All the common anxieties, concerns and distractions of the world, faded into a sanctified vocational "apathy" for the shepherds,

and they said to each other: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger." It is fun to think for a moment how the sheep and any sheep dogs responded to all this – the night sky lighting up, the sound of the angelic choir, the hustling into town?

II

But for these humble believers, they could not help but speak of their great joy about what had been made known to them. You know what it is like - if you find out personal good news, but how much more are you eager to tell others if it is a shared good news? How was it received? We are told: "all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them... Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." Much of what these Shepherds just found out was known by Mary nine months ago and became an ever-increasing joyous reality. What she just heard from the Shepherds was confirmation of what at times she may have wondered if it was all just a dream and at times perhaps even a nightmare.

The lives of Mary and Joseph were certainly thrown into a dizzying turmoil after the visit of Gabriel. Except for Elizabeth and Zechariah anyone they told were probably dismissive cynics unable to put the best construction on this pregnancy out of wedlock.

What may have seemed quite personal for those nine months: *"To us, Mary and Joseph, a child is to be born; to us, our little family a son is given"* took on a whole new depth and breadth of meaning. When the shepherds arrived and shared their account of how and what was revealed to them out in the fields, it would confirm what Joseph heard in that dream: "He will save His people from their sins." For as the shepherds heard from the angel very clearly: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for **all the people**."

You today are blessed beneficiaries of this great news. This holy One born of the Virgin, announced to the Shepherds, is the Savior promised of old who came to substitute His holy life for your sinful life. He would offer up His holy life as the sacrifice, which would make full and complete atonement for your sins and of all people.

Among the 3,000 baptized on Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead, were some of the chief priests and elders who refused to believe that Jesus was the promised Christ. They would hear the Gospel concerning the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus as fulfillment of the prophecies of old, again especially of Isaiah. As far as we know Peter did not speak of the virgin birth at that point, but it is fun to imagine when after their conversion they

learned of this great mystery, which we take for granted as old news today. We could well imagine that their jaws dropped as they very likely did for the Shepherds that holy night.

So while not a jaw dropping experience for us as Christians today who celebrate this marvelous event every year, yet we have the same joy of making known what God accomplished for us and all sinners according to His eternal plan. He sent His only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. Amen.