

Christmas Day Exordium

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

She laughed... but not because she thought it was really funny.

She had been eaves dropping and she could not believe her ears... at least not immediately.

And when she was called her out for laughing, she **denied it... for she was afraid.**

But the one speaking to her, responded, "**No, but you did laugh.**"

He laughed, too... but there wasn't a punchline.

He fell on his face and laughed. But he wasn't ROTFL.

It was an act of worship, even if possibly mixed in with a little momentary disbelief.

After all, what was promised was not only unlikely, it was impossible... but it had been promised.

So, it was fitting that "Laughter" should be his name,

for not only was there laughter before he came along, but also when he was born.

It was impossible that this woman – at 90 years old, well passed the way of women – should not only conceive, but also bear a son.

Where there had been years of weeping and fretting, anxiety and depression, frustrated hopes and dashed dreams, now there was "Laughter."

But we usually call him "Isaac."

He was not a child of the flesh, conceived by the normal, natural means, like his half-brother, Ishmael.

He was the child of promise, conceived, yes, naturally enough, the son of both Sarah & Abraham, but not by the normal course of human experience,

...just like with Hannah, and Samson's mom, and Elizabeth who were all barren until God promised them each a son.

But as impossible as conceiving a child is when you are barren, and when you are beyond the years, these were to prepare us for the far greater promise and miracle that Isaiah foretold,

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son.

And instead of calling Him "Laughter"... "Isaac," she **shall call His name "Immanuel."** Isaiah7:14

Not "God far way from us," or "God separate from us," but "**God with us.**"

United to us for all eternity and what is more, uniting us to Himself.

So let there be laughter, and joy, and gladness at the announcement of His birth,

for He also is come to replace weeping and fretting, anxiety and depression,

frustrated hopes and dashed dreams, for He is "**Immanuel,**" "**God with us,**" the Promiser and Fulfiller of impossible things.

So, Come, All Ye Faithful, let us rise together and sing our Exordium Hymn,

#142 - Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

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 great 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. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

Have you ever wondered how much the atmosphere in Bethlehem that first Christmas Day is like the atmosphere around us today?

There was excitement. There was fretting over last minute preparations.

There were squabbles and disagreements among family and strangers.

There were many discussions about how much room people and things would take up.

There was the ever present anxiety about money and how we are going to afford all this.

But like with so many people around us, and perhaps even we ourselves,
it did not involve much about the concern for the birth of the Christ-child.

Caesar Augustus' mandate for a census, and concurrently the taxation, of his empire caused a major disruption in the routines of normal life.

Bethlehem was bustling. The influx of relatives coming back home.

The impending taxation raising everyone's hackles.

Of course, Mary and Joseph also attended to all these things,

and at the same time, considered the proper preparation to receive their King and Mary's Son.

But let's step back a moment to our text, and slow things down a little, we are taken out into the fields around Bethlehem. The atmosphere is a little more tranquil...

at least it is a slower pace... after all, excitement isn't a good thing for resting flocks.

Out in the fields, the shepherds were pulling a hard shift - the graveyard shift,
some of you know very well what that is like.

But what it seems like on the outside, isn't always what is on the inside.

The quiet time provided by the long hours of the night gives a lot of time for one to think.

To think about the fight he just had at home with his wife, or child.

To think about the heavy-handed and encroaching powers of the gov't.

To think about the finances and the worries of paying for their taxes, food, and growing children.

To think about the unexplained pains he has been feeling as of late, or of his ailing parents.

To think about his job and his future.

Or to remember the pains, the guilt, and sufferings of the past that still haunt and burden him.

Then, of course, there is also what is brought up in conversation with the other shepherds sharing your cold, bed-less evening out in the open country.

Of course, it's not only shepherds who have long nights and lots of things on their minds.

Mothers and fathers caring for nursing or sick children, praying for godly wisdom in their teenagers, and that their adult children would stay on or return to the straight and narrow path of Christ.

Children and young people trying to find their way in life and the culture, planning careers, all while struggling against the temptations that life & culture and their own flesh bring.

Those whose labor is difficult or dangerous, and their loved waiting at home for their safe return.

Those whose husbands or wives did not return safely home...

Families concerned about where the money will come from for the rent/mortgage, car payments, credit cards, or medical bills.

Those who feel the pressure of obligations at work, at home, at school, in the community, in the Church, and who struggle and fail to find enough time in the day to meet them all.

It doesn't matter what age bracket, social class, or income level you fit into, we can all relate to those abiding shepherds.

And since we all can relate to them, let us consider the message that 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.

For those shepherds, the Lord interrupted their *thoughts and fears through all the years* with **good news of great joy...**

This good news wasn't a winning of the lottery. It wasn't a change in political structure.

Nor was it the announcement of a 28 hour day, or the declaration of the cessation of all violence.

The good news was the birth announcement of a child.

In all the hustle and bustle, even in the midst of long hours of quietness, the Lord of heaven and earth was born, the **Savior, who is Christ the Lord**.

Don't think that this spiritual salvation was lost on these blue-collar shepherds.

They didn't get all hyped up about the vision of the angels they saw.

They wanted to **see this thing that the Lord made known to them**.

They wanted to find the sign, the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.

This was their Lord, their long-awaited Christ. He was their Savior.

Their concern for their sheep was overshadowed by God's concern for them.

If He would send their Savior that night and announce it to them,

with the sign of how they were to find Him, surely He would take care of their flocks while they went with haste to seek Him out and worship Him.

Imagine Mary and Joseph's surprise when the shepherds knocked on the door

no doubt, interrupting their attempts to rest after the labor and settle things down for the child.

And yet, the Lord, this little 1-day old babe, has time for these men of the field,
these sinners in need of comfort and joy, these concern-ridden husbands and fathers,
citizens, patients, and employees seeking to find God's Prince of Peace on earth.
Not only does He have time for them, but He bids them to come to Him;
to find the sign He gave them and see Him lying in a manger.

Of course, it wasn't the act of gazing upon the baby that would save them,
or relieve them of their concerns, cares and fears.
It was the promise and hope in what this Christ-child would do for them and their families...
... and for the whole world.
He would grow with the same concerns for the welfare of loved ones... and even enemies.
He also would have to make ends meet, trusting His Father to supply all He needed,
even when He was hungry and thirsty and sleep deprived.
He had only 24 hours each day with which to perfectly fulfill His duties and obligations.
This Word was not silently pleading for you, but spent many a long night awake in prayer
for the needs and concerns of this world He entered into to redeem.
And while He had no sins of His own, burdening His conscience,
He took on the sin and guilt of the world, to bear it on the cross where He paid for it in holy blood.

As the angel announced, his message wasn't just for the shepherds out in the fields that night.
This is **good news of great joy for all the people**. The shepherds didn't keep it to themselves.
All people are to hear this. You are to hear this, not just as an announcement to the shepherds,
but as God's announcement to you. That day in Bethlehem a Savior was born to you.

...
In all the excitement of life, we can get very caught up in things that easily distract us from Jesus.
In the quiet hours of the night or day, our thoughts can be clouded in darkness, fear, anxiety, & guilt.
In those times, make time and make haste and see this thing that the Lord has made known to you.
Not the sign of a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,
but that same body and blood, born of Mary, that was crucified and risen,
wrapped in bread and wine.
As the shepherds hurried off, leaving their flocks in the fields that night in the care of the Father,
that is a good place to leave your cares and concerns, not in fields, but in your Father's care.

We know of only one visit those shepherds had with their Savior,
but this Word-made-flesh bids you to come to Him often.
Do not seek Him once a year, in a manger, but weekly upon the altar as it is offered here.
Here He comes to you for the forgiveness of your sins, for the cancellation of your guilt,
for relief from worries, and for strength to fight against temptations and fears.
Make haste to celebrate His birth, His life, His death, and His resurrection,
then return to your home, work, school, and community,
glorifying and praising God for all that you have heard and seen... and received.

Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Goodwill toward men! Amen.
Soli Deo Gloria