

Christmas Eve Sermon 2 by Bishop Michael Hawkins

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Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

We don't yet know his name, for he has not received it. That will not come for another week. He is simply the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. What we do know is this: Mary and Joseph, visiting their hometown of Bethlehem for a census relating to Roman taxes, got caught out and had to take refuge in a cave or barn. There Mary gave birth to a son. We can well imagine Joseph's fears and doubts, as well as his frustration at being able to provide nothing better for this woman. And what of Mary? Away from home and the guidance of an older woman, she is left to give birth alone, in the helpless company of a man and some barn animals. And then there are these shepherds out in the country, far away from the crowded streets of Bethlehem, shocked and terrified by this vision of light and the voices they hear. Fear and anxiety abound throughout the story. Yet to all these, the message that is given by God's

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angels again and again is: “Fear not.”

“Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God...and thou shalt bring forth a Son which shall be called the Son of the Highest and the Son of God.”

“Fear not Joseph, to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost and he shall save his people from their sins.”

“Fear not, Shepherds, for behold I bring you tidings of great joy...for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”

In every case, the reason not to fear is the encouraging news of who this child really is. So while the Angel does not tell the Shepherds the name of the child, he does tell them who he is, a Saviour, Christ the Lord.

Now, everyone knows that Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Everyone knows that Jesus was born of Mary in Bethlehem. But what the Angel tells us and the Shepherds is news, Good News, Gospel. “Unto you is born this day in the

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city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”

The first thing the angel announces is that this birth is for us. Jesus was born for us and to us. I don't know if any of you have been peeking at brightly wrapped packages lately, but I know that the first thing I check for on a present is the gift tag...I look closely to see what it says, and my face lights up if I see my name on it. So the Angel reads the gift tag on the baby born this night, and it reads “To: You.” This is the first thing we are invited to believe - that the gift of this child is given to us and for us.

Next, the Angel tells us that he is a Saviour. He is the one who will save us from sin and death and bring us salvation, forgiveness and eternal life.

And he is the Christ or the Messiah, the long-promised Son of David, the King all Israel has been waiting for.

And he is the Lord, the Lord God come among us, in human flesh and blood, to save us.

His name shall be called Jesus, but at this stage and on this

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night, we are invited by the Angel to know him and to own him as the one born for us and to us, our Saviour, Christ the Lord.

To know him as the Saviour, Christ the Lord will change everything, but most of all it will quiet our fears and rejoice our hearts.

But this is not something we can see with our eyes. This requires the insight of faith. Our eyes may see a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, because there was no room in the inn, but the eyes of faith see in him a homeless infant, a Saviour, Christ the Lord born for us.

The Angel who brings us this news is joined by countless others, as the sky is filled with angels like the stars, and his proclamation is answered with their loud praise: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

In this child and in his birth, the Angels recognize the glory of God, and the source of peace and good will on earth. Glory, peace and good will - this is what this child will bring - glory to God, and to us the peace and love of God. This is the final invitation of that Gospel: to know in Jesus Christ, God’s glory

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and his peace and good will towards us.

Lo, this is our God; and we have waited for him, and he
will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be
glad and rejoice in his salvation.