

Seeing Salvation

The Angel of the Lord proclaimed the Good News of Jesus' birth to a couple of lowly shepherds on the outskirts of town that first Christmas Eve. "*Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*" God has kept His promise! The Messiah has come! To cap off all this Good News, the sky instantly fills with thousands upon thousands of angels, all praising and singing, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!*" I don't know about you, but my imagination simply doesn't do justice to the text. I try to picture this glorious scene, but I know I'm not even close to the incomprehensible magnificent beauty of it all.

And yet...in the midst of all this awesome heavenly display, the Angel of the Lord provides *description* of this newborn savior to the shepherds. "*You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.*" **Do you realize how absurd this is?!** God just put on one of the biggest shows human eyes have ever beheld, announcing the fact that God has come to earth. ***How hard can it be to find the Almighty Himself?***

Well...if we let the original Greek of St. Luke's text do the talking, we find that it would take a miracle. You see, the word that we translate as "sign" is *seimion* in the Greek. This same word is translated as "miracle" throughout the Gospels; e.g., Jesus turns water into wine, and John tells us that "*this was the first of His seimion (signs/miracles).*" Give this some thought. "*This will be the miracle/seimion of the One who has been born in the city of David; the Savior who is Christ the Lord: He will be a dead-ringer for a homeless newborn. His kingly chamber will be a cattle stall. He will be lying in a feed trough and wrapped in a couple of spare rags.*"

It would indeed take a miracle—the miracle of God-given faith—to recognize the Almighty in such a lowly, humble form. Here is God...at His mother's breast, needing His diapers changed, ***completely helpless*** as only a newborn infant can be. **And yet...here is Almighty God!** Here is the Word who created the heavens and the earth; the very Word of God become flesh. Here is the One who has come to crush the head of the serpent. Here is the One who has come to put to death the forces of sin, death, and the devil. ***Let that sink in.*** The same One who will vanquish sin—our sin—comes to us in such a meek and lowly form. He doesn't come "guns blazing." He doesn't come in all wrath and fury. He comes to us as an infant. He does so because He wants us to lean in and draw near and not be terrified of Him. ***Who's afraid of a baby?!***

But that's just it: Who in their right mind would look for God in such a lowly form, in such a lowly place? **No one!** Just think about when the Wise Men would come. *Where's the first place they naturally go?* They show up at King Herod's royal palace. "*Where is He who was born King of the Jews?*" It makes perfect sense when you think about it. Where else would a King be born, especially a Divine King? Kings live in palaces...not barns. Kings are attired in the best of the best...not spare rags. Kings are surrounded by the best and the brightest; the most elite of all the elite...not a couple of shady nomadic shepherds. Kings come from the best blood lines...not from a dysfunctional little brood that consists of a blue-collar no-name dad with a fiancée who has a questionable background concerning her purity.

And yet...this is *exactly* how God does things. The womb of a lowly virgin girl. A "baby daddy." A barn. A manger. Swaddling clothes. Second-class citizen shepherds. All of this taking place, not in a cosmopolitan capital city like Jerusalem or Rome or Alexandria or New York or Los Angeles or London. Nope. Bethlehem; the first-century version of Hackett or Mansfield. **Here is God.**

Look here [the crucifix]. Behold the lowly manger wood has given way to the lowest wood—the bloody wooden cross of One cursed by God Himself. ***Here is God.*** I don't care who you are: **NOBODY** in their right mind naturally looks at this [the crucifix] and sees "victory." And yet, through the eyes of miraculous, God-given faith, that's exactly what we see—victory. We see God's love for us. We see our salvation, in the flesh. ***This is why God sent His Son! This [the crucifix] is the reason for the season!***

And nothing has changed over the centuries. God *still* works His miracle of salvation in very lowly, unexpected and unassuming ways. Christ still comes to us in the lowest and humble of ways—Word and Sacrament. "*Take and eat. Take and drink. This is My body. This is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin.*" Here is where even the lowest of the low are still called to behold and receive their Almighty God and Lord. Here is where the faithful are led to receive the free gift of salvation that Christ purchased for them with His all-redeeming life, death, and resurrection.

The gates of heaven, flung open for all men on that first Christmas Eve, continue to be opened wide and brought to us this very today. ***God still brings heaven to earth...for us, for our peace, for our joy.*** Dearly beloved: Here is your peace. Here is God's peace. Here is the peace that surpasses all understanding; the peace of God that is yours while you reside on earth; the same peace that abounds for all eternity. Here is the peace of Jesus Christ—God become Man—for you. May you see and rejoice.

AMEN