

“Let Us Go and See This THING!”

Luke 2:1-20

Martin Luther, reflecting on the announcement of the angels to the shepherds, points out that Luke “...does not simply say, Christ is born, but to **you** he is born. Neither does he say, I bring glad tidings, but to **you** I bring glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ, but it shall be to **all the people.**” This is a very personal announcement. God wants us to be part of the family and join in rejoicing over this birth. No wonder that when the shepherds heard this news they took it to heart and said, “**Let us go and see this thing which the Lord has made known to US....**”

So it is that we gather this holy evening of Christmas Eve. True we gather for many reasons. It’s a tradition. We love the music. Somehow it wouldn’t be Christmas without our joining sisters and brothers in Christ and lighting candles. Yes, we gather here tonight for many reasons, these are but a few, but hopefully we have gathered this night because deep down we have heard the angel’s announcement to **US** personally “**that unto US a child is born a savior, who is Christ the Lord.**”

Who is this child? Appearances can be deceiving. For all the humble circumstances that surround the incarnation, there is also incredible holiness, awe, and Luke seems to be telling the people of his day that if you were impressed with the pax Augustus (peace of Augustus), just wait till the pax Christi (peace of Christ) fully takes hold! You ain’t seen nothing yet! You stood in fear and awe of Caesar Augustus, just wait till you begin to grasp the truth of Jesus of Nazareth!

We are told angels appeared to the shepherds and the “glory of the Lord shone around them.” No wonder they were terrified! Who wouldn’t be!

The angels tell the shepherds “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: ...” What a combination, both fear and joy!

If you get a chance to see the new Disney movie *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*, go see it, or better yet read the book. It is quite good. Much has been made of C. S. Lewis’ use of Christian metaphors in the book. Early in the movie one of the four children, Susan, asks Mr. Beaver whether Aslan is a *safe* lion. Aslan, the lion king, is the Christ figure in this book and movie. Mr. Beaver responds, “*Of course he isn’t safe, but he’s good.*” Later her brother Peter says, “*I’m longing to see [Aslan], even if I do feel frightened when it comes to the point.*”

As it turns out, the shepherds also long to see this child, this savior, this one who will bring joy and peace. They overcome their fear and go to Jerusalem to “see this thing.” They can not even speak of that which the angels told them, calling it “that thing.” But they set off to see it for themselves. Their sense of God’s goodness overcomes their sense of fear.

In the Narnia story Lewis’ narrator says that people who have never been to the land of Narnia “sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time.” As it turns out the very thing that makes Aslan so terrible is the very thing that makes him good, his fierce love.

In the most recent issue of *The Christian Century* Ralph C. Wood says, “Lewis liked to quote Jeremy Taylor, a 17th century Anglican divine, on this deepest of Christian paradoxes: **‘God threatens terrible things, if we will not be happy.’**” He goes on to say, “**To be happy is not to wear a blinding smile, to be materially gratified, to be assured that everything**

will turn out well. Happiness, as the four Pevensie children learn, lies in surrendering oneself to the good and thus to Aslan.” (December 27, 2005 p. 8)

The angels are joined by a multitude of the heavenly host. All join in singing a doxology, a song of praise, **“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”** No wonder the shepherds make “haste” to see what the Lord has made known to them. The shepherds become a model for all who hear the gospel message, who sense the fierce goodness of God.

The shepherds find the manger and the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths. All that the angels had foretold them they now see for themselves. Notice that they don’t keep this good news to themselves, ***“they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed.”*** Well, we know that they told Mary and Joseph, but who were the ALL that heard it? We are not told that anyone else was at the manger. Did they stop and tell all they met on the way to the manger? The scripture passage doesn’t say, perhaps Luke is suggesting that we are to tell everyone what we have heard and experienced of the Lord.

In the Narnia story Narnia is a land caught in the grip of winter. Spring, summer and autumn no longer come and go. Not only is the land stuck in the grip of winter but as one of the characters says, its **“always winter and never Christmas.”** The land has not experienced Christmas in hundreds of years. Ruling over this winter nightmare is the White Witch, who does her best to ensure that winter’s grip remains strong.

Christmas and spring can only come when Aslan returns and the children of Aslan follow him into battle against the White Witch and her forces. Aslan works to ensure that all the children will be on board.

Early on Edmund, who is a sour, selfish child, who loves Turkish delight, a love that the Witch twists to her own advantage and corrupts him.

Edmund betrays his sisters and brother and all allied with them.

Aslan and Edmunds sisters and brother spirit Edmund away from the witch shortly before the final battle, but the White Witch comes to Aslan and demands that the ancient laws of that land be enforced. She says, “***For every treachery I have a right to kill.***” Aslan knows this is true. What is to be done? A penalty must be paid. A pound of flesh is required. There is no escape. Edmund’s sisters and brother look on in desperation. Their allies look on wondering what Aslan will do.

The Witch is surprised when Aslan offers to die in Edmund’s place. She misjudges the Lawgiver, the Lord of the Universe. She thinks Aslan is a foolish, sentimental being who has made a very bad bargain, trading his life for Edmunds.

Ralph Wood says of this, “***The Witch can not fathom the God who is good and terrible at the same time: the Holy One who, fiercely insistent that his people be happy, is willing to die and to conquer death in their behalf. Such a fearful Love both requires and enables their transformation. Edmund is restored to the dignity befitting a servant of the Lion, as he puts himself at radical risk during the final battle, he like the other children no longer fear the roar of Aslan’s wrath, so long as he and his siblings are happily remade into the Lion’s likeness.***”

The shepherds return, “***glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.***” When the angels were singing their glories the shepherds did not join in, but listened; now they too sing the praises of God. They have stood by the manger. They have heard the

angel's foretelling that this child they have seen will be a savior. This child will bring a peace and joy available to all people.

In closing I would like to share this thought from Martin Luther, **“The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own?”**

“...I am bringing YOU good news of great joy for all people: to YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” Amen.