

Christmas Message 2018

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

In that short song of the angels can be found what this world has been missing since the days of Adam and Eve and the garden and the serpent. In that short song of the angels can be found the source of all goodness as well. For in a world that scorns ideals and idealism, we are told that we are to give glory “in the highest.” In a world that no longer knows the meaning of the word ‘respect,’ we are told that we are to offer to “good will to all.” And in a world of noisiness, of commotion, of too many words, we are reminded that God’s Word for us means peace, a peace that passes all understanding.

Now all that might sound nice coming from a pulpit, and I can assure you it sounded even nicer coming from the angels of heaven on a night that we can visualize these many centuries later as being cool but not uncomfortable, crisp but not a teeth-chatterer, clear and brilliant.

But words are not enough, even if they come from all the heavenly angels God can muster on any given night, even Christmas Eve. What is it that can give these words the force of truth? How can these pious thoughts be transformed into deeds? Who can possibly make the dreams of the ages come true?

The answers to such questions were found not too far from where the angels sang, from where the shepherds guarded their sheep, from where the inn was full to overflowing, from where King Herod, the chief priests, and the scribes sat in troubled silence as they pondered the meaning of the ancient prophecies that threatened to be fulfilled in their lifetime.

Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.

The beginning of the answer to all questions was close at hand. It is still there. It awaits us. It wonders what we are going to make of it.

Will we seek out the manger stall, or are we also threatened by the ancient prophecies that call upon us to change our lives and to repent?

Will we seek to face the angels and their music, or will we hide from the glad tidings, or worse yet, ignore them once the echoes of the singing stop resounding in our ears?

Will we leave our flocks that would keep us from higher pursuits? Will we stay in the warmth and friendliness of an overcrowded inn, where good times and good drink would prevent us from venturing forth in search of something more eternal than our own creature comforts?

Why do we hesitate? Come, let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.

The reasons for that night so long ago are found in ancient scripture, which tell of a story of how women and men first lost sight of what goodness meant, what truth meant, and what honesty meant. They had lost the vision of a greater good in their attempt to grasp at personal advantage. They had turned their backs on harmony, peace, and balance in the created order in an attempt to budge ahead in line.

Thousands of years passed, from the fall of humanity to the coming of Christ. During those thousands of years, the need for Christ did not diminish. It remained as real as ever. And since that time, our need for him has not diminished, either. It has still remained as real as ever. We have not outgrown him, we have not outperformed him, we have not dispensed with our need for him, even if we have, from time to time, forgotten him, ignored him, or even crucified him. No, he is still there. He is still here. He is still at Bethlehem. Come! Let us now go and see this thing which is come to pass.

What might the Child of Bethlehem accomplish for us? He has restored sight to the blind, and so we might ask that he restore to us the vision without which the people perish.

His new life promised us new life, for in coming as a child, he symbolizes that we, too, can be born anew, and be cared for as lovingly by God our Father, and rejoiced over by angels without number.

His coming demonstrated that God means to accomplish, he will perform, no matter what the obstacles, no matter what stumbling blocks we might ourselves set up in our path. For maybe we, like King Herod and company, do not want the prophecies fulfilled in our lifetime, for we shudder at the idea of having to make a decision, one way or the other, with regard to the place that God and God's anointed One will have in our own life. We do not care to go to Bethlehem and see, for that might mean confronting ourselves, asking real questions, probing for real meaning in life. And many have made a profession of avoiding, at all costs, precisely that.

But the Call is relentless. It haunts us. And even if we succeed in escaping this day, you can be assured that it will confront us again and again, over and over. For the angels still sing, the star still shines, and shepherds still call out to anyone who will listen: "Come, let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which the Lord hath made known unto us."

And so what might we find there? What is it that we seek? As an artist searches for beauty, as a musician listens for and creates harmony, as a philosopher ponders humility, and as a servant seeks for purpose, so will we find there our own fulfillment, our own meaning, our own peace, our own rest.

So, Come! Let us now go even until Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us. Let us seek that which we

have lost. Let us ask for that which we cannot provide for ourselves. Let us knock, that the doors of our own hearts might be opened. Let us come, and adore.