Home Service Sheet for Sunday 24th November 2024

Call To Worship: Ezekiel 37:24-28

“My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that we have peace with You through Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You for blessing us with Your love and grace, not only in now but for all eternity. Thank You for adopting us into Your family, and clothing us in Jesus’ righteousness. It is only because of what Jesus did on the cross that we have found favour in Your sight and have the peace of God in our hearts. Lord, we confess that we are sinners, deserving of death - but glory to God in the highest, that Your peace has been granted to us! Praise be to Your holy name that both peace with God and the peace of God, is available to all who place their faith in the only begotten Son of God, in Whose name we pray, amen!

Hymn: While Shepherds by Nahum Tate

<https://youtu.be/qkUGOya66Bo?si=CdWVZnOuI69oirN3>

While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground,

The angel of the Lord came down and glory shone around.

'Fear not,' said he - for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind -

'Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind:

'To you in David's town this day is born of David's line

A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, and this shall be the sign:

'The heavenly babe you there shall find to human view displayed,

All meanly wrapped in swathing bands and in a manger laid.'

Thus spoke the seraph, and forthwith appeared a shining throng

Of angels praising God, who thus addressed their joyful song:

'All glory be to God on high, and to the earth be peace;

Goodwill henceforth from highest heaven begin and never cease!'

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible Reading: Luke 2:8-20

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 Saviour, 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.

Reflection

The events recorded by Luke in our reading today happened at night and involved shepherds who were “keeping watch over their flock...” near Bethlehem. Luke’s description is quite telling, as there was more than one shepherd, but only one flock of sheep. In other words, these were not the owners of the sheep but hired workers who lived with the sheep and cared for them. From what we know it is likely that these men would have been rough and ready, lacking the airs and graces of polite society. Why then did God chose to send an angel to tell them about the birth of the Messiah? Couldn’t God have chosen more deserving folk, perhaps religious leaders or at least respectable folk?

Well, He certainly could have done, but He didn’t. Perhaps God was indicating the kind of people He had come to save – those who knew that they needed a Saviour? Maybe it was a link back to King David, who God had anointed king of Israel whilst he was still a shepherd boy. Perhaps it may even point to the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, was also the one true Good Shepherd who had come to care for His sheep, born from the family line of David. Whatever the reason God chose to announce the message to the shepherds, He did so because that was His will.

When the angel appeared to the shepherds they must have been terrified and awestruck! The angel then spoke and reassured them that they were not to be afraid. The message was “good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” How could the birth of a baby boy be so significant that it required an angelic herald? We know the answer, but at first the shepherds would not have understood this. The angel quickly told them that this child was a Saviour, “Christ the Lord.” What would the shepherds have understood by this message? Luke does not tell us, but the shepherds’ speedy response suggests that they understood its importance.

The shepherds were then given a sign, or a description of what to look for. They would have known from this brief message that He had not been born in a palace, but rather in much more humble circumstances. In verse 12, they are told “you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” Mangers are feeding troughs for animals and so they were looking for a barn or something similar. Then the shepherds see and hear a number of angels who proclaim praise to God and announce peace for those with whom God is pleased. In the context of the first angel’s message it seems likely that the peace in mind is peace between God and man made possible through the death of Jesus, the Saviour.

After the angels departed, the shepherds responded, saying “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.” They believed the message and wanted to see this good news for themselves. They “made haste” to find the new-born Messiah. On finding Mary, Joseph and Jesus, the shepherds recounted the angel’s message. In fact, it would appear that they told a number of people the good news, as we read in verse 18, “all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” Are we excited like this about the Gospel story, good news for all people? Do we excitedly share this with everyone we meet?

We have the complete Gospel that God had revealed to us. Not only did God send His Messiah to Earth to rescue humanity, but He died that our sins may be forgiven and reconciled with God and adopted into His family through faith in Him. We also have the Holy Spirit living within us, who empowers us to proclaim the Gospel. There is certainly a challenge here for us. As we approach Advent and Christmas this year, this should give us great cause to rejoice and celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus, God’s Son and promised Messiah. This is great, but it should also spur us on to share this good news with those who have not yet believed. Amen!

Prayer

Gracious God, as we think about the shepherds today, to whom You sent an angel announcing the birth of Your Son, help us to remember that the Gospel is good news for everyone. May You grant to Your Church confidence in the Gospel and boldness to proclaim it in truth and love at every opportunity. Build Your Church, O Lord, through the work of Your Holy Spirit who graciously gives the gift of faith to all who believe. We also remember those who work hard, providing food for us day by day. May You grant them strength and rest as they need them, we pray. Lord, we also pray for those who do not have enough food, or warmth, and ask that You would keep them safe and cared for this winter. These things we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Benediction

Loving Lord, as we celebrate the birth of your Son, fill our hearts with the joy that comes from knowing Him. May that joy be a constant presence in our lives, reminding us of the true source of happiness that is found in Jesus Christ alone. Let us share this joy with others and reflect Your love in the world. Amen!