

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

Silent night? “All is calm”? It doesn’t seem that way for Joseph and Mary. The government decrees a registration (for the sake of taxation) – which is anything but convenient and good timing. It means an arduous trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem and Mary is pregnant.

They get to Bethlehem and the place is packed. There’s “no place for them in the inn” – so it’s out to a stable they go. Not the ideal place to lodge – much less give birth to a child – to say nothing about your first child.

But the Child is born – wrapped in strips of cloths – and laid in a manger. You know what a manger is, don’t you? It’s a food trough – where the cows and other animals would eat their food. Not quite the cribs and bassinets that we lay our children in.

“Out in the fields” surrounding Bethlehem – where the shepherds kept watch over their sheep – was certainly a less chaotic place to be. A “silent night” in comparison – with the sounds of nature – and “all is calm.” According to the hymn – “all is bright” – and you can imagine a clear night with the brightness of the moon.

Then the silence comes to a crashing halt – and the brightness is overcome by a greater brightness – as “an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.”

The “Silent Night” becomes a “Holy Night.” Holy means “set apart” – and this night is set apart from all others – not only because of the appearance of the angel of the Lord – but with the “glory of the Lord” revealed to mankind!

In so doing, the shepherd’s world is turned upside down – “and they are filled with fear.” To stand before the angel of the Lord and the glory of the Lord is frightening indeed – but remember, an angel is a messenger – and this one has a message from the Lord.

“Fear not” He says to the shepherds and to you. To you who live in the midst of chaos – frustrated by governmental demands – concerned about finances – travel headaches – and trying to make everything just right for your family.

“Fear not” the Lord says – “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” “All the people” rushing around Hy-Vee trying to get the last ham – “all the people” grabbing toys off the shelves at Target – “all the people” plowing through traffic like they are the only ones with important places to be.

“Fear not” the Lord says – “for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Did you hear that? “For you!” Yes, for “all the people” – but “for you” personally – a Savior is born.

This Savior is Jesus – so named because He will save His people from their sins. This Savior is the Christ – the One “anointed” by God to be the sacrifice for all sin – to redeem sinners. This Savior is the Lord – the very Son of God – God “for you.”

This One born of Mary is the eternal God who takes on human flesh, becoming true man – because He comes to save mankind. God in the flesh Jesus – which means that God dwells with man – that God dwells with you – not to give you what your sins deserve, but to be your Savior – so that you may “fear not.”

To the shepherds the Lord has given the “good news” that their Savior has been born “for you.” And with this Gospel – signs. “And this will be a sign FOR YOU: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

Dearly beloved, the Lord has given you signs – so that you might know where God dwells with man – where He promises to be “for you.” The Lord Himself speaks to you through His messengers sent to preach the Gospel. He promises that where two or three are gathered in His name – gathered around His Word – “there am I among them.”

The same Jesus born of Mary, the Baby laid in the manger – dwells in the midst of you. Martin Luther compared the swaddling cloths to the Bible – for just as those strips of cloth once contained the God of the universe – so in the Holy Scriptures we find Jesus – the Savior, the Christ, the Lord – God who is “with you” and “for you.”

This same Jesus is present in Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper – tangible forms of the Gospel – through which He cleanses you from all sin – and nourishes you with forgiveness and life, giving you His very own Body and Blood.

Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, we are gathered around our Savior Jesus Christ this night. We hear the angel choir sing: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.”

A Silent Night, for Christ is your Savior – God come in the flesh to save you from your sins. Taking your place, He shed His blood to ransom you from your sin, and sacrifices His life to defeat death and give you life.

Silenced are the accusations of God’s holy Law. Silenced is your guilty conscience. Christ forgives all your sin, giving you peace which only He can give. And with that forgiveness – He has set you apart from sin, death and the devil – set you apart to be a beloved child of God a Holy Night indeed.

Thank you children – for helping us to glorify and praise God – to rejoice in the “Silent Night, Holy Night” of Jesus our Savior.

God grant that you may treasure this Gospel of Jesus Christ (God “for you”) – and be gathered continually around His Word and Sacraments – to receive His peace. God grant that you ponder His gracious mercy to you – leading you to be gracious and merciful to your fellow man.

“FOR UNTO YOU is born this day ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.