

Christmas Eve Sermon

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Trinity Church in the City of Boston

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2005

Glory to God in the highest, Amen.

So they went with haste and found Mary

and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

The angel had told *them*, shepherds out in the cold and the night - told *them* that the long awaited Savior, the Messiah, the anointed one of God, had been born to *them*. The message was confirmed by a vision of angels all around them, praising God. And then, as quickly as it had happened, it was over. They looked at each other, and the thought came to several of them at once, "Let's go and see." So, according to the story, they set out forth-with.

As an adult, the child of Bethlehem, would have the same talent, the same holy magnetism, the shepherds were compelled by the night of his birth. He would call people, and they would go. They would drop their fishing nets. Or abandon a tax collecting booth. They would leave their homes and their kin to be with him.

Tonight we have come to find him. Once more to find the child of Bethlehem and his parents. It's Christmas Eve. Let's go to church. Let's go and find the long awaited Savior, the Messiah born anew for us in our own time, in our own heart.

You may have come alone tonight, and, despite the people gathered here all around you, you may be feeling lonely. He has been born for you. You may have planned to come with a spouse, who was just too tired to come at the last minute or with a friend who cancelled, and you have come here feeling resentful or hurt. He was born for you. Maybe you are with Mom and Dad, because you came home to their house for the holidays, and it means a lot to all of you to come together to find the child and his parents. Maybe this is a yearly ritual for the family that all of you cherish. Then again, maybe *you* are here because Mom and Dad made you come, and you'd rather be anywhere than here. I daresay that there were some among those shepherds who were less enthused about making the journey to find him than others. He was born for the reluctant as well as the willing.

Perhaps you are here tonight with dread in your heart, because you have received a life-threatening the diagnosis. Or you are anxious on another score, worried, sad - your job isn't going well, your job is over, you are drinking too much, your marriage isn't going well, you are grieving the death of someone. Perhaps it is that the agony in the world lies heavy upon you, and you have come to the child in the manger, because you know that it is *his* healing power the world needs - his compassion, his touch, yes his judgment, and his mercy.

Maybe you have brought **your** newborn, and you are here exhausted ... and grateful. Or you are with someone you have committed to marry, and you are full of joy, love for that person and hope for your future together. Or you are here with your partner of 25 years and a recently blessed civil marriage. Or this is your 90th year as his disciple on earth, and you have come to thank him for being born into life on earth and for your long life with him.

However we have come here tonight, whatever has brought us to church this Christmas Eve, it is he - his holy magnetism that has drawn us and moved us. Like the shepherds we have come to find **him**.

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A couple of weeks ago I flew to Atlanta. It is said that if you're on your way to hell, you will be routed through the Atlanta airport to get you ready. Actually, I was impressed with how the hordes of people in that airport are handled ... with courtesy and relative dispatch. It didn't feel at all like a prelude to hell to me. But there **are** hordes of people there, as many of you know, teeming hordes of people ... anonymous people on their way to somewhere, passing through the gates, on the concourses, waiting in ranks at baggage claim, on the trains, in long, snaking lines at check-in. An apt metaphor, perhaps, for the hordes, the seas of faceless, anonymous people in this world.

You know shepherds were a dime a dozen in Palestine at the time of Jesus' birth. Faceless, anonymous, invisible to many - among the least in their culture, roaming here and there. Jesus was born for **them** in the city of David, the angel said. Jesus was born as well for all the seemingly anonymous people of our world. We are not anonymous to him. We are not invisible to him. We are his friends. We are his disciples. We are his people. He knows each of us as persons of dignity, meaning, purpose and beauty, and he came into the world to show us that. And so, he came into the world, just as we do - helpless, dependent, vulnerable.

When He grew up, he showed himself to be God's gift to the world. His deepest desire: to connect with us in such a way that we become aware that we are blessed and called to be a blessing. He is not a magician who whisks away our hurt to make everything hunky dory. He is our divine companion, the Son of God, who is with us through all the rich intricacy of human experience... in the deep dark shadows of pain; in the radiant light of joy.

We have come here tonight to find him anew lying in his manger. May that manger be our very heart and may we, in our prayer, in our hymns and in the bread and wine, his body and blood, find communion with Him and one another.

So they went with haste and found Mary and

Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

Glory to God in the Highest.

Merry Christmas and Amen.