

Christmas Eve Reflection prepared by Jonathan Shradar

The stillness of the fields in the small hours of the day. The occasional baw and bleating sounds from the flock. Maybe the wind blew gently the cool air in the darkness of the night. A normal night, your mind thinking on other things, the family you have at home, your hopes for the future, counting down the minutes until sunrise...

Somewhere a few miles off, there is a family, huddled to keep warm. A young mother has wrapped her newborn baby in cloth and laid him to sleep in a bed of hay. Did she look at her husband-to-be with a knowing glance as if to say, 'this is the promise?'

Still further away, in the East, a Star would appear in the sky. It would beckon to those mining the Scriptures and the skies for clues of things to come. 'Could this be the Star of Judah?' 'Could the King of the Jews truly have come?'

And as you wait, as you survey the flock and stand ready to protect it from the wolves and thieves, the sky begins to brighten. Goosebumps fill your arms and you run to your friends as an Angel appears and light like you have never seen before fills the air as if you can breathe it. Frozen in fear you stand there, but this angel brings news of peace and not destruction. He announces the birth of a Savior who is Christ the Lord. This is a Savior for you, unto you a child is born...

At this announcement of birth, worship breaks out and a multitude of angels sing of the glory of God... of peace on earth...

You then run to Bethlehem, the little town and find there a babe, as promised, in a manger. The Word is true, the promise fulfilled! You tell the young mother of the angelic chorus and all who hear it are amazed, they wonder!

As you go, returning to your flock, you can't help but worship God for all he has done.

We can just imagine the night. In singing these songs and hearing the Scripture, we can be reminded and imagine the glorious event that would change the world and our lives still today - the birth of the Savior, Jesus. But whether we were present for the birth or are left to imagine it, we are meant to experience what they did. We are meant to go out worshipping because of the wonder of it all.

In the noise of our lives we can be distracted and awestruck by all manner of silly things. By shiny toys and plump men dressed in red. By the work to be done or things to be bought.

But there is usually one or two moments of quiet, stillness that invite us back into wonder of the child born king. *That is the goal of our time together this evening.* To be invited into a life of wonder.

“All who heard it wondered...” we are recipients of the what the shepherds told and what countless others have been telling since. The story that is about surprising our expectations with something so brilliant and breathtaking that we would be left in awe.

What is it that makes us wonder, that would leave us amazed?

That he was promised...

The light of the world has come - the babe in the manger is the Great I Am.

This child would grow and confound the teachers of the law... he would be baptized and God-the-Father would declare his pleasure in the Son.

This child in the hay would one day face the full weight of all temptation to sin and he would beat it, clinging instead to the Word of God.

The babe wrapped tight would unchain captives, forgiving sin and healing the sick.

The firstborn son of an unwed mother would teach with authority and announce the arrival of his kingdom, one to be won not in military battle but a bloodshed of a different kind.

The One “born King of the Jews” would be killed for being the same.

The baby in the manger would become the man nailed to a cross that proclaimed “it is finished!”

The Savior born in the City of David would be wrapped again in cloth and laid to rest... but he would defeat death, promising to never leave those he loves.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus begins here with a birth. And what wonder it brings as we are the ones he came to save - that we can be forgiven, adopted as Children of God and transformed to be like him. Christmas is about the gospel. Jesus was born so that we could be born again.

Hebrews 2:17 “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

This is Christmas, that Jesus would enter into the mess of humanity through blood and water to be like us; extending mercy to us, meeting the punishment for disregarding God that we deserve and instead making us his beloved brothers and sisters

Today the scene might be a little different. Not many of us are set to work in the field and encounter a baby in a bed of hay. But because that babe came in that place long ago, he now

comes to us... in the stillness of Christmas... in our loneliness. In our dark nights. In our celebrations and family traditions. In our laughter and in our rest. Into our expectations and hopes. Into our wonder... that we would believe in him; that we would call him king.

The words of **St. Augustine's** *Nativity Sermon* are timely; "Awake, mankind! For your sake God has become man. Awake, you who sleep, rise up from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you. I tell you again: for your sake, God became man. You would have suffered eternal death, had he not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh. You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness, had it not been for this mercy. You would never have returned to life, had he not shared your death. You would have been lost if he had not hastened 'to your aid. You would have perished, had he not come."

"Let us then joyfully celebrate the coming of our salvation and redemption. Let us celebrate the festive day on which he who is the great and eternal day came from the great and endless day of eternity into our own short day of time."

Oh that we would live in wonder of Christ and the gift that he is. That we would know him and like the Shepherds tell the story, singing of the dawn of redeeming grace... of Jesus, Lord at his birth.