

The Shepherd Has Come and Abides

"And in that 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 fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe 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 men 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 hast, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept 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. (Luke 2:8-20)

All of Israel's history was leading to the coming of an anointed One, a Savior the Messiah. The earthly Kings and Shepherds prophesy by their presence that *the King* and *the Shepherds* of Israel had come! The Image of the Shepherd and King are both seen in the person of David as the prophet Ezekiel foretold.

"The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD; O , shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the wild beasts.... "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; ...As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture...I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong. I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. (Ezekiel 34:1-16)

King David was anointed by God to shepherd Israel. With the advent of Christ however, all things were made new. Christ reveals Himself as the good Shepherd, the Shepherd that has come to give His life in order to save His flock from sin and death. *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.* (John 10:11-16)

The great apostle Peter also saw fulfillment of the prophet Ezekiel's words in the person of Christ.

And Peter opened his mouth and said: *"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with powers; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnessed to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witness, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."* (Acts 10:34-43)

Israel lived in great anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. The first Israelites to accept the Messiah were the twelve apostles. They understood themselves as fulfilled Jews, the Messiah had been revealed to them. The death and resurrection of Christ manifested God's divine love for His flock, the Shepherd laid down His life. The Shepherd was with them *even after* His death, 'they ate and drank together.' Here is the fulfillment of their hopes and ours—God is with us, His Church. The ever-lasting presence of the risen Christ is what shaped the development of worship and is the *key* to understanding its purpose and meaning.

The Messiah has come to earth and is continually *present* in His people, the Church. How many explanations are there for coming to Church, and rarely do we hear, 'To be with the Messiah!' In assembling, as the "New Israel," the people become the body of Christ. We are *at table* with Christ; His Kingdom had been *inaugurated* and is *present* on earth, in and through the Church. By eating and drinking with Christ, His life becomes our life, as we become His body.

The everlasting *joy* of Christmas is to be found in the revelation of Christ as our true life. Not the Church building, but the *people*, who when assembled as *new creations* in Christ, are now worshipping in 'spirit and truth.' This is the greatest gift of God to the world. The Messiah is with us, and His Church is the revelation that His Kingdom has come!

In Christ' Love,
+Fr. Andrew