

“Divine fear and joy.” Luke 2:1-20

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

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 Savior, 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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

How are you this evening? This has been a very confusing year. A very trying year in so many ways, indeed. But we have made it this far. Most of us are not used to live in ever-changing circumstances, where our regular routines are lost.

When uncertainty reigns supreme – what will tomorrow bring, what about the next month? Who knows it anymore?! All the many disruptions, so many of our usual practices suddenly were gone, prohibited, even punishable.

Some of us suffered from isolation, from loneliness; when all our life-making human connections were momentarily cut. How was this year for you emotionally? And on the top of that, don’t forget – many fears.

Fears about our health, and that of our loved ones. Fears about our jobs, and businesses and finances. About our daily bread. About our livelihood. Fears about our future. At times this year may have felt like the very foundations on which we had built our lives and our seeming security were crumbling and the ground was going to disappear under us.

The hand of our God has been heavily upon us during this year. There is no doubt about that – it was Him behind it all. Gently knocking at the doors of our often rather hardened hearts: “Return to me, my child, return to me!”

This whole year can be described as a rather fearful experience. But it was by no mean as fearful as what the shepherds experienced on that night. That’s right, there was a lot of fearing and trembling on that night.

We know it from the Scripture, and some of you may even know it from your own personal experience, that the immediate presence of the holy God may not be the most pleasant place to be. Don’t ask for it!

When He draws close, everything is revealed, everything is exposed. Without words... without a single whisper. Not only the order of created things withdraws and disappears, but also everything in our souls is exposed to this divine light, everything... even our best-kept secrets.

Our past that we would like to remain hidden from the eyes of others, all our guilt and shame and secret passions. This is why people are in such agony when they suddenly face the holy God’s presence. We just can’t stand it. Physically, emotionally, spiritually... we just can’t bear it. It is killing us...

That is what happened to the shepherds. They were just doing their own stuff. Suddenly, a majestic being from another dimension appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone on them! The heaven was open! I don’t know how it was. I can’t imagine it.

But it means that the reality as we know it suddenly was disappearing, being replaced with something unknown. That would be terrifying. The shepherds, indeed, were terrified. This is why the angel rushes to calm them down and strengthen. “Guys, guys, don’t be afraid! This is not the end.

This is not the day of judgment. I bring you good news, actually great, wonderful news. This is not a message of judgment, this is a message of forgiveness and peace, of joy and hope. See, to you today a Saviour is born, who is God the almighty Himself. It’s okay! Go and see!”

Would you go? If the angel was so terrifying, what about this Saviour, who is God Himself! Can we stand in His presence and still live?! But the angel replies: “Don’t worry, you will find Him as a ... baby.” Baby?!

The holy and eternal God comes to us as a baby? In our likeness? Yes, He knows our hearts and our histories, in tiniest of details, He knows every time when we failed Him, rejected Him, and every time we failed and hurt our fellow humans. But He has not come to expose us and to judge us. Not yet.

He comes to bring us forgiveness and joy and wonderful hope. He has not come in His divine glory and majesty. Not yet. We would not be able to stand before Him. None of us. Instead, He comes as a baby.

To encourage you. To invite you. He makes Himself so vulnerable so that you can feel safe. He wants to show how much He longs to have you with Him. How far He is ready to go for you.

So that only you could truly know Him as your God, as your Father in heaven, as your brother Jesus. “Come to me,” He keeps inviting, “come to me, don’t be afraid, so I can bless you, I will be your Rock, I will be your shield!”

This is His voice still speaking to you today. “Come!” And what is remarkable – to whom did the angel tell this great news? Yes, to the shepherds! He did not tell it to the high priests, he did not tell it to the government officials, he did not tell it to some very important people. He told it to the shepherds.

What does this mean for us? That our God, who was born in this world as a baby, who has come to us as Jesus from Nazareth, who today speaks to us through His Church, that He desires everyone to come to Him and to know Him, regardless of who you are.

Jesus doesn’t divide people in more important and less important, in good enough and not good enough. He wants everyone to know Him – not just to know about Him, that does not matter, but to know Him intimately as your unshakable Foundation, as your Protector, as your Brother. Because to know Him – that is to have eternal life. This is what He desires for you.

He has promised that at the end of this age He will return, not as a baby anymore, but in His all penetrating divine glory and power, then the old order of things, so familiar to us, all that we know, will pass away with mighty roar. That is going to be the most terrifying experience ever!

Unless ... we already are among God’s chosen people, as members of Jesus’ own family, the Church. Then that day will be the best, the most glorious day of our lives. We will finally see our Jesus face-to-face.

He will embrace us and will fulfil the promise to give us a new, infinitely better home, New Heavens and New Earth, where we will dwell with Him in everlasting joy and indescribable blessedness.

Then this life with all its trials and tribulations will seem so far away and so insignificant, impossible even to compare with the all surpassing heavenly glory and joy that we will be privileged to call ours.

This Jesus... this God who came to us as a baby, He really wants to have everyone with Him, each one of you, everyone. This is why He keeps inviting us: “Come to me, come to me, and I will bless you!” I pray that this evening we all could go home just like the shepherds – “glorifying and praising God for all that we have heard, as it had been told us.” Amen.

Christian greetings to you!

“Grace” Lutherans in Tanunda wish you blessed Christmas and hope-filled and joyful 2021!

May the Holy Spirit dwell in you, and the Son of God Jesus Christ walk with you, so that every day you feel loved, appreciated and safe in the hands of your Father, who is in Heaven! May His abundant blessings make your life adventurous and colourful, and your heart content and grateful!

FYI:

We celebrate the Divine Service every Sunday at 9:00am. The location you can clarify here: <https://pastorsblog.com.au/> You are most welcome to join!

On the same website you will also find our sermons, news and some useful articles. You can also watch and listen our sermons and services here:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/GJBaikovi>

And here: <https://www.facebook.com/GraceTanunda>

Enjoy!

Furthermore,

if you have any questions about this wonderful God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – and we pray that you have many – and would like to learn more about Him, to tap into His wisdom or to have more joy and peace and hope in your daily lives, please, do not hesitate to contact pastor Guntars on (08) 8563 2248 or Guntars.Baikovs@gmail.com.

It will be my great joy and pleasure to share the beauty and wisdom and grace of our Triune God with you so that you too can taste the grandeur of what is to come for all God’s beloved people.

“Go in peace praising God for all that you have heard!”