



Christmas Eve ~ 2019

Scriptural Reference ~ Luke 2:1-20

“The Sign”

Greetings Blessed Ones and welcome to this Christmas Eve celebration at All Saints. We are blessed by your presence here tonight as together we help to create Sacred Space here in our church, in our families, in our workplaces, in our world and in our lives. All during the preceding four weeks of our Advent Season we have been focused and concentrating on our Blessed Mary. On her journey of Birthing the Divine and our own mirrored journey of learning to Birth the

Divineness that lies within us. But now the time for waiting is over. The birth of the Blessed One is upon us. The anticipation is behind us, and the reality of this New Creation stares up at us from a rough and straw-filled animal feeder. What is next? Where are we going? What is the plan? Is there a plan? And tonight Blessed Ones, the answer is a resounding and angel chorus filled "Yes." As we learned in our Christmas Gospel today from Luke... we have a sign... we have a sign... Thank God! We have a sign!

Signs of our "small c" Christmas, our secular and commercially driven Christmas, surround us. Fat Sunday newspaper editions spewing coupons and shouts of deals, only X shopping day left! Malls and shops are crazy... Winco, Safeway and Freddies looks like they are giving away the food.

We rush... put up the tree, lights... o my gosh I forgot the cookies! Signs of Christmas ? Perhaps. But the Sign that Luke speaks about tonight is much different. A Sign filled with layer upon layer of symbols for us to unwrap and learn this Christmas Eve.

We hear an amazing story tonight. And the focus of the cast of characters in this story has shifted dramatically. Shifting from the strength of Mary and the faithfulness of Joseph to the most unlikely ones ever to have a leading role in any story... The Shepherds. Even Baby Jesus himself plays a supporting role in this story. It is the Shepherds who will help us to see.

In first century Jewish culture it is pretty difficult to get lower on the socio-economic ladder than a

shepherd. There is only one rung lower and that is the dreaded tax collector... the extorting contractor squeezing the last of the financial blood from the impoverished for Rome. But not much higher is the Shepherd. And why is that... in Jewish culture those dealing with animals, especially animal "products" are considered ritually unclean from the get-go. Can't possibly enter the Temple, certainly not welcome in the Synagogue. Shepherds spend all their time in the hills, watching and tending flocks. They were illiterate, rough and ready, most times stinky and uncouth, loners by nature and most comfortable with simple things... simple jobs, simple language, simple people, simple ideas.

And so in the story we have the angels... the antithesis of the shepherd on the social and

spiritual spectrum giving the shepherds the good news on this night. One cannot get further apart than an angel and a shepherd. Sacred meeting secular.

And we hear the story... "Then angels of the Lord stood before them, and the God's Glory shone around them and they were terrified. And the angels said to them...

Do not be afraid... I am bringing you good news of great joy for All the people... (that's right All the people)... to you is born this day in the City of David, a Holy One, who is the Messiah.

AND THIS WILL BE A SIGN FOR YOU. You will find a Child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

And this will be a sign for you, and this will be a sign for you, and this will be a sign for you.

The Sign of Christmas, the Holy One lying in a feeding stall. A sign dripping with irony and symbolism.

Of all the people and groups possible to be first to hear the news... why the shepherds? Why the lowest societal common denominator.... Why did the Angels the holiest of holy ones reach out to these raucous, stinky and most unholy humans? It is in the name... Mary was instructed to name the Baby... Emanuel... Emanuel... god is with us.

Emanuel... God is with us, God is in us. In the Birthing of this Blessed Child in these most simple of circumstances... Jesus sent his very first message of the Jesus Way... I came for all... God

is within us all... even the shepherds, especially the shepherds, the carpenters, the fishermen, the women, the lepers, the outcasts, society's least and lost. By calling the Shepherds first, our Creator sent the most powerful of messages on the sacred... we all have skin in this game. We all get to play... we all have the Divine Opportunity and yes Divine Responsibility to birth the Sacred Within Us... to bring it to life, nurture it and grow it. Social station doesn't matter, educational levels are irrelevant. The Jesus Way is for all of us.

And this my Blessed Ones is the Sign of Christmas...

And the angels said... "Do not be afraid. This will be a sign for you, this will be a sign for you... you will find a Child wrapped in bands of cloth and

lying in a manger...” A simple child, in the most simple of places, born of simple parents, bearing a simple message that continues to change the course of humanity. A message first spoken to herders smelling of wet wool and wood smoke.

When the angels had left them, the Shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place... which God has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the Child lying in a manger, just as the Angels had spoken. And when they saw this, the Shepherds made known what had been told to them by the Angels about the Child. And all who heard it were amazed at the Message of the Shepherds. And Mary treasured these words and pondered them in her heart.

The Shepherds, The most simple of messengers,
selected by Angels for the most profound of
messages. Emmanuel, Emmanuel, Emmanuel...
God is with us, God is in us...

Do not be afraid... this will be a sign for you. You
will find a child wrapped in strips of cloth and lying
in a manger. Embrace and empower this Child
you have helped to birth.

This will be a sign for you. This will be a sign for
you.

Merry Christmas, Amen.