

THE FIRST 15

Friday, December 20, 2024

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Today is Friday, December 20 and this is the third week of the Advent season. We are studying the song of the Angels recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke following the birth of Jesus.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and loving God, in the early morning of a dawning December day, I seek Your presence. As I journey through the season of Advent I find my heart growing in anticipation as the celebration of the birth of Your Son Jesus draws near. In this place of stillness, I quiet my mind and prepare my heart to reflect on a humble manger in Bethlehem surrounded by shepherds and angels. I listen attentively for Your message. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Luke 2:16-20

REFLECTION

There were shepherds living out in the fields when the news of the Messiah's birth was told. An angel appeared to bring them good news that would cause great joy for all people. In the city of David (Bethlehem) a Savior was born, the Messiah, the Lord. The angels told the shepherds to go and find the child, lying in a manger – a feeding trough for oxen or cattle. No sooner had the angels departed than the shepherds went to seek the child they were told about. The shepherds did not hesitate to go to Bethlehem and find the baby Jesus. The scripture says they "hurried off" or "went with haste" to seek the baby.

In these last few days of hurry and haste to accomplish so many activities for the busy Christmas celebration, we are given this image of simple, lowly shepherds hurrying off in haste to find the true meaning of Christmas. They seek the Christ child. The shepherds go together to seek the Son of David. David who was a shepherd and kept his father's sheep in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:11, 17:15). David who was to be the King and Shepherd of Israel. The Old Testament prophecies (Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah) tell of a Shepherd King who would feed his flock and they are fulfilled in the birth of the Good Shepherd, Jesus.

The reason the birth of Jesus is so important is because of his suffering, death and resurrection. The manger (or feeding trough for animals) is mentioned three times in Luke. The manger is a

signpost to the shepherds. It indicates which baby they were looking for – the one who is the Messiah. The angel said, “This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12).

There is a striking similarity of the words at the end of the Gospel of Luke about Joseph of Arimathea. Luke 23:52-53 says, Going to Pilate, he (Joseph of Arimathea) asked for Jesus’ body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. At the beginning of life, Jesus was wrapped in cloth and laid in a manger. At the end of life, Jesus was wrapped in cloth and laid in a tomb. Both places were likely a natural grotto or cave. The angels were there to announce His birth. The angels were there to announce His resurrection. “He is not here – He has risen!”

The reason the birth of Jesus is so important is because of His suffering, death and resurrection. Otherwise, we would have nothing to celebrate at Christmas. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Ask: What am I celebrating in my heart of hearts this Christmas? Have I hurried with haste to find the Christ Child and worship Him or has my hurry and haste led to other things?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed and Holy Lord, as You fill me with Your Holy Spirit, my heart overflows with the joy of the Christmas season. Thank You for the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, Your one and only Son, whose sacrifice for me made salvation and eternal life possible. As the disciples ran with haste to the empty tomb and the shepherds ran with haste to the babe in the manger, let me run with haste to the side of Christ and bask in His blessed presence this Christmas and always. Amen.