

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

December 21, 2009



*Adoration of
the Shepherds*
Gerard van
Honthorst
1622

Advent 2009: The Extraordinary in the Ordinary

The Christmas narrative is only contained in two of the four gospels. The good news is that these stories are concise and rather easy to get our arms around. The bad news is that we often hear these stories over and over throughout our life to the point that they become trite. Almost woven into the very fabric of our culture, these historic accounts are known to even the atheistic. How does this story fall on fresh ears? As we close out the Advent season and this week begin the Christmas celebration it's only appropriate to meditate on that wonderful juncture between anticipation and inauguration. The moment when the Shepherds came into the presence of the Great King. The story, recorded in Luke 2:1-20, is set in the context of a great juxtaposition; the imperial power of Rome versus the marginal life of shepherds and a young couple. Yet, it's because of this juxtaposition and the very shape of the text that we understand what God is saying through this text. God seeks to show us exactly where this "good news" is located.

To understand this though, we must first understand where the gospel is not located. The text begins, almost like a Star Wars movie. In verses 1-3 we find the view nearly breathtaking as our view is fixed upon the whole of the Roman Empire. The poet Ovid, a contemporary of Christ, reflected on the magnitude of the empire when he wrote, "wherever Roman power reaches, conquered lands, I'll be read: and fame through all the ages, if poet's predictions are true at all, I'll live." Surely, if there is to be good news found it's linked to the empire. And yet, within a few short verses we are brought down to discover the good news is amongst the ordinary life of shepherds and a man and a woman to be wed. Why has our pursuit of the good news skirted quickly past imperial powers? Knowing that Rome fell in 410 and God seems to be saying "my good news does not need Rome." The Romes of life will rise and fall but my good news, something wholly other, will last forever. Not only is the good news not found in Rome, but it is likewise not located in the heavenly places beyond. So often,

during the holidays we "let our heart be light and our troubles be out of sight". Somehow we believe we'll find good news if we just escape. Gnosticism always has and always will fail us because the truth grit of life can only be ignored for a time. The good news, as much as we'd presume otherwise, is not found in escaping to some far off place. So where is the good news located? This extraordinary good news is found in the very ordinary places and people of life. The good news is for people who when hearing understand their desperate need for it. People such as shepherds and young couples, who in the eyes of the world, are nothing. The rulers of Rome and the leaders of the religious establishment thought they knew good news or at least could recognize it. But only those who responded to the voice of God found it. It lay in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. It's here that we see the good news is for ordinary people in ordinary situations. The good news is designed to do extraordinary things for the glory of God in the dirt and grime of our life. Glory to God!

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: Luke 2:1-20

1. What are some observations that you've made this season about how our culture calls us to celebrate this holiday? Has God been leading you to a different experience?
2. Read the first 7 verses of Luke chapter 2. How has God uniquely shaped this text. Why are the details placed the way they are?
3. The marketing industry often tries to put products in the hands of famous people. Why did the angels not appear to Caesar nor was the Christ child born into his household?
4. Discuss or journal about the challenges you face this Christmas with your own life or family. How are you trusting in the "Romes" of life to deal with these things? How are you trying to escape? What would it look like to be grounded in the gospel in this situation?
5. If God is sovereign, then why was Jesus born in a feeding trough for animals? What does this tell us about the character and purpose of the gospel?
6. Cindy, a consultant who lives in Inman Park recently claims that she's come to discover a higher plane of Christian spirituality. She uses phrases such as "Let go and let God" and states that she operates above the fray. What would this passage say to such claims?
7. When the shepherds and Mary reflected on their experience before Jesus their hearts were filled with awe, wonder, and worship. How does this shape your own heart amidst the business of this season?

"Biblical spirituality has a low tolerance for "great ideas" or "sublime truths" or "inspirational thoughts" apart from the people and places in which they occur. God's great love and purposes for us are all worked out in messes in our kitchens and backyards, in storms and sins, blue skies, the daily work and dreams of our common lives. God works with us as we are and not as we should be or think we should be. God deals with us where we are and not where we would like to be."

Eugene Peterson
Christ Plays in 10,000 Places



Advent Reflections: The Shepherd's Adoration

The hustle and bustle of the holiday season leaves many Christians wondering how they can celebrate the Advent season with meaning and intentionality. Over the next two weeks this column will be dedicated to helping you do just that. The column will have three focal points during the advent season; daily Scripture readings, reflective works of art, and Advent carols (see page 3). Use each of these components to foster a sense of anticipation of the birth and for us, the return, of Christ. Any of these elements would be great to use either individually or with your family.

Scripture Readings for This Week:

Monday: Ps. 61, 62; Ps. 112, 115; Zeph. 3:14-20; Titus 1:1-16; Luke 1:1-25

Tuesday: Ps. 66, 67; Ps. 116, 117; 1 Samuel 2:1b-10; Titus 2:1-10; Luke 1:26-38

Wednesday: Ps. 72; Ps. 111, 113; 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Titus 2:11-3:8a; Luke 1:39-48a(48b-56)

Thursday: Ps. 45, 46; Gal. 3:23-4:7; Matt. 1:18-2

Friday: Ps. 2, 85; Ps. 110:1-5(6-7), Ps. 132; Micah 4:1-5, 5:2-4; 1 John 4:7-16; John 3:31-360

Saturday: Ps. 55; Ps. 138, 139:1-17(18-23); Zech. 8:9-17; Rev. 6:1-17; Matt. 25:31-46

Sunday: Ps. 93, 96; Ps. 34; 1 Samuel 1:1-2, 7b-28; Col. 1:9-20; Luke 2:22-40

Works for Art for Advent Reflection

Consider the Honthorts' work "Adoration of the Shepherds" on page one of the worship guide. The scene vividly pictures the location of the "good news".

- How does Honthorts' (like Rembrandt last week) use the contrast between light and darkness?
- Why does the author picture Jesus as a radiating presence? How does this strike you as you consider the surrounding environment?
- How do the people's various expressions shape your own posture during this season? Note each one.
- From a technical point of view, what geometric shape is represented several times in this painting? Was the artist saying anything through the character's positions?

1. Daily Scriptures take from the Book of Common Prayers, Daily Lectionary.

2. Information & artwork gathered at www.artbible.info

3. Hymns copied from the original Trinity Hymnal, all rights reserved.

Carols of Advent: Week III

Joy to the World

Issac Watts, 1719

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Charles Wesley, 1739

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th’angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Refrain

Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”
Christ, by highest Heav’n adored;
Christ the everlasting Lord;
Late in time, behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.

Refrain

Hail the heav’nly Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris’n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die.
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

Refrain

Come, Desire of nations, come,
Fix in us Thy humble home;
Rise, the woman’s conqu’ring Seed,
Bruise in us the serpent’s head.
Now display Thy saving power,
Ruined nature now restore;
Now in mystic union join
Thine to ours, and ours to Thine.

Refrain

Adam’s likeness, Lord, efface,
Stamp Thine image in its place:
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in Thy love.
Let us Thee, though lost, regain,
Thee, the Life, the inner man:
O, to all Thyself impart,
Formed in each believing heart.

Refrain