

Sermon for December 14, 2014 – Advent 3

Isaiah 40:9-11 (NIV84)

Theme: Our Christmas Proclamation: Here is your God!

- 1) *He comes as a gentle Shepherd.*
- 2) *He comes as a powerful King*

⁹ *You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"* ¹⁰ *See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.* ¹¹ *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.*

The people of Athens were terribly afraid. The Persians had landed at Marathon – just 26 miles away. Even though Athens' army was there - prepared to meet them in battle - everyone knew that the Persian's forces were superior in number and strength. If the battle of Marathon went to the Persians, then all hope would be lost.

The city was on pins and needles when, all of a sudden, a runner by the name of Pheidippides was seen coming as fast as he could. He ran into the city and the people gathered to hear what he had to say. With his dying breath he cried out: "Rejoice, we won!" Oh, the relief and joy Athens felt on that day: they had crossed over from the fear of death to the joy of life!

Brothers and sisters in Christ: the people of our world are under a much more serious threat than the citizens of Athens were. All people are born slaves of the devil and under the threat of eternal damnation in hell. Many do their best to simply ignore the danger, but many others feel – deep inside their hearts – that something is wrong. They live in fear.

But you, dear Christian have been given good news – great news, really – for the entire world: that God has won the victory over sin for us. The LORD wants us to be like Pheidippides and dedicate all our life and strength to proclaiming his wonderful salvation to our lost countrymen – and, as we will soon see, Christmas provides for us an excellent opportunity to do so.

With Isaiah as our guide, let us learn to heed God's call to fearlessly point to the manger and proclaim: **Here is your God!** 1) *He comes as a Gentle Shepherd.* 2) *He comes as a powerful King*

Part One: He comes as a Gentle Shepherd.

Today's sermon text follows on the heels of last Sunday's sermon text and begins: *You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"*

When I hear this text, I can't help but think about the shepherds who saw God's heavenly host, and heard the angel of the Lord proclaim: *Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.* ¹¹ *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.* ¹² *This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. (Luke 2:10-12, NIV84)*

What joyous news: the Savior that Israel had, for centuries, been expectantly waiting for, was finally here! *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." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2:15-16. NIV84)*

I want to pause for a moment and consider how the shepherds responded to the good news of their Savior's birth: they did not linger to finish what they were doing. No, they left everything and hurried to see the Savior!

Oh, that all Christians would have the attitude of the shepherds: not worrying about earthly possessions, but simply hurry to see their Savior at the Lord's bidding! Sadly our sinful, selfish nature often hinders us from doing so. Oh, how wretched we are: often finding more joy in the fleeting frivolity of the world than in our incarnate God who came to save us! May the LORD forgive our sin, and move us to respond like the shepherds so that we may rejoice in seeing our God lying in a manger for us.

And what did the shepherds do after they worshipped Jesus? ¹⁷ *When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (Luke 2:17-18)*

The shepherds fulfilled our sermon text by telling others the good news the angels told them. Unafraid of what people might think or who they might offend, they went around proclaiming the news: "Here, O Judah, is your salvation. Here, O Israel, is your God!"

Let me read the first verse of our sermon text again: ⁹ *You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"*

Brothers and sisters in Christ – even though I spent some time applying the text to the Christmas Eve shepherds, I want you to know that they are not the primary fulfillment of this text; you are! You see, even though our NIV Bibles make it sound like the glad tidings are for Zion and Jerusalem, the Hebrew text (and most other English translations) actually describes the good news as coming from Zion and Jerusalem. Since the terms "Zion" and "Jerusalem" often symbolize the Church, our sermon text is actually a prophecy of you. We, believers, are God's New Testament Zion, his holy new Jerusalem. And the Lord wants us, his Church to proclaim his Gospel loud and clear. He wants us to point to the manger and say: *Here is your God.*

"But," we might think, "I am not qualified to do this. I don't have the gifts and training to talk to people about the Bible. What if I mess things up? What if people think I'm crazy and just laugh at what I say?"

To our fearful hearts the LORD says: *do not be afraid.* Don't be afraid of what people might think or what you will say. Be like the shepherds: let the message you heard from God compel you to tell others. Let the thing you have seen in Scripture move you to proclaim the good news and invite others to come and see the Lord, laying in the manger!

And, just as it was with the Shepherds, not everyone will listen. Not everyone will like what you say, but you can be confident that the Holy Spirit goes with you as you proclaim his word – according to the Lord's own promise: *do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:19-20, NIV84)*

Here is your God – this is our Christmas proclamation to the world! Yes, he is a fearful and powerful king, but He is also a tender shepherd who has come to rescue his lost sheep, as the last verse of our text indicates: *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.*

The Lord did not come that first Christmas Eve to judge mankind, but to save it. He came to live the perfect life to God's law we failed to live, and to suffer and die as the sacrificial Lamb who would take away the sins of the entire world. He came to rescue us, his precious, lost lambs, and carry us back to God, as He himself once said:

¹⁴ *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--* ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:14-16, NIV84)*

Brothers and sisters in Jesus: you and I know why Christ came on Christmas, but the world does not. Let us, then, share the good news: "Come, see your God, your eternal Shepherd, who has laid down his life in order to pay for your sin and rescue you from the power of the devil. Come and celebrate his birth with us. Hear and believe his Word and you too will be carried close to His heart and held in his fatherly arms. He came on the first Christmas to be our gentle shepherd. He is coming again as our most powerful King."

Part Two: He comes as a powerful King

Verse 10 of our text reads: *See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.*

Certainly Christ came at Christmas with power, but this power was hidden from the world, wrapped up in the humble packaging of human flesh and blood. When Jesus comes again, he will come with power and might, revealing his full glory to all. On the day his Father appointed, Christ will come again with the gracious reward that he won for us through his life death and resurrection. He will come to welcome believers into the perfect paradise he is even now preparing for us. He will judge all peoples with justice showing his final victory over sin, death, the devil and all who refused to believe in Him.

The Lord wants us to herald this message to the world also. When we point to the manger and say: "Here is your God," we only give half the story. The Lord also wants us to point ahead to the day Christ will come in his full glory and fearful might and say: "Here, too, is your God. Don't let him come as an enemy. Repent and look to Christ for forgiveness so that King Jesus may come as your friend. In this world Christians may have trouble, but Christ has overcome the world for us. He reigns in heaven on our behalf, and will keep his promise to judge the world and give us eternal relief."

Brothers and sisters in Christ: God has given you an awesome message that He wants you to share with your family, friends and neighbors. Point to the manger and tell them: "Here is your God, who was born to be our good and gentle shepherd, who laid down his life for us – his lost sheep". Point them to the skies and tell them how their Sovereign Lord is coming again in awesome glory and power to fully deliver all who trust in Him for salvation to His Father's side in heaven.

And, as we witness, let us also pray that the Holy Spirit moves all those we invite to worship to respond like the shepherds on that first Christmas Eve: to come to the manger with us and worship our God for his great love. Amen.

