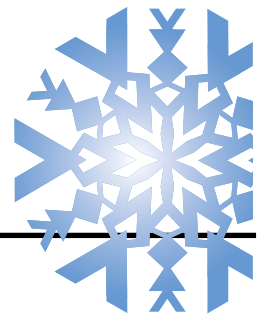


STUDY GUIDE

Christmas Eve 2010



Glimpse the Divine — Look Up! (week 5 of 5)

Luke 2:8-20 — The Word from the Bible (New Revised Standard Version)

“And in that 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 fear. And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to 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 babe 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 men 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 babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept 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.”

Peace

Through the angel, God tells the shepherds the meaning of this most significant event in cosmic history. The meaning is peace; Jesus’ birth is to bring peace, shalom, blessedness, fullness. This is the message from the angels to the shepherds and through them to us. Christ’s coming means peace. Not the abolition of war necessarily, but a different kind of peace.

The angel told the shepherds this peace was to come by a Savior who is Christ the Lord. The Babe they found was to be named Jesus, a common name in that time meaning “The Lord Is Salvation.” The angel used three names to identify the one who would bring this peace. First was “Savior”, a Hebrew word meaning rescuer; then “Christ,” a Greek word for “The anointed one, the chosen one.” The third was a word used by Greek-speaking Hebrews to refer to God.

The angels predicted this peace will come when we give glory to God in the highest. The peace does not come when the arms race ends. Peace will not come with arms limitations treaties. Peace does not come when a general glow of good will wells up and we all feel magnanimous about our neighbors. The angels give us the precondition for peace – that we give glory to God in the highest. That has nothing to do with whether or not we win the arms race.

Shepherds?

How surprising that this message of peace was entrusted to shepherds. They were a despised class of people, outcasts from all respectable society. Their honesty and integrity was so questionable that they were not even allowed to testify in a court of law in those days.

God is reminding us that the peace of God’s presence is found anywhere we recognize the Divine. This peace does not start with governments or diplomats. It starts with us, from the bottom up. By starting with the shepherds, God wants us to know that anyone can be an instrument for God. Anyone can experience the divine presence of God. God’s peace and the miracle that comes with it is for all.

God, Neighbor, and Self - A Glimpse of the Divine for All

The lesson God has for us here is that we need to make peace, first of all, with God. That's where peace begins. We may be running because we are afraid of God. "Fear not," the angel says. We need only stand still and let Him catch us. Francis Thompson's wonderful poem portrays Him as the Hound of Heaven. We may simply be caught up on our own busyness as the innkeeper was. God has dealt with our sin and God's grace is sufficient. We can come home. We belong to God. Whatever we have done, we can come home and be reconciled.

The next step is to make peace with our neighbor. We are called to reconciliation in families, between husbands and wives, between parents and children. We are called to effect political reconciliation between right and left, radical and conservative, the minority and the majority, between pacifists and those who defend the arms race.

Finally, we need to find that inner peace that comes from being in harmony with ourselves. No longer are we like the demoniac who said, "My name is Legion," because so many different selves possessed him. Jesus brought integration to a man who was described as "beside himself," and that man became one person. One dimension of peace is that head and heart and all our conflicting emotions come together.

That last verse of our Scripture says that after the shepherds had seen such wondrous things they went back to the commonplace. That's true for us each year at Christmas as we celebrate these events. Where will we be when the excitement and fun are over? How do these events change the lives we lead back at our jobs, our homes, our schools? If we believe the message of the angels we go back to the ordinary as peacemakers. We begin to bear the message out and become peacemakers.

The Meaning of Christmas

by Joseph Bayly

Praise God for Christmas.

Praise Him for the Incarnation, for the Word made Flesh.

I will not sing of shepherds watching flocks on frosty nights, or angel choristers

I will not sing of a stable bare in Bethlehem, or lowing oxen,

wise men trailing star with gold, frankincense and myrrh.

*Tonight I will sing praise to the Father who stood on heaven's threshold and said
farewell to His Son as he stepped across the stars to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.*

*And I will sing praise to the infinite, eternal Son, who became most finite,
a baby who would one day be executed for my crime.*

Praise him in the heavens, praise him in the stable, and praise him in my heart.

***We hope you and your family have a very Merry Christmas
and a safe and Happy New Year.***

