

The Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord
St. Luke 2:1-20

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The family made their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census. Mary was tremendously pregnant; she could give birth at any moment. They couldn't find room in the inn—it's a small town, but that's where they had to go to register, and so did many, many others. They find a place to stay; it's warm and dry, but surrounded by barn animals. Mary gives birth, wraps her Son in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger.

Angels sang. The whole creation rejoices at the birth of the Son. Shepherds made their way to see the sight of which they were told. What do they see?

Take a look yourself. Peak in the manger, pull away the layers, and what would your eyes behold? It's a baby, but so much more, for it's just what the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Glory? Yes...absolutely. God is there, and where God is there is glory. It isn't obvious because He veils his glory in flesh. Ordinary flesh and blood like yours. But, that flesh and blood wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger is God. And since He is God, there is glory lying there.

Oh, but it's nothing to be afraid of.

In contrast, think of the Exodus. God appears to Moses in a burning bush that isn't consumed. Fire can be a frightening thing, especially when you see one raging but not burning anything. From this fire, YHWH tells Moses to go to lead his people out of bondage in Egypt. Leading the people out, the glory of God led the people out of Egypt as a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. Fire and smoke enveloped Mt. Sinai as Moses received the tables of the Law from God. (cf. Exodus 19:18) From a great fire, God spoke to the people, and they feared for their lives when He did this. (cf. Deuteronomy 5:24-25) Day and night, God's power and glory were on display for the people, and the people were frightened for the lives as a result, with good reason: "[F]or no man shall see Me, and live." (Exodus 33:20b)

At the birth of Jesus, however, the glory of God is veiled. It's there, but hidden. It's hidden in a little baby, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger. You can look at Him and live. Your sins do not kill you on account of being in the holiness and glory of God.

Point in fact, He comes in grace and mercy for you. He veils His glory that He may be looked upon. There He is in the manger to behold, and His messengers announced to some shepherds to go and have a look.

But, He will also draw all men to Himself as He is lifted up. (cf. John 12:32) On the cross, nailed and dying, He is to be looked upon. You pierced Him there, because your sins placed Him there. He willingly took your sins into His flesh, the flesh He was born with, the flesh wrapped in swaddling cloths, the flesh lying in a manger, the flesh that veils His glory. He's there on the cross—God's there on the cross—so the glory of God is there at the cross. And since you pierced Him, you will look upon Him, as it is written, "[T]hey will look on Me whom they pierced." (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37) And looking upon Him, seeing there your Savior, sin-bitten you live, just as the snake-bitten Israelites looked upon the bronze serpent and lived. (cf. Numbers 21:8; John 3:14-15)

A man dying on the cross is nothing to be afraid of, either; he can't do anything to you, but this Man on the cross is there to do everything for you. So, peak into the manger, and be not afraid, Jesus veils His glory for you. Gaze upon the wood of Christ's cross, and be not afraid, Jesus dies there for you. You will see the same thing in both places, just as the angels sang it at Jesus' birth: "Glory to God

in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

The glory part we talked about, but what about this peace and goodwill? Yes, that's there, too!

The one wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger is the Prince of Peace. (cf. Isaiah 9:6) He is come to bring peace, but not as you would imagine. This boy Jesus, when grown, would one day say,

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to "set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law"; and "a man's enemies will be those of his own household." He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (Matthew 10:34-37)

No, Jesus isn't born to bring peace between you and your siblings and parents and neighbors. There's a sword there, potentially; faith in Him will divide you from those of your acquaintance that have no faith.

No, the peace He brings is between you and His Father. His death in your stead brings you peace with God, for the death He died He died to sin once for all. (cf. Romans 6:10) And since His blood covers your sin, then there is nothing that marks you as an enemy of God. By God's grace you believe and trust in this and are justified, so that "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5:1-2)

That peace was won most certainly in Jesus' death on the cross, but was borne throughout His life, including His birth, when He was wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger. Even then, He was already calling men to Him, as His birth was announced to the shepherds, the first to find peace with God through this infant. It was to them that the announcement was first made, "[T]here is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." "To you," the shepherds were told, "is born a Savior;" right from the moment of His conception and birth, Jesus was being Savior. And then, throughout His life, Jesus would announce the peace of God as He forgave, healed, and raised the dead.

The point I'm trying to make is that Jesus is your Savior, even as He is zygote and fetus, even as He is infant wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in the manger. Think of it this way: God becomes a child of man—the Son of Man—so that He who is eternally the Son of God would make you, who is a son of man, a son of God. That is salvation! By way of baptism into Jesus' conception, birth, life, death, and resurrection—baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost—you are adopted as a son of God and co-heir with the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

So, here in this baby is God's goodwill toward men. Your God is One who takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner (cf. Ezekiel 18:32, 33:11), so out of His great love for you, He sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem you, to buy you back from death to life, life in Him. (cf. Galatians 4:4-5) His goodwill is that you would look upon Him and live, not die, to forgive you, and to bring you where He is, in glory. Therefore, "[T]here is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Jesus is born for you, wrapped in swaddling cloths for you, laid in a manger for you. He is God's glory in the highest for you. He is God's peace on earth for you. He is God's goodwill for you. Therefore, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.