



Homily for
CHRISTMAS
24/25 December, 2016

Fr. Dwayne's homily follows...

Christmas 2016
(4:00/6:00 – HG; 8:00 – HT; 11:00 SH)

Readings of the Mass
Gospel: Lk 2:1-4

I. Pope Francis has become known for his remark that the shepherds should take on the smell of the sheep. He is speaking primarily to bishops and priests – telling them they need to get out and be with, connect more fully with, the people they serve. But I think it can also be applied to anyone who is a disciple of Jesus.

The shepherds at the time of Jesus' birth certainly did smell like their sheep! They were of the least esteemed people of their day. They literally lived with their sheep. They would have had to be with their sheep, stopping strays, keeping away dangerous animals, preventing theft. They would not have been able to take a Sabbath break, so they would not have been able to observe the letter of the Law. They were probably quite uneducated. And they, themselves, were not known for the virtue of honesty.

They were about as far away from a sophisticated religious elite one could get. They would have had few clear expectations about what a Savior might be about. And yet, in all of their simplicity, they were the first to be invited to come and see the newborn Jesus.

So they went to see for themselves what this was all about.

II. We become like the shepherds when we put aside our sophisticated mindsets...

our preconceptions...our pre-judgments...our *fixed* conclusions about life or about what God is like or where God might be found. We become like the shepherds when we allow ourselves to think outside the box.

Perhaps we should approach this great feast of Christmas with the simplicity of a shepherd, approaching this feast with the open and receptive eyes of the shepherd. They went to see what had taken place in Bethlehem with no preconceived notion of what they might see. It was a baby in a manger – and they believed.

Where do you see God's presence?

III. This time of year, newscasts are filled with feel-good stories about people doing all kinds of acts of charities.

- I've seen several stories about children developing a project designed to reach out to other children in some way – providing gifts for them, especially those who may not otherwise receive a gift
- there was the family of a slain police officer who received a gift of many people reaching out to them, which included payment of their mortgage
- there was the officer who pulled over a college student driver for a traffic violation and ended up helping the driver tie his tie!
- if you are watching the news, there is a different story every day.

In the midst of a world in which we daily receive reports of violence: shootings, theft, people driving trucks into Christmas markets, and so on – there are still people, many people who live the spirit of Christmas. Who says God isn't present in the world?! Aren't all of the good things we do for each other really extensions of God's gift of himself, God's gift of love we celebrate at Christmas? Isn't this what Christmas is about?

Where do you see evidence of God's presence among us?

IV. The shepherds saw – and believed – and began to share what they had seen. Luke bookends his gospel with two stories of a journey: the first is the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the second is the Emmaus story of two disciples going out of Jerusalem.

In each story angels make an announcement: in the first, that Jesus had been

born, in the second, that he was alive.

Each story features an Inn: in the first, there was no room for Mary and Joseph at the Inn, in the second the two disciples invite their companion to join them for the night.

In the Nativity story, the shepherds recognize Jesus wrapped and lying in a manger where animals feed; in the Emmaus story the disciples recognize the Risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

And in each story, both the shepherds and the disciples go out to tell the Good News.

V. By placing these stories as bookends to his gospel, Luke is telling us that the journey of faith is an adventure, a journey of exploration and discovery, a pilgrimage of encounter with Christ. Simple shepherds and unperceptive disciples become models for all who are open to receive the gift of Jesus.

Coming to the manger today, how does your experience of Christmas transform you – or at least challenge you to see things a little bit differently? What do you see more clearly that perhaps you did not see before?

And, how can we become simple shepherds who share the good news of our experience?

Fr. Dwayne Thoman