

Christmas Eve
Friday, December 24, 2010
7 o'clock (Angels' Mass)

GOSPEL: Luke 2:1-14

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

1'Εγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐξῆλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην. 2αὕτη ἀπογραφή πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηνίου. 3καὶ ἐπορεύοντο πάντες ἀπογράφεσθαι, ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πόλιν. 4Ἀνέβη δὲ καὶ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐκ πόλεως Ναζαρεθ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν εἰς πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἣτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυὶδ, 5ἀπογράψασθαι σὺν Μαριὰμ τῇ ἐμνηστευμένῃ αὐτῷ, οὔσῃ ἐγκύω. 6ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, 7καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον: καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι. 8Καὶ ποιμένες ἦσαν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῇ αὐτῇ ἀγραυλοῦντες καὶ φυλάσσοντες φυλακὰς τῆς νυκτὸς ἐπὶ τὴν ποιμνὴν αὐτῶν. 9καὶ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐπέστη αὐτοῖς καὶ δόξα κυρίου περιέλαμψεν αὐτούς, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν. 10καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ ἄγγελος, Μὴ φοβεῖσθε, ἰδοὺ γὰρ εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν χαρὰν μεγάλην ἣτις ἔσται παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, 11ὅτι ἐτέχθη ὑμῖν σήμερον σωτὴρ ὅς ἐστιν Χριστὸς κύριος ἐν πόλει Δαυὶδ: 12καὶ τοῦτο ὑμῖν τὸ σημεῖον, εὐρήσετε βρέφος ἐσπαργανωμένον καὶ κείμενον ἐν φάτνῃ. 13καὶ ἐξαίφνης ἐγένετο σὺν τῷ ἄγγέλῳ πλῆθος στρατιᾶς οὐρανοῦ αἰνούντων τὸν θεὸν καὶ λεγόντων, 14Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας.

On Earth Peace

+ *In nomine Domini. Amen.*

Tonight is the Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord, the Christmas Eve.

It is the time for which we have been watching and waiting and listening and hoping and preparing through the all too inconveniently brief weeks of Advent.

In almost every household, there is a feeling that we should be doing more, we should be preparing more, we should be engaging more ... especially in these days, these times, these moments of life that seem to come and go like the melting snowflakes of the nearly *White Christmas* we had this past week here in our city.

Advent is always too short a time to make our preparation perfect. It always leaves us with more to do than we are able and in the end ... which is now, this end, this end of preparations and machinations and grievous feelings ... there is nothing left to do but to let ourselves fall into the Story.

Yes, fall ... let go of everything to which we clasp so tightly, let go of everything that is frantic and hectic and panic ... let go of all that stands in the way of us coming into the Presence of this Silent Night, this Holy Night ... and with all that we have, all that we are, all the joys and the sorrows and doubts and fears, all the wondering, the questioning, the grieving that inhabits our nights and penetrates our days ... and fall ... lovingly and gently into the Story of this Christmas, this Nativity of Our Lord.

And ... let the Story fill us

... let the Story calm us

... let the Story inhabit us, dwell inside of us and those we love

... and teach us

... teach us again, but especially this night, what Christmas is and what it means and who it is for ...

The Angels, the messengers from the Holy One, in the Story sing from the heavens a song of praise and a song of gentleness ...

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace ...” Yes, peace is the mark of Christmas Eve.

It is the one word which surrounds everything that we do this night, every part of the Story that we read and pray and sing and celebrate in our worship of the one who comes with healing and solace and hope.

We look deeply into the Story from the pen of the Gospel Writer we know as Luke ... we peer inside the words and find ourselves being tugged ever so tenderly inside the realm of God where peace is woven into the fabric of time and space ... peace among every particle of creation, every inhabitant of every nation, of every kingdom, of every home, of every family, of every relationship, of every individual.

When we look deeply inside the Story and see an Infant that is the embodiment of Hope, the Incarnation of Holy Purpose, then and there we see in the innocence and pureness of that baby, the *message* itself ... a message of peace, *the* message of peace.

Just as this baby must be cared for, must be fed, nourished, washed, clothed, held, taught ... loved ... so must we do that for one another ... it is what the gift of peace means ... is all about. Were we to see each other, to see those closest to us and those farthest away from us, those we know and those we do not ... see each other as we behold the Child of this Holy Night, then the suffering of the world would be alleviated, the pain of our neighbors be soothed, the broken hearts of our loved ones carried gently into healing.

Tears would be wiped away, fear and trembling would be removed, anger and hurt would become so rare that the world would strain to define those words ... if we saw each other with such peace.

Bishop Oscar Romero, martyred in 1980 in El Salvador saw deeply into the Story of this Night and breathed into the world this message of peace; he said:

“On this night, as we Christians have done every year for 20 centuries, we recall that God’s reign is now in this world ... [that the Christ Child’s] birth attests that God is now marching with us in history, that we do not go alone, and that our aspiration for peace, for justice, for a reign of divine law, for something holy, is far from earth’s realities. We can hope for it, not because we humans are able to construct that realm of happiness which God’s holy words proclaim, but because the builder of a reign of justice, of love, and of peace is already in the midst of us.”¹

This night as we share the Peace of God in our Liturgy, as we partake of the living presence of the Prince of Peace, as we sit next to those we love and cherish, as we remember with thanksgiving those we wish would be sitting next to us ... those who have now gone before us and have found themselves in the endless time of God, as we peer deeply into the Story of this Night, then let us become the embodiment of his peacefulness and care for one another ... and our community ... and our world ... with as much love and gentleness as did Mary and Joseph and all who came seeking peace in this holy Birth, and found themselves with that story of gentle peace upon their lips and in their words and in their acts of mercy and compassion ... let us become tonight the embodiment of this divine gift of peace.

Silent night holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

And let us together say, **Amen.**

Deo Gratias (+)
The Rev. Benjamin Larzelere III
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¹ *More Quips, Quotes, & Anecdotes for Preachers and Teachers*, Anthony Castle, ed. Twenty-Third Publications. Mystic, CT.2001, page 25.