

Luther's Christmas Sermon

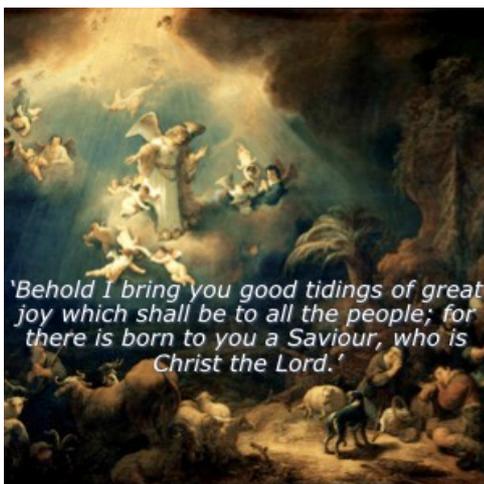
Martin Luther preached many Christmas sermons in his uniquely passionate and colourful style. Tonight we hear short extracts from a sermon written while he was in exile in Wartburg Castle in 1521.

Now there were shepherds in the fields at night, watching over their sheep. That's a lowly job. Looking after sheep is a lowly job at any time, especially at night. But there they were, doing that which was assigned to them. And that's the kind of people God comes to — people just doing their job.

And the glory of the Lord shone about them. The whole hillside was ablaze with light. And they were terrified. And the angel said, "Fear not. Behold I bring you glad tidings. For unto you this day is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts. A multitude! All the angels in heaven. And there are more angels in heaven than there are blades of grass on earth. And they were all singing, singing, singing! I wonder why one of them didn't go and give Mary a hand. You'd think one of them could have taken her a feather bed or a pan of warm water. But there they were — they were so happy they just had to break out of heaven and sing to somebody.

And so the Gospel teaches that Christ was born, and that he died and suffered everything on our behalf. Listen to the angel again: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." In these words you clearly see that he is born for us.



'Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.'

He does not simply say, Christ is born, but *to you* he is born; neither does he say, I bring glad tidings, but *to you* I bring glad tidings of great joy. Furthermore, this joy was not to remain in Christ, but it shall be to *all the people*. This is what is also meant by Isaiah: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," — to us, to us, to us is born, and to us is given this child.

O, this is the great joy of which the angel speaks. This is the comfort and exceeding goodness of God that, if we believe this, we can boast of the treasure that Mary is our rightful mother, Christ our brother, and God our father. For these things actually occurred and are true, but we must believe. This is the principal thing and the principal treasure in every Gospel.

Christ must above all things become our own and we become his, before we can do good works. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and would daily be sung in my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me, and was to be my very own?

Therefore see to it that you do not find pleasure in the Gospel only as a history, for that is only transient; neither regard it only as an example, for it is of no value without faith; but see to it that you make this birth your own and that Christ be born in you.

From this good works will come. Our neighbour believes and expects our love, we are therefore to love them also in return and not let them long for it in vain. As Christ helps us so we in return help our neighbour, and all have enough.

What more do you need, if indeed you know Christ, if you walk by faith in God, and by love to your neighbour, doing to them as Christ has done for you? This is indeed the whole scripture in its briefest form: no more words or books are necessary, but only life and action. That's why we celebrate this festival, so that this act of God might be preached and learned, and comfort and joy will follow.

May this be true for you. Amen.

