

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Our Christmas gospel with the beautiful simplicity of its language, presents an idyllic, even poetic scene. We immediately picture images of Christmas past, of Christmas cards portraying the holy parents and the baby in a manger, shepherds in fields with an angel overhead proclaiming the good news of the event in Bethlehem. We think of beautifully decorated Christmas trees, and homes emblazoned with a host of lights, we remember Christmas parties in school, the office, or at homes. I always remember the first Christmas Eve I spent with the girl I married, spending Christmas Eve with my family, then the two of us attending the late service at St. Olaf Lutheran Church down in Austin, then driving around looking at the displays of lights, the night air clear, cold and crisp.

We wrap ourselves in our memories much as the baby Jesus was wrapped in bands of cloth, our memories like the bands of cloth, keep us warm, bringing back images we hold so dear, opening presents when we were younger, our moms and dads watching us, anticipating our surprise and delight. Then in later years, watching our own children, then our grandchildren as they opened their presents, and we are looking forward to their surprise and delight. Christmas brings out family traditions and makes all of us sentimentalists at least this evening and tomorrow morning.

As we grow older, as our lives change, this one thing, our Christmases, we don't want to change, ever. We love the story that we hear, the Christmas gospel from Luke, even though many of us have heard this story seemingly countless times, the shepherds in the field watching over their flocks, an angel appearing in the starlit sky, telling the shepherds not to be afraid, that there was good news of great joy for all people. Of course change is ushered into human history and into humanity. And nothing has ever been the same since that very first Christmas Eve.

God became incarnate as a baby boy and time, space, our time and space, indeed, our very lives are transformed. God shook things up and he shakes us up. And as we get older and see more and more of Christmas past, as we wax sentimental and nostalgic, we like the shepherds hear a message: Do not fear! Our God has sent the Good News and as we are transformed so we are to be agents of transformation, bring and sharing the Good News with others in our families, our communities, our world.

The Good News that on this very night we celebrate the arrival of the Good News, our Lord and Savior, the Messiah, he who saves his people, us, from their sins. So as we enjoy our images of Christmases past, as we savor this present Christmas, the angels and shepherds, Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus, as we enjoy the comfort of our traditions and perhaps the start of new traditions, wrap yourselves in Jesus and enjoy the warmth and the love our Messiah has for us.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we relax into the peace that is holy, the peace of Christ which neither time nor change can touch. Merry Christmas!

