

## Christmas Eve 2022

“Peace on earth and good will to all people!” Tonight we celebrate with the angels this good news proclaimed to us by the heavenly host. As I was writing this sermon yesterday, I thought maybe it should start out, “It was a dark and stormy night...” for indeed it was! Without power, by candlelight, next to the wood stove, I also almost felt like I should get out a quill pen, but I had remember to keep the computer charged up before the storm hit! But whether I used a quill pen or modern technology, the message is still the same: this night we sing out with Christians around the world as we proclaim, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come.”

Prayer: Most merciful God, on this holy night, we we ask you to open our hearts to the message of the angels, and like the shepherds, to see the true gift of this night. This we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

We gather this holy night to acknowledge that ancient miracle two millennia ago, when to a poor and humble family, homeless except for the little shelter afforded by that stable roof, a child is born to be the Messiah, the Christ, the savior, to free us all from sin and death. Not the child of the emperor Augustus, not the child of any of the high ranking officials, but a child born to these poor parents is destined to be the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace. Indeed a miracle so unlooked for and unexpected: God with us, God come into our lives, God come into our world.

And this is indeed not only miraculous, but for you and me, for us, my sisters and brothers and for all, this is Good News. God’s grace, God’s amazing grace is now fully present with us and with all in human life. Perhaps the emperor Augustus don’t know it, perhaps all the high officials are unaware as well, But his mother Mary knows, she knows and treasures this and ponders it all in her heart. Surely Joseph knew as well, as he looked on this incredible scene. As if that is not enough, however, soon the word gets around. Good News like this cannot be completely contained in a rude stable, no, the heavenly host proclaim it in their dance among the stars, and specifically, to the shepherds gathered on the hillside, watching over their flocks. In the middle of the night, on an ordinary day, the most extraordinary things happen: the angels tells them not to fear, but that there is. great tidings of Good News: the savior is born and he’s near, laying in a manger in a stable in Bethlehem, Good News with great joy! And the hosts of heaven sing out; Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth, good will to all people. No wonder the shepherds cannot contain themselves and rush to see what has taken place; this Good News, these joyous tidings, this is something you have to see with your own eyes, have to experience for yourself.

And so for you and me here this holy night as well: we too hear this great Good News, these joyous tidings, whether it is for the first time or the fiftieth time, once again by God’s amazing grace the miracle of this Christmas story, the truth of God’s presence with us, is again fully our to see with our own eyes and

experienced by us in the fullness of God's vision and power. This is not looking backward, looking back to a past that is over and done with: no the holy night is just as full of Good News as that night in the City of David lo those many years ago. While our Good Shepherd singers might be outnumbered by the hosts of heaven, I think they hold their own quite well in giving voice in their melodies to the joyous Good News of Jesus's birth that we hear this evening! So for us, having endured a global pandemic, in these uncertain economic times, and at a point where but our own nation and the world are bitterly divided, this Good News comes to us, that God is now present for us, ready to reach out in love to bear us up in the most difficult times. Here now we encounter a Spirit of Love greater than e have ever known, a Spirit of Love to lead us inspired by God's light, a spirit of Love to lift our spirits when they flag, a Spirit of Love to overcome the barriers which may divide us, to knock down the walls that keep us apart and to build the bridges to bring us together.

As most of you are aware, we have spent the last four months here at Good Shepherd engaged in a very thoughtful and intense discernment process, prayerfully determining together how God is calling us to be as the church here in Barre in the next few years, looking to the future in hope nd seeking God's guidance to be faithful in this vision. We have prayed together and talked together through this discernment and in doing so our community is growing stronger. I believe that as we celebrate this Christmas together, God is calling us to live into and become the Beloved Community. Last Christmas Ee I quoted the last Christmas sermon he preached a few months before his tragic assassination. I think this year, again quoting Dr. Martin King, that "Our goal is to create a beloved community, and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives." Now is the time for each one of us, and all of us together, to be the Beloved Community, rejoicing tonight in the presence of Christ in our midst, God come to us and God with us, this is the Christmas gift God is offering us this ear, that we might celebrate together Christmases yet to come, looking to the future and the deepening of God's Spirit of Love, God's amazing grace among us. Thanks be to God on this most holy night and thanks be that tonight we sing along with the angels and shepherds, seeking to live in beloved community because of the birth of Christ, yes, we sing out, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and good will to all people." Amen.