

Christmas, Mass at Dawn December 25, 2009

Readings: Isaiah 62:11-12; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:15-20

Go Away Changed

Merry Christmas! All of our preparations are complete. The presents are all wrapped and some have already been opened. We have had some parties and more await us. It is now a time of peace and joy. And we come here to visit Jesus to give thanks for everything that we have received, especially to thank Him for being willing to humbly take on our human nature and come into the world to save us.

This morning in our gospel we hear how the shepherds responded to the message of the angel as they were out tending their sheep in the middle of the night. The angels had come to them with this message: ***“Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger....Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”***

We hear that the shepherds went in haste to see Jesus, and Mary, and Joseph. The shepherds came, but then they left to go back to the world; to go back to their job of being shepherds. They came and went, but they went away changed. They went away glorifying and praising God. They went away and spread the good news.

We come here this morning like the shepherds did that first Christmas morning, and that is very important. It is important to take time out from our busy lives to come and give thanks to God, to praise Him and give Him glory. But it is also important that we once again go back into the world, back to our jobs and families, glorifying and praising God like the shepherds did. It is good that we come, but it is also important that we go. That is why we give thanks at the end of Mass when we are sent back out into the world. We hear: ***“The Mass is ended. Go now in peace to love and serve the Lord.”*** And we respond: ***“Thanks be to God.”*** We are not, or at least shouldn't be, giving thanks because the Mass is finally over and we can go meet our friends for breakfast. We give thanks because we have the opportunity to spread the good news to all we meet, to witness to what we have seen and heard as the shepherds did.

We come here this morning to participate in this liturgy; to sing hymns, to listen to scripture, to receive the Body of Christ in communion. And hopefully we are changed. Maybe we have heard or learned something new or been touched by the Holy Spirit and now see some element of our faith in a new light. Maybe we are reminded of some message from Jesus that we already knew, but of which we needed to be reminded. Maybe we have simply been recharged and strengthened. But in any case, we are hopefully better prepared to go out once again into the world and be witnesses to Christ.

The angels proclaimed good news to the shepherds. It was good news of great joy and of peace on earth. If we have truly received the good news into our hearts, let us be people of great joy and people of peace; not just toward our families and not just today on Christmas, but to all people throughout the whole year. If we are people of joy and peace, others will notice and we will be able to lead them to the manger and introduce them to

Jesus who came into this world to be their Savior. We have a great message, but we need people to want to hear it. They will be more likely to listen to us if we joyfully offer the message in a spirit of love and peace.

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Deacon Joe Hulway