

## Christmas Day C

“Let’s go now to Bethlehem and see this thing...” Luke 2:15

The story is told of Teddy Roosevelt entertaining guests at his Sagamore Hill estate on Long Island. After a late dinner he invited his guests outside to walk beneath the brilliant nighttime sky. After a silent, reverent stroll Roosevelt said,

"I guess we've been humbled enough now. Let's go inside." And that's what Christmas Day is all about -- about stargazing toward the infinite to be humble in our finiteness.

So in response to the angel chorus and the angel announcement, the simple, rustic, stargazing shepherds said, "Let us go even now into Bethlehem to see this thing that has happened...." And they went inside the stable, and beheld in the manger the inner galaxy -- the interior meaning of the universe. And what did they experience?

Luke tells us they returned "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen...."

The shepherds hear the gospel proclamation of heaven: A savior, who is Christ the Lord has been born to you this day in nearby Bethlehem, the city of David.

A sign is given that is one unlike any would have expected for the Son of God. The sign of a child wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a food crib and it reaffirms:

- there is a God who is with us!
- there is a God whose presence in a child purposefully goes unnoticed! (Identifies with the lowly instead of the powerful)
- God is both almighty yet near enough to come and live among us. It's as if heaven were telling the shepherds, "I will not let you think that in some rare place and privilege, life will achieve it's infinite fulfillment. Here in a lowly place, here in the most ordinary spot on earth, I came to dwell with you. Here and not elsewhere is Emmanuel."

It was in this vein, dwelling with common people, shepherds, fisherman, tax collectors, mothers and fathers, farmers and simple laborers, that Christ would show the world his humanity and godliness. If Jesus life entered this world through a little door, so also it was through little doors that he would go in and out.

That the shepherds had not just witnessed some cosmic spectacle common to their outdoor profession: a shooting star, a comet, or a supernova, is proven by their reaction.

It was not merely, "Let's just check this out after the cattle are fed," but "Let's get there before someone else does!"

They went with haste (as they fed their flocks that night they too would have their souls fed).

They found Mary and Joseph and the child as told. That's all they needed to see. There were no cosmic fireworks. Perhaps today it's so hard for us in 2006 to get very excited about yet another Nativity story. There are no high "tech" wonders to behold. There was no glowing radiate light coming from Jesus face and the halos painted by the great artists of the world around the heads of the holy family. Those halos were just NOT THERE! Their sight of the child was enough and their haste was rewarded with faith that the Lord had come. They were eyewitnesses.

They made known what had been told them – Mary and Joseph and "all who heard" unknown others were there.

They rejoiced and gave glory to God.

They remained true to what had been told them – the story was not embellished nor sensationalized.

Luke in his way of contrasting the characters of his narrative tells us of one different reaction. It's believable too.

Mary had a different reaction than others to the news of the shepherds.

Mary, though young she was not prone to emotional speculations nor ecstatic utterances.

Mary chose to treasure and ponder the mysteries of the gospel proclaimed to the shepherds.

To treasure is to give value to some one or thing because one realizes what one has and the meaning that it holds.

To ponder is “sit” with the truth, think over events, experience their impact on one’s life or others lives.

I ponder how it is that some people never encounter the power of Christ’s Incarnation – that God became man so that we might become God (Irenaeus).

To treasure and ponder what it means for us that God came to the world, to you and me, is for many of us the way that this story of the Nativity comes alive. It is a way for us to gaze at the inner galaxy that God has made within the stable and within our inner life. And when it becomes alive that will incite us “to go and see, to make haste, to find and sit with what we have found in Jesus’ birth, to go make known to others as witnesses of God’s love and rejoice together that God in Christ is truly with us. The journey toward understanding the mystery of the universe now has truly begun! AMEN.