



Advent Vespers Devotional 2020

Wednesday, December 23
Luke 2:15-20

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

It is very difficult to make sense of this passage without looking at the verses that precede it, verses 8-14, in which an angel tells the shepherds that the Savior – for whom they have been waiting – has been born. This news is both what prompted the shepherds to say, “let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place” and what they “made known,” that is, what Mary treasured and pondered in her heart. A newborn baby, of humble means, is certainly not the Savior, the Messiah, the people of Israel were hoping or expecting to come. Yet, the shepherds returned to their flocks, praising God.

This year – 2020 – has been marked by the intersecting horrors of a global pandemic, rampant racial injustice, and the escalating climate crisis, a far cry from the good news of the second chapter of Luke. But this reality has forced us to pay attention. Over and over again, we have been called to “go now...and see this thing that has taken place,” to listen to unexpected voices, prophetic voices on the margins, and to hold their words in our hearts. George Floyd’s agonizing cry, “I can’t breathe,” simultaneously proclaims Black Lives Matter and evokes images of creation choking on the thick smoke of forest fires in the Pacific Northwest and loved ones dying alone, isolated in ICUs, of Covid-19. I will not praise or glorify God for these atrocities. I will not look for a ‘silver lining’ or a providential plan. But I will return from all that I have seen and heard, and amplify what has been told to me.

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