

## INI

Luke 2,1-20

Christmas Eve & Day 2015 — 24-25 January 2015

**Greeting:** To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Christmas Gospel According to St. Luke, which was read earlier:

And, lo, the Angel of the LORD came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. <sup>10</sup> And the Angel said unto them, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

**So far the reading. Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Introduction:** Do you ever wonder what those shepherds were thinking when they heard the angels say,

you shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.?

Were I one of those shepherds, I would probably be thinking, “Really? And what kind of directions are those?”

Granted, Bethlehem was a small village, no walls in New Testament times, and its population as well as that of the surrounding

area was probably around one thousand people. But even in a small town, are those the clearest directions one would want?

It wasn't the same for the Magi from the East, who came a bit later – from them God provided a star which led them directly to Jesus.

And it wasn't the same as we see depicted in Christian art. If you look at the pictures in the bulletin that depict the Holy Family – that's Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Joseph – as well as the angels, you'll notice that they all have halos over their heads. If they really had halos, finding the baby Jesus would have been pretty simple. The angels could have said, "Look for the family with the new born Child, all of whom have halos."

But it wasn't like that, was it? It was,

you shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

This brings me to my sermon theme for today, "**No Halo For Jesus.**" I'll develop this theme in two parts:

- 1) What If Jesus Had A Halo?** and
- 2) No Halo For Jesus**

**1) What If Jesus Had A Halo?** We may be so used to seeing Jesus, angels, and various saints shown with halos over their heads, that we probably do not give it a second thought. After all, in the typical manger scene the only ones not having halos are the Wise Men, the shepherds, and of course various sheep, cows, goats, camels, and any other critters that may be in the background.

Halos were used in pagan iconography and depicted an aura around someone's head and indicated that the person was special or had

some connection to the divine. Christian artists soon took this up, but then only gave halos to people who really were special – of course their definition of “special” expanded so it included people who were considered by the Early Church to be saints.

But on that first Christmas, while the angels seemingly did not wear halos, they were bathed in heavenly light and splendor. Luke records that the “glory of the Lord shone round about them.”

That glory bathed the shepherds who were in the fields watching their sheep. We are not given the reaction of the sheep. We might think that the reaction of the shepherds would have been joy and excitement at this heavenly appearance of angels. Well, we might think that, but if we thought that way we’d be wrong.

The reaction of the shepherds is simply stated: “they were sore afraid.” Scared out of their wits would be more like it.

Throughout the Scriptures, that pretty well sums up the reaction of humans when confronted by God’s splendor and glory. In a word: fear.

Isaiah had that experience as he was taken up in a vision to God’s throne. He said,

“Woe is me! I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” (Isaiah 6,5)

God’s glory exposes our sin and makes us afraid of His judgment. That’s why Isaiah was afraid. That’s why the shepherds were afraid.

What if Jesus had a halo? That halo would be a reflection of God’s glory. It would make people shrink away in fear. It would mark Jesus as not-quite-human.

But thank God, that is not the way the Scriptures depict Jesus. From Jesus' birth in Bethlehem to His crucifixion and death, the Scriptures show us that there is:

**2) No Halo For Jesus.** In spite of countless, well-meaning artists throughout the ages, we do not have a Savior who has a halo.

Paul tells us about why Jesus was born in Bethlehem:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,<sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Ephesians 4,4-5)

Nothing special here. “Born of a woman,” just like any other birth. “Born under the Law,” to show us that He was not exempt from God's Law. “So that He might redeem those who were under the Law,” to show us that from the very conception of Jesus in the Virgin's womb, His mission was a mission of salvation, of redemption for all who would be otherwise condemned by the law.

In all of this, there can be no halo. There can be nothing that would set apart Jesus from humanity – that's us! Thus the divine takes on human flesh, but humbles Himself in the form of a servant. Again we hear Paul,

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a Cross (Philippians 2,5-9)

From Cradle to Cross, Jesus lived out His life in deepest humility

for us.

Many times we wish to sentimentalize Jesus' humility. Look at poor Jesus. Born in a manger because there was no room in the inn. Laid in a feeding trough – you know, I bet that wouldn't meet crib safety standards of today – poor Jesus. And of course, every charity then tries to play on our heart strings at this time of year to think homeless, the poor, the underprivileged, the toyless, the wish deprived, you name it. None of that is necessarily bad, but if we only think about it one day a year or one season a year, we've missed the point.

In his book, *Jesus Through the Centuries*, Jaroslav Pelikan comments on a sentimental approach to the Baby Jesus and to Luther's reaction. We hear: To hearers who cooed sentimentally over the infant Jesus and clucked over his poverty, "If only I had been there! How quick I would have been to help the baby!" Luther retorted: "Why don't you do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor."

Where do we first find the face of Jesus? Look in the mirror. Then look at our neighbor! Our spouse. Our parents. Our children.

It's true that at times it is difficult to get close. It isn't because of the glory of God, but because of the sin we see. Perhaps we see it in ourselves. Perhaps we see it in our neighbor. But when we see sin, we should also see the face of Jesus. This is the face that invites us to forgive even as we have been forgiven.

This is the meaning of Christmas. Love. Love of God for us in Christ. This is the forgiveness that works 365 days a year—or at least it should. This is tough. This is the love that forgives, and it forgives in the good times as well as the bad.

**Conclusion:** God's glory is manifested in two ways. We can see the

brightness of angels which reflect the glory of God. The reaction is invariably one of fear. That is why the angels have to say, “Fear Not.”

But the glory of God is also revealed in another, more inviting way. It is the glory of Christ, who veiled His Godhead so that we might not be afraid. No halo here.

That Jesus led a life of humiliation is much, much more than having been born in poor circumstances. This humiliation was an act of love. He veiled the glory of God. This is more than superman going into a phone booth and emerging as Clark Kent, mild mannered reporter. This is a conscious decision that God would get close to us. That He would be pleased to dwell with us. That He would be pleased to go to the Cross and die for us. That He would be pleased to forgive us. No halo would separate us from God’s love to us in Christ.

And being forgiven we might live with Him and for Him. We are not afraid to come to the foot of the feeding trough in Bethlehem to see the haloless Baby Jesus, nor are we afraid to come to the foot of the Cross. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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