

Lighten Our Darkness

Luke 2:1-20

The Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Eve

Analysis by Michael Hoy

1In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

15When 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.” 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

DIAGNOSIS: Living in the Dark

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) “*Night Life*”

This Christmas narrative is all about life. But what kind of life? Life under imperial decrees that send people here and there (like Joseph and Mary). Life that is born in the midst of ever-changing world events. Life of those who live out doors, like the shepherds in the fields. But all of these life stories take place in the midst of a great deal of darkness – “by night.” That’s also where our life story begins. We live in the dark of night, no matter how bright we might think our days might be.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) “*Fear*”

The problem with this night-life becomes clearer when our fear is aroused. Can we really count all the ways that we are a fearful people? Oh sure, we seek to put on a good show externally. Nothing, we think, can make us too afraid or frighten us. Fearful where we might find lodging

or even a birth place when there are no rooms available. Fearful of what dangers might come calling in all that is out there in the world, or in the fields and hillsides. However much we seek to keep these fears under wraps, hidden, buried within ourselves, we do not recognize, or believe, how much we are buried in fear.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) “Exposed”

What brings fear to the shepherds is not even all that dark. It is when the glory shines upon them that we hear of their fear. What is it they are afraid of? The same that we are most afraid of – of being exposed! Of having our life and all its truth laid bare in an instant, in a twinkling of an eye. We are unable to get away with it any more. There is no impunity. There is no escape from the deep dark truth of our sin. And no one is exempt. Not even politicians and power-brokers, however much they try to avoid it. All fear the penetrating light of personal and public exposure – not only before others, but before God. Yet God comes nonetheless (perhaps even in some messenger in our daily life) to expose our fear and our deep darkness within. There is no more hiding in the dark.

PROGNOSIS: Living in the Light

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) “Good News for All People”

But the “good news” starts with a bold acclamation from one promising messenger to call us beyond our fears. “Do not be afraid;... I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David as a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord!” Note the magnificent titles of this good-news birth: “Savior” – one who can save us and all of creation from the damaging truth of our sins – at great cost! for his path would lead through the darkness to the cross; Messiah – one who has power to overcome all principalities and powers of darkness; Lord – one who graciously transfers us into his new ownership, with all its rights and privileges. This is indeed good news – and not only for us, but for “all the people.”

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) “Seeing = Trusting”

This promising messenger also says, “see!” There is sight even in the midst of darkness! This promising cry comes not only as a command of God, but as the literal sight of the One who comes for us – and *how* he came! He comes in all humility, a child, a baby, a babe! The Humble One comes to bring peace and reconciliation with God. He is not ashamed of our own humility and darkness, but comes to welcome outcasts and to make somebodies out of nobodies.

Seeing is believing, trusting, this humble Child!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) “The Sound of Praise!”

Now in the darkness of night a new sound erupts over the silent realm of fear. The shepherds go out shouting, praising God! “Your night is over! Now is the light of promise and grace! For you, for you, for you.... For all people, everywhere, wherever darkness would seek to keep you bound! You are loved with the light, the grace, the peace of the Christ, who has come to bring good news of great joy for all the people!” No power of darkness can stop that singing, nor fear dampen its joy! It lives, this light, within and without – pondered and treasured ... and for all!