

Christmas Day 2016 - Rev. C. Bosch

Christmas Light

Today is Christmas, 2016. 2016, A.D. “Anno Domini”, that is, “In the year of the Lord”. I know, this way of reckoning time, in terms of the birth of Jesus Christ, is rapidly falling out of favor. Today it is becoming more popular to designate years as belonging to “C.E.” or, “*Common Era*” or, BCE, “*Before the Common Era*.”

Why that change? Because there are those who prefer terms that do not explicitly make religious references. Even the term Christmas itself is falling out of favor by those who want to dismiss any and all suggestions that Christmas is a Christian celebration.

Yet we will not, must not, try to remove the celebration of *Christ’s* birth out of the history of mankind. For it remains, a most joyous, glad tidings that ought to enrich our lives and bring the news of true light and life home to us.

The story of Jesus’ birth is found in the bible and I would specifically call our attention to what the writer Luke says about it in chapter two of his gospel.

There we read, (I’m looking at ch. 2: 8 and following, -

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby (that is, to the town of Bethlehem) keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified . But the angel said to them, “ Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people...

Surely this “glory of the Lord” which shone around these lowly shepherds must have been a brilliant, magnificent light! For God himself lives in what the apostle Paul calls, “ *Unapproachable light*” in his first letter to Timothy ch. 6:16.

It was as if God in heaven suddenly switched on His lights below, to dispel the darkness found in that field. It meant light, and even life, as well, for a world which for centuries had lain, “ *In sin and error pining*”.¹

It is true, God’s glory had been displayed prior to that eventful night in Ephratha’s fields. Think only of Moses at the bush which looked to be on fire when the angel of the Lord appeared to him from within that bush. (Exodus 3:2). Think as well when God’s glory came down to fill the tabernacle, Israel’s place of worship prior to the building of the temple. Then not even Moses had been able to enter it because he could not stand in the brilliant light of this glory.²

¹ see these lyrics in “O Holy Night”

² To use the words of the late Rev. Clarence Stam in Celebrating Salvation p. 30

What did it mean but that on this night the glory of God had come very close to people. So close that it surrounded, we could say embraced, them. Never before had this happened in this way. But here, with the impending announcement of the birth of Jesus, the Light of the world, God was moving on in the history of salvation, making something new!

Here was an angel of the Lord, a messenger and ministering spirit . And just like that those shepherds share in that kind of glory normally seen only by angels.

Is it any wonder that the shepherds were filled with great, even *mega fear* as the original words in Greek indicate. Such fear must have overwhelmed them as it gripped their hearts and minds. No, this wasn't such a "*Silent night*" when "*All is calm*" after all. Neither the shepherds, no doubt in shock, nor the world at large, in the grip of Rom'e dictatorship *were at ease*.

Yet consider the brightness! A brightness like no other. One which signalled that God had come down to dwell with us. God in his grace was making known to a select group of shepherds the birth of his Son, the Savior of the world.

God did not leave it at the appearance of this *one* angel for very soon , says Luke " *A great company of the heavenly host* "appeared singing a Christmas carol produced in heaven itself. "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people on whom his favor rests.*" (Luke 2: 14.

Dear listeners, here was God, “ *Melting the clouds of sin and sadness, driving the dark of doubt away*”. He the “Giver of immortal gladness, ” *filling us with the light of day.*”³ Filling the hearts of those shepherds with *mega-joy*⁴ As God would fill the hearts of millions of others, right into today with similar joy.

That you and I might know of the forgiveness of our sins by the death of this same Jesus, on Calvary’s cross That people might be drawn away from the gates of hell to know the joy of belonging to Jesus Christ.

That’s why the angel said, “ Fear not!” It was, and is, not a time to fear and flee from the light. The shepherds, shortly after realized this as they decided to go to Bethlehem and to see the Christ child. (v. 15).

O it is so, that even then people, even many people, loved the darkness rather than the light. The apostle John wrote about this in ch. 3 of his gospel when he said, “ *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*” (v. 19).

This while John had just spoken about that stupefying love of God for the world, in which he *sent his One and Only Son that*

³ From the hymn by Henry J. vanDyke, “ Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee.”

⁴ Cl Stam again, p. 32

whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
(John 3:16).

We mustn't take this gift of Jesus lightly for his coming into the world and dying for sin was a costly affair. Already at birth something of the weight of our sin was already pressing upon him. He was born *in darkness*, the darkness of a manger in what might have been a cattle shed in a cave. He entered the human race, which needed him to become a slave, a servant who would give his life in a bitter and shameful death. Talk about *mega fear*. We may remember that later, when he was on the way to the cross, in the garden of Gethsemane, he sweated drops of blood. For he saw the enormity of being forsaken by his Father looming, now very close by.

O yes, later on he would allow some a glimpse of his glory.
(Matthew 17) When the martyr Stephen gave his testimony before the Jewish council and a short time later was cruelly stoned to death he was given the privilege of looking into heaven. There he saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55)

“But” you might say, “*That was then*”. “Where is the light today, outside of those globes of light on a few million trees and on the homes in your neighborhood? Though even those appear to be temporary and need periodic replacement.

O but wait, Jesus Christ is alive today and he is and remains the *Light of the world*. He died but was raised and returned to his glorious home in heaven, but He saw to it that His Holy Spirit was poured out on his church. He left us His Word, which is filled, not only with the knowledge of the universality of people's dark sins. It is the life-giving, light bearing news of salvation and the return of Jesus on the clouds of heaven.

The question is, how will you and I not only celebrate Christmas today and tomorrow? But do we, will we, live in the expectation of Christ's coming? Will we be full of that contagious, joy that characterizes a true Christian's life. Will we be seen to walk in the light of Jesus Christ? The light of his Word. May it be that we will be found singing, rejoicing, often "glorifying and praising God for the great news that Christ Jesus lives and reigns. With the same eager joy and thanksgiving that characterized the life of those shepherds when they returned from seeing the baby Jesus in the manger.

That humble joy must keep us singing and giving thanks even as we join the church of Christ as she prays, "*Maranatha, come Lord Jesus*".

Amen, and thank you so much for listening.

