Dec. 24, 2017 (evening) Birth of Jesus Luke 2:1-14 [15- 20] (Psalm 96:7-10) Liturgical color: White

PRAYER OF THE DAY Holy Father, We celebrate with you the birth of your son, and together we sing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill among people!” Amen.

HYMNS Silent night, holy night ELW 281, H82 111, UMH 239, NCH 134 Away in a manger ELW 277, 278, H82 101, UMH 217, NCH 124 Joy to the world ELW 267, H82 100, UMH 246 CHORAL While by my sheep, (trad. Ger.)

{Ask to borrow Robin’s deck the halls hat?}

Psalm: Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.

9 Worship the LORD in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.

10 Say among the nations, "The LORD is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity."

This passage starts with a heavy, burdensome reality; but it does not stop there… nor shall we… listen beyond the familiar for the surprising grace of God!

We start with a society that is oppressed, burdened with making ends meet. So when the Emperor makes a decree about taxes, we are told that ALL went to be registered. Falling obediently into line, including Joseph. Even when falling into obedient lines… is at great cost and inconvenience! Joseph goes, with Mary who is very pregnant… if you have ever travelled with someone who is very pregnant and expecting to give birth at any time… you can begin to understand the anxiety that went along with the burden of travelling through the dry, rocky hills from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

Contrast that travel with the Shepherds, who seem not to go anywhere! In fact, maybe they don’t even go home! They are living in the fields… I wonder if they were supposed to register, or if they didn’t count… of if they were already in their ancestral town… but for whatever reason, they are not on the move… the shepherds are likely surrounding their flock, the gate protecting the sheep from the dangers of the night. And then suddenly those shepherds are surrounded by angelic shepherds, who terrify the shepherds, yet protect them at the same time, One proclaims ‘Do not fear’… I AM bringing you good news of Great Joy! (Quite the opposite of the news Emperor Augustus brought!) This Good news came to the shepherds! This good news of great joy. And it was not only for the shepherds… it was for All the people under the stars… in fact for all people as numerous as the stars.

**To** you is born A Savior… curious isn’t it? The baby Savior is not born to Mary… nor is he born to Joseph of the house and line of King David… the savior is not born to the angels either! The Savior is born TO those poor, smelly, shepherds sleeping on the ground, fearful in the dark. God’s word came TO these folks and their flocks.

God with us, was on the move, God with us fell obediently into line… even when it was inconvenient… obedient even to death on a cross. God on the move, so that there is good news to exclaim in the darkness of life. So take a moment to not be afraid, take a moment to lay down any doubts, take a moment to gently place any grief in God’s hands, and take a moment to be overcome by the Light that no darkness can overcome. Light as tiny as a far away star… and let it start there as small twinkling, joy, growing closer as contentment, wholeness, breath-in the fragrances around you here in this family of God, this community of faith…

Let the contentment grow into delight as you appreciate the beauty of the lights on the trees, and pews, the decorations, remember a recent moment of laughter, a moment of wonder like a child placing an ornament on a tree… or wiping away a tear from a face…

Let joy grow with the anticipation of singing with a full voice and eating until full; and drinking-up {the Word of God, the Living Water} until full! *{hat on and dancing if available}*

And suddenly the light is not so tiny and far away as a star in the night sky… no now, the Glory of God has come close and we can be absolutey giddy with joy. The Light of the World, is as close as a newborn baby… FULL of grace and truth… fully Good news… of Great Joy… for ALL people, for you and for me…

That bright morning star has come to us, come for us… and will even die to protect us from all darkness and dangers… no matter how taxing it is to protect ALL of humanity. Breathe deeply, be filled with wonder and joy… then go ahead, overflow and pour-out the good news of great joy…

God has come to us, so that we may go to others as witnesses, singing Joy to the world, the LORD has come!