

SIGNS OF THE LORD'S BIRTH

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“And this will be the sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12).

Read: Luke 2:1-20.

In the hill country of Judea, near the town of Bethlehem, the shepherds were watching over their flocks by night, guarding them against wild beasts or evil people who might come to steal or kill. Suddenly, they saw a strange and beautiful light shining through the darkness and, even as they fell down upon the ground in fear wondering what this light might mean, behold, an angel stood before them in shining garments, who said: “Do not be afraid.... For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:10-12). And suddenly the shepherds saw a great company of angels, and heard them singing a song of great joy because the Lord was born: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!”

As the song died away, the light gradually faded, the angels disappeared, and the shepherds found themselves once more in the darkness of the Judean night. But they were filled with a great longing to find the Lord, and so they said: “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15). They went quickly, and, as they drew near to the village—where nearly everyone was asleep, because it was so late at night—they saw a light shining in a stable. Looking in, they saw Joseph and Mary, and there, lying in a manger—even as the angel had said—was the infant Lord.

When the Lord was born, He looked just like other little babies, and the shepherds would not have known that it was the Lord unless the angel had given them a sign. This sign was not given to everyone. The reason for this was that there were many evil people in the world who, if they had known that the Lord had been born, would have sought to do Him harm—even as Herod did. Because of this, only those who loved the Lord—the shepherds and the wise men—could be given a sign by which they might recognize Him. The sign given to the shepherds was that He would be found “wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” The sign given to the wise men was that a new and wonderful star appeared in the east, going before them until it “came and stood over where the young Child was” (Matthew 2:9).

Things that are precious must be protected. We wrap them up, we put them into a strong box or in a locked room. Only those who have a key can open the door and find the precious things. Nothing could be more precious than the infant Savior who was born that first Christmas. He

came to save all people from the power of hell, to bring peace and joy on earth and everlasting happiness in heaven. But because there were many who loved what was evil and hated the Lord, He came in secret. He was born in the middle of the night, when those who might wish to do Him harm were asleep. And He came in the form of a little Child, just like other children, so that no one could tell who He was. It was as if He was locked away in a safe and secret place; only the shepherds and the wise men were given keys in order that they might find Him. These keys were the signs of which the angel spoke—the fact that He would be found in a stable, lying in a manger—and the star that led the way for the wise men.

This all happened long ago. But it also happens now. The Lord is with us, always. He sees and knows everything we do. He watches over us, protects us, and gives us all that we need to preserve our lives and make us happy. Yet we do not see Him, unless we are given a sign by which we may know Him. And this sign is not given to us unless we love Him, lest we should do Him harm. Of course, we could not really injure the Lord; no one can do this. However, if we try to injure Him, we really injure ourselves, closing our hearts against the Lord so that He cannot give us the joy and blessedness of heaven.

If we wish to find the Lord we must be like the shepherds who watched over their flocks by night. We must love what is good and true, especially the Lord's Word and everything else that is holy. We watch over these things lest evil thoughts and evil delights come and snatch them away from us, like wild beasts can snatch sheep in the night. We must do this because we love the Lord and want Him to lead us and teach us. The Lord knows what is in our hearts. If He sees the desire to protect what is holy, then He knows that we will not be like the wicked king Herod who sought to do the Lord harm, but instead like the shepherds to whom He could give the key—the sign by which they could find Him.

If you are good shepherds of the holy things in your mind from the Word, the Lord can send His angels to give you the sign of His coming. The Lord comes to us in a very simple way. Because He is a great King—the creator of the world, the ruler of heaven and earth—we are apt to look for Him to appear with power and glory, clothed in purple and gold and jewels, living in a gorgeous palace. But He comes as a little child, in a lowly stable, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. He comes to us in the simple things that we learned as children in the stories in the Word. For the Lord is present in the Word. At first we may not see Him there. We may see only the stories and know that they tell us about Him. But, if we love those stories, and long to see the Lord, then over time we will come to see the Lord within them, clearly, like a baby in a manger.

This is why the stories of the Word are our most precious possessions. Keep them present in your minds and hearts, not only on Christmas day, but all through the year, so that you may be among those to receive a sign, like those given to the shepherds and the wise men, by which they found the Lord.