

## The Day After Christmas

'Twas the day after Christmas and all through the house  
Not a creature was stirring, not even the mouse  
The stockings were empty, the Christmas tree bare  
For jolly St. Nicolas had already been there.  
The family was bushed and thoroughly beat  
Collapsed from exhaustion and too much to eat  
The dishes were stacked in a heap in the sink  
for attempting to do them was just too much to think  
Roloids were handy for pains most distressing  
from belly's stuffed full of roast turkey and dressing *and cranberry  
sauce, pickles, nuts, candy and pie - to mention just a few*  
The relief that was marked on two or three faces  
Was sign that the relatives had returned to their places  
And as they dozed off one was heard to exclaim  
"Boy and I glad that's done for another whole year."

That indeed may reflect our feelings on the day after Christmas. As we wrap up the Christmas season there is a certain sense of relief after all of the intensity, the extra work, the many things to do, that seem to come with this time of year.

But there also comes an inevitable let-down and sense of loss, even depression and disillusionment.

We journey towards Christmas with anticipation and excitement - even as the Shepherds went to Bethlehem - with haste

And the celebration itself - the special services, the music, the lights, the gathering of family, the gifts and the feasting - all lift our spirits,

And In the midst of all this warmth and glow we are at times inclined to feel as if the world has changed, that peace, goodwill, joy and charity have indeed found their place in the heart of humanity.

But then the celebrations end, the tree comes down and we find ourselves back in the ordinary world where no angels sing  
where there is little glory to God  
certainly no peace on earth  
and good will is a scarce commodity.

- The children still bug us about the same things,
- the neighbors take down their tree and up goes the same wall of cold isolation,
- the carolers go home and no one calls again for another year
- the problems at work are still the same
- parents still don't understand
- and teachers haven't learned anything about compassion over the Christmas break.
- We are burdened with the same aches and pains of body and soul

So it becomes necessary on the Day after Christmas to leave the festival and begin the road back to the places where we live out our daily lives

And that is the question and focus of our time together this morning: How do we journey after Christmas -in the routines of home, work school, in the places where our bodies do not always work, where relationships are fraught with danger, where there is no star in the sky, no angel choirs, where wise men are in short supply and Herod is still very much on the throne?

At the conclusion of the Christmas story in Luke's gospel, we read how the shepherds and Mary responded after the momentous event of the birth of Christ and these verses give us some clues as to how take up the Journey on the Day after Christmas:

We read in Luke 2: 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

In these brief verses we can see

*A Journey Outward to the world that God loves and for which Christ came and died*

*A Journey Inward - Mary pondering these things in her heart*

*A Journey Upward - glorifying and praising God in a life lived of the Father's love begotten, by the Spirit, for the Glory of the Lord.*

Evangelizing: Everywhere All the Time

*A Journey Outward to the world that God loves and for which Christ came and died*

“When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”

And they had good reason to be amazed. The shepherds had witnessed a night unlike anything in their previous experience - They glory of the Lord shining down on them, an angel proclaiming good tidings of great joy for all people, followed by a heavenly choir singing “Glory to God in the highest” and then - in a stable in Bethlehem - they actually met the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Now, not only had they heard the angels story, but they had a personal story to tell - not a theory, not a theology but their own story of God's intervention and disclosure in their lives.

and the magnitude of what they experienced compelled them to spontaneously spread the good tidings of great joy to all people.

**When they had seen him**, they spread the word concerning **what had been told them** about this child,

My friends, like the shepherds, we have also been to “Bethlehem.” Understood and entered into correctly, this season past is not simply a tradition or religious observance: rather it is an **encounter** with God and the truth about God which impacts our lives for mission.

All of the music, the celebrations of Christmas are not given to us for our own personal consumption and enjoyment, but rather they serve as a re-commissioning for our Journey outward into the world which God loves, into which Christ came and for which died.

There is an amazing story in the Old Testament in the Book of II Kings. We read that the city of Samaria had been besieged by the Aramean army and the siege had gone on for so long that no food remained in the city.

People were dying and those who remained were reduced to the most inhumane practices in order to attempt to survive. You can read the gory details for yourself.

We are told in this story that there were four men who were afflicted with the highly contagious disease of leprosy which meant their exclusion from general society. They were outcasts and were forced to sit outside the city gate. And in their desperation, they said among themselves.

“Look, if try to go into the city, we will die, if we stay here, we’re going to die along with everyone else.

So let’s go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die.”

So they took the gamble, but when they arrived at the Aramean encampment, they found no one there - absolutely everyone had fled. So they quickly helped themselves to the food and were in the middle of having a great feast when one of them said,

“Wait a moment. What we’re doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. Let’s go at once and report this to the royal palace.” Which is what they did.

This is a day of good news. Let us go at once and report it.

Because we have been to Bethlehem it is our calling to speak the truth of God through our words and our very lives into the fabric of lies and deceit which surrounds us

Because we have experienced redeeming love from a gracious heavenly father we have the awesome privilege and responsibility to display that love and grace in our words and in our lives into our world.

As Christ becomes incarnate and lives within us, then we carry the life of Christ and the character of Christ with us into all of the places and to all of the people with whom we interact on a daily basis. And that is good news; it is very good news for them.

This past month I learned a bit of Latin. Do any of you recognize this?

## EVANGELII GAUDIUM

This is the title of Pope Francis’ personal mission statement and message to Christians everywhere. It is titled “The joy of The gospel.”

What about this Latin: “evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum.” This is the Latin version of the message of the angel: “good news of great joy.”

The common words are “Evangelize” and “joy.”

All too often Christian message has been presented in terms of condemnation rather than salvation, of guilt rather than grace  
And all too often Christians themselves have backed up this dismal message with lives that are self-centered, small and joyless.  
The message and the messengers have been anything but good news.

But the message of the angels which is so wonderfully echoed by Pope Francis calls us to be joyful representatives of good news in our world - that’s what it means to evangelize - to carry good news - like the shepherds - everywhere, all the time, in the character of our living and the character of our speaking.

So, as we take up the journey outward into our world on the day after Christmas, the great day of Good News, we ask ourselves the question: Am I good news - everywhere, all the time?

Our next song is a prayer which helps us answer that question. “As With Gladness Men of Old”.

### **Pondering**

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

Mary had just come through the most confusing and overwhelming set of experiences in her entire life. The angel visit, a highly unusual conception, Joseph’s initial response to her pregnancy and then his change of heart, the strange but marvelous greeting of her cousin Elizabeth, the birth in a stable and the visit by the shepherds . Now it was time to stop and ponder. To contemplate what all of this meant for her - but more importantly for the Child who had just been born. Mary pondered.

I’m sure it comes as no news to you when I observe that the culture and environment in which we live is not given to pondering. In fact it is just the opposite. By way of illustration, social media like Twitter and Facebook are not about pondering. They are purveyors and even encouragers of instant expression, saying whatever occurs to one at the moment. And the consequences of this flash, global communication consistently show up in terms of emotional damage, loss of careers, even suicides. Words hastily posted necessitate apologies which are then followed up by apologies for the apology.

We are a fast-paced people whose highest good seems to be keeping busy - after all, don’t we frequently ask one another in our small talk, “Are you keeping busy?” Multi-tasking, radical connectivity and instant gratification are the currency of our time. Hardly the ingredients of pondering, much less thoughtful, reflective and intentional living.

But a healthy and successful transition from the intense, mountain top experiences of Christmas back into the routines of every day life, require that we step aside from the

rush and pressure of life and take time, like Mary, to ponder before rushing off to the next item on our “to do” list.

It is important to take time to internalize great experiences such as Christmas in order to integrate them into our lives in ways that will shape our Journey from here on.

To treasure them and hold them close so that their significance does not just pass us by.

So, this morning, rather than talking a lot about pondering, I invite you, even here and now. take a few moments to do some pondering.

Let’s disconnect our minds for a new moments from what we have to do next

And think back about what we have seen and heard on our journey to Bethlehem. Think, for example, about the words you’ve been singing:

“O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant” *to what extent to those 3 things characterize my life?*

“O come to my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for thee.” *How much room is there in my heart, in my life for Jesus?*

Ask yourself - “So what? As I wrap up Christmas for another year and journey back into the world what difference does my journey to Bethlehem make?”

### Praising God

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

There was no doubt in the minds of those shepherds that God had intervened in their lives in an awesome and magnificent way. They were mindful of origin of the angel choirs and the nature of the baby in the manger - the Savior who is Christ the Lord. And so they gave glory and praise to God. We’re not told exactly how they did that. Did they burst forth into joyous song? Were they shouting out exclamations of worship? Did they recite Psalms like 103 “Praise the Lord O my soul all my inmost being praise his holy name.”?

We can only speculate about what form their praise may have taken but whatever it was, as they journeyed from Bethlehem back to their flocks, it was a journey that had an upward dimension as they directed praise and glory towards God who had so blessed them with his grace and favor.

Today we find ourselves on that same journey - the journey away from the glories of Christmas back to the daily routines and stuff of our daily lives. And part of that journey from Bethlehem is the journey upward. A journey that is undertaken in constant reference to God. It is a journey that recognizes that all things come from God as the source of life and that all of life is lived in His presence and for Him. This is the upward Journey - the journey of giving praise and glory to God.

This is something we regularly do together as a congregation.

During the Christmas season, here in this place we have joined our voices with the heavenly host singing Glory to God in the highest. We have been inspired through drama, word and song with the story of Christmas. We have sung our hearts out with the songs that we love;

    songs which touch our hearts with truth and meaning;

        songs which have the power in their music and words to convey rich  
        praise and adoration to God.

But our corporate praise doesn't end with the conclusion of Christmas. We will be here again, the Lord willing, next Sunday, and the next and we will continue to join our voices in giving glory to God and celebrating his mighty saving works in salvation history and the grace that we've received.

And it is in the uniting of our voices in praise that we not only speak the truth about God to one another but with one voice we give praise and glory to God. And what a joy, what a blessing it is to hear one another's voices and to know that we are joining together from all of our individual personalities, tastes, preferences, experiences and personal histories for the one purpose of giving glory to God.

That's one reason, among many others, why we need to be here consistently.

But we only do that for about an hour each week. We also praise and glorify God in our hearts. Here we are speaking about a frame of mind, a life posture or an attitude in which we live daily in reference to God - an upward orientation.

It is the attitude of heart and mind which acknowledges God as the creator of all things, as the one who has ordered both the physical cosmos and the moral cosmos.

The upward orientation is living in the reality that God is **ever** and **everywhere** present and active in our lives.

And finally, this upward orientation of the heart acknowledges Jesus as Lord - not just as a title - but as Lord of our lives, and ourselves as His servants engaged in implementing His purpose for us and for the world in which we live daily.

It is this consistent attitude of heart in our daily lives which we bring to our corporate worship and which gives it its meaning for without that upward orientation all our singing is only empty noise.

This upward posture of our heart finds expression not only in the acts of corporate worship but in the living out the stuff of daily life. This brings us to the heart of the matter. For the true manner of giving praise and glory to God is through the living of our lives in ways which reflect the character of God and which further the purposes of God in the world. That is the worship that God seeks. That is how we praise and glorify God.

When our living does not worship God, then our efforts at worshipping God on Sunday not only completely fail to impress God, but they call down His judgment. Such was the case with the worship patterns of people of Israel at one point in their history about which God declared, through the prophet Amos, (5:21)

“I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
your assemblies are a stench to me.  
Take away the noise of your songs!  
I will not listen to the music of your harps. Amos, (5:21)

But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5:24

God’s word is clear. The true worship which God seeks is not found in meetings - as important as they are - but in lives which show the deeds of justice, mercy, kindness and compassion.

God is glorified when we share our food with the hungry, give shelter to the wanderers and clothing the naked.

True worship happens when we care for the orphans, the widows, the suffering and the dying.

We praise and glorify God when our lives show the character of Jesus,  
and when we fulfill the purpose of God  
for the world that God loves and for which Christ died.

That is the true worship which God seeks and this is how we journey on the day after Christmas - praising and glorifying God.

And so, our challenge on the Day after Christmas is to carry the spirit of this blessed season into the world - in January, June October

The road back to the ordinary is not an easy one  
but as we go telling, remembering, and praising  
the glory of Christmas will indeed be extended beyond this season to every aspect of our very every day lives

and wherever sins and sorrows grow, where thorns infest the ground may we joyfully proclaim “Good news to the World, the Lord has come.”

### **Closing Words**

And it came to pass on the day after Christmas that the people of EBIC journeyed back to their homes and places of work and school telling everyone what they had seen and heard as God had spoken to them through His word, and they treasured these things in their hearts, thoughtfully reflecting on their meaning. And everywhere they went and in everything they did they gave praise and glory to God for all that they had seen and heard just as it had been told to them.

