

### Christmas Eve Message: 1 Timothy 3:16

[Verses from Luther's hymn: "From heaven above to earth I come" are part of the message, and can be sung. The 'Christmas Creed' emphasises what we celebrate once more at this time of year.]

*Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith: Christ appeared in the flesh and was shown to be righteous by the Spirit. He was seen by angels and was announced to the nations. He was believed on in the world and was taken up in glory.*

A great mystery - something which had not been known before - was revealed on that first Christmas. It was not made known to wise men - they would probably have spent many hours thinking about and debating this news. It was not revealed to the religious leaders - they might have decided that it is not theologically possible for this to happen. So God revealed his Good News to shepherds sitting outside in the darkness. Suddenly a bright light surrounded them, as God let them in on His wonderful news, by the angel who appears to give them his message:

*From heaven above to earth I come To bring good news to everyone! Glad tidings of great joy I bring To all the world and gladly sing:*

Good news, glad tidings of great joy - in Bethlehem! How could that be, as Bethlehem stood in the shadow of King Herod's mighty fortress palace. The shadow of his cruel power lay over the town like a dark cloud. In the midst of this darkness, at a time when the power of Rome once again brought hardship to many who had to travel to the places of their birth, to places where there was no room for the many to stay, the angel calls out his message:

*To you this night is born a child Of Mary, chosen virgin mild; This newborn child of lowly birth Shall be the joy of all the earth.*

A child of lowly birth to be the joy of all people. How would He do that? What could He do in a world in which the rich prospered and the poor were oppressed. But, as God's plan is revealed, it becomes clear that this was not just any child born to lowly parents:

*This is the Christ, God's Son most high, Who hears your sad and bitter cry; He will Himself your Saviour be And from all sin will set you free.*

The good news is that here is the One, who hears the cry of the oppressed, of the outcast, of the lonely and forgotten people, of those who mourn. In fact as the angel

calls out this message it is plain that God Himself sees the pain His people experience:

*The blessing which the Father planned The Son holds in His infant hand That in His kingdom, bright and fair, You may with us His glory share.*

Above all, God is faithful. He keeps his promises. That was what the shepherds were to know then, that is what we are to know today. Christmas is not meant for those who have everything. God's blessing is for those who come empty-handed; He comes to people who are lost in their darkness; He comes to offer life to all those who have given up hope; He comes to fill the emptiness in our lives and to give us His righteousness. God blesses us at Christmas - not with power or wealth or even good health, but first of all through the birth of a baby:

*These are the signs which you will see To let you know that it is He: In manger bed, in swaddling clothes The child who all the earth upholds.*

Every year we hear again of Christmas being a season of peace and joy - and it truly is! Yet, we need someone to bring about this peace. We need someone to fill us with a deep and lasting joy, even when there is not much to be happy about in our lives. We are to believe that this child, laid in a manger, brought up as the child of poor parents; who said of Himself that He had nothing to call His own - no home, no property -; who in the end died a shameful death on the cross, is the one who - in the words of a more modern song - holds the whole world in His hands.

That is why the miracle of Christmas which speaks of God's love, is to be made known to all people. We today, just as those shepherds, are called on to believe the news of God's Son being born human. It is not a case of understanding, but of going:

*How glad we'll be to find it so! Then with the shepherds let us go To see what God for us has done In sending us His own dear Son.*

Under the Christmas tree here - and in many places all over the world today - we find the scene of Jesus' birth presented in the way people think it might have looked. As the shepherds came in from the darkness where they had been herding their sheep, from the darkness of their lowly jobs and of being on the fringes of society, so we are to come in from our darkness to see what is pointed out to us:

*Look, look, dear friends, look over there! What lies within that manger bare? Who is that lovely little one? The baby Jesus, God's dear Son.*

As we stand and marvel at God's love tonight, it is so that we will once again receive Him into our lives and our homes - so that God's glory will shine into our lives, and through us to our world. And so we all sing together:

*Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child, Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled Within my heart, that it may be A quiet chamber kept for Thee.”*

### **Christmas Creed**

I believe in God the Father, Creator of all things, who sent his Son as my Saviour.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, announced by angels, worshipped by the Wise Men, who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, to free me from sin, death and the power of the devil.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, who has brought me to faith in the Christ and by whose continuous work in my heart I am ever led to lay before the feet of Christ my worship, my life, my love; to live under him as my King, both now and forevermore. Amen.