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Substance of Two Sermons preached by our Pastor

on Sunday, November 24. 1974.

Morning Lesson. Revelation 12.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2. 10-11

You may almost think it is premature for us to read this Text in November. Certainly rejoicing in the Advent of Christ is not confined to December: it is perennial. It is the only rejoicing a quickened, needy sinner ever experiences. I want to tell you how my spirit was channelled to this subject: something you are all very well and solemnly and painfully aware of that is, what type of news reaches you to day in the news media. What have you come to anticipate in these sad, dark, evil latter days? News filled with gloom and misery, and there seems to be nothing else. This is the fruit of sin, obviously. So what comes to us through the news media? That which is horrific, as in the city of Birmingham. That which is macabre, obscene and blasphemous. What do ^{you} think of what will be taking place in Eastbourne? It is blasphemous to the extreme; all that is horrific, macabre, obscene, vile, blasphemous. Is there good news anywhere?

My mind was therefore channelled to the only good news there is, and it is in the Text. I issue a challenge. You will never find good news, good tidings only in the Church of God; in the holy gospel, and the gospel's message of peace and joy, and nowhere else. So the word is in striking contrast to the news media you are accustomed to, and which is worsening all the time. Remember the headings I have given you: all that is terrifying, vile, blasphemous, filling you with terror. How wonderful that there should be this amazing contrast! "for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." I felt the friends assembled here together in the Sanctuary to day would wish to hear good tidings of great joy. I well recognise that to hear these good tidings the power of the Holy Ghost is indispensable, and the sweet presence of the Lord Himself. I hope God will not pass me by. I hope He will use this unworthy instrument to bring to some on the face of the earth in these dark days good tidings of great joy.

I want to give as I begin, a concise summary : what we see here as recorded by St Luke, - the moving of the unfathomable counsels divine, and the issuing forth of the healing of the nations through the birth of a Saviour. We have three titles here: Saviour: Christ: and Lord. So there is a moving of the unfathomed counsels divine, issuing forth in a river full of blessing, love, salvation for the healing of the nations. That is a summary of the ~~Text~~.

subject

I want to take a further step. The wondrous incarnation of the Son of God was heralded by an angel of the Lord. He did not come to Caesar's palace. Blessed be God, he came to shepherds: and would to God he would come to Buckingham Palace! How this land would ~~rejoice~~ be enriched if we had God-fearing people in exalted positions, and in the majority in the country! Let us pray that the angel will come to Buckingham Palace. He did not go to the temple: he came to shepherds, and we read, "there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." I may hope to make this a point of meditation as we proceed. "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

There are two things here. It was not only the coming of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night. This seems highly significant for the One born the great Shepherd of His sheep,- the Good Shepherd who giveth His life for the sheep. It was not only the announcement by the angel of the Lord: there was something else. What was it I want to take you up on this. It was something so significant and characteristic, and so divinely impressive. What was it? It was the glory that shone round about them. That is when my soul is blessed, when the glory shines round about me, and irradiates my spirit. This is an unmistakable proof and evidence of your relation to God in Christ: the glory shines round you; not the forbidding glory of Justice shining from Sinai; not a consuming glory. This glory was the Shekinah glory, seen as from above the mercy seat between the cherubims from the Ark of the Covenant,- the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; a saving glory. "and the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

God knows how my soul longs for another experience of the Shekinah glory! "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." That glory shone round about them. Surely my dear friends, many of you have known this glory a few times round about you. It is not a weekly or a monthly experience: it may not be every year. Surely a few times in your life the glory of the Lord has shone round about you, and your soul has been ready to break through the walls of clay and fly to bliss. You were so blessed you hardly knew how to contain the holy joy of your soul. You were so certain of salvation and safety; not a doubt clouded your skies. O that this glory may shine to day! in this pulpit, in your hearts and homes, in your bedchambers; such glory that you are caught up to Paradise in spirit, and lose sight of this sin-blighted world, and see the shining path to bliss.

"and the glory of the Lord shone round about them." I want to take up the state of the world as it then was, and we shall see how relevant it is with the state of the world now. It may be summarised in this way: it was devoid

of joy; there was no joy in the world. That is where we are now; the world is devoid of joy. Imperial Rome with its conquering armies had swept through the world centre. The Holy Land was under its power, and there was no joy in the world. We have got to that now. Can you find joy outside of Jesus Christ? Even the few joys you have left are fast vanishing before your eyes. So the world was devoid of joy.

Next, the world had had no good news for generations, and we are in that place now, nearly two thousand years later. I will be explicit. The day did not dawn on the earth until the Advent of Christ: the shadows did not begin to flee away till He was born, then there was the Day break of the Advent: it was night before. The only good news through all the period before the Advent is the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy. It is prophesied here and there in the Prophets. You think; "I do not understand them." Go on reading: you will find Christ shining in the prophecies. This was the only good news prior to the dawn of Day,- the testimony of Jesus by the prophets. So there was no good news for generations, and we are in the same place. We should all be seeking to worship God and to praise Him for our blessings. In Winter the flooding brings home to you the cases of the homeless and the starving. You go home, and there is a hot meal. You get out clothing suitable for the season, so you should be here to thank God. Some of you are here to give thanks for specific favours you have received in the past week. You had to commit things to God, and the Lord heard and granted His sweet mercy, and you are here to praise Him.

But generally speaking, there has been no good news for generations. Take my span here: it will soon be four decades if I live. The Lord has been good and gracious, but I feel my lot is cast in sad and evil days, and I suppose it is the same with all of you. Those who are younger must feel acutely, your days are cast in dark and sombre times, and there is every conceivable possibility of a worsening, and you never know how it will affect you. It is not only Birmingham and other families: it is your lot. You read in the Bible things that are almost incredible, and they touch you in your own path. The world is devoid of joy. Have you got any joy left? Some say; "Yes." Make the most of it: thank God for it; appreciate it. "In the day of prosperity be joyful." Is there much joy left? You look to all points of the compass: the world is devoid of joy. Just one thing can come in your life and mar all. The Hymn-writer knew it;

"My earthly joys are from me torn,
And oft an absent God I mourn." (289)

Let me say to you, if you are in a little joy I do not wish to spoil it. I join and rejoice with you. In some quarters you feel the Lord has appeared and blessed you, and I rejoice with you. Generally speaking there had been no good news for generations.

Two other things concerning the world then. They were living in an agony of fear concerning the tyranny of oppression from Rome. You may not realise it: you read history. They were living in an agony of fear because of oppression. It is the same to day: multitudes are living in fear because of oppression. It is a dreadful state. God has mercifully defended us in this dear land from Soviet Russia. He has not allowed the vast hordes to march over Europe and through the world, but the world is living in fear of it. We have it close to our borders; only a few miles of sea, and the world is in that state. It was a world full of woe and despair, and that is when the angel visited the shepherds and Christ was born. Despair is where we are now largely. Nearly all people are getting into despair. Who knows what to do? Who knows what will appear tomorrow? Mountains are cast into the sea. "Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains ^{shake} with the swelling thereof." The world is convulsed with anxiety, woe, and despair. Blessed be God, there are good tidings; to me this is so wonderful.

I will tell you why purposely in the range of our meditation to introduce the subject, I survey the world, not only this country. The remarkable thing is, what pertains to the world and this country, those terms we used, - sadness and despair, and everything we mentioned, - afraid of tyranny, devoid of joy, bludgeoned into submission; you have in microcosm in your own ~~heart~~ path, your local area, your family, your heart. Some of you have said; "Yes, that is more or less the delineation of the scene in my heart. That is how I feel, devoid of joy almost." If you said; "How does it fit you?" Not altogether: no; because we have had the Triune God with us this last week. It does almost describe my poor heart; there is a deep sense of it. There are many things to rob you of joy: you rob yourself; sin and Satan rob you. Where do you get good news? How often do you have good news? I want to speak in a balanced way; to appreciate every crumblet of divine mercy and peace. We are not destitute of it.

But how little good news there is in life! and how much feeling of despair and sadness, and a paralysing and crippling fear of the tyranny of the oppressor! Think of the temptations of Satan, the many temptations and the agony of fear you know in your heart: so there you are! and on this scene of sadness and despair, - and it does amount to that. After all, one may have the greatest business expertise, and everything can go against you, and what can you do? You find you are brought into circumstances where you can do nothing, and there is this terrible feeling of sadness and despair. Last Sunday I said to you, don't you look back to those halcyon days when the children were round the table, and you could tuck them up in bed? and you are saying now; "I wish enough I had appreciated it more." Look at the trend of things! It is difficult for adolescents, and they have to be with all the other children at school and at work. How terribly difficult it is for young

people. Look at the problems for parents! and they find themselves in the depths of sadness and despair. Is the picture too black? No: you prove it.

Against this terrible background is news,- good tidings. Let us see the exact nature of the tidings, and I reiterate: you will only find good tidings in the gospel, in the Bible, in the ministry of the gospel of redemption. That is the only good news there is,- good tidings of great joy. You may say to me; "It would be wonderful if I found I had inherited £50,000. What about it if you lost your soul?" "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" I well recognise when the Lord appears in providence to relieve His people it is a great mercy. Can you find solid joy in material things? Here is the only good news there is.

So let us see what the language is. "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." That is to say, it is universal, cosmopolitan, to all the Lord's chosen people in all lands. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour." This Person is Saviour, Messiah, Lord. Just a brief word on this. The One born is Saviour. He is born in Bethlehem, the Saviour, and He is facing all the sins of all His people with regal authority of redemptive power. He is Christ the Messiah, facing all the chaos of the world, knowing He will accomplish the true hegemony of the Kingdom of God. This is wonderful: knowing He will accomplish the building on Himself as the foundation of the Kingdom of God. And Lord. I love this. You can get ^{it} in trouble. Jesus reigns. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." Lord; facing all eternity and all ages as the great King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.