

Advent 3, 2009

LOVE

Isaiah 40:10-11 10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Human beings, people, understand strength and power and might. So, the Jews and we should understand God's description of himself in our lesson from Isaiah. Verse 10 says, **10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him.**

The surprise is how the strong, powerful, Almighty Lord of the universe acts, according to God's revelation of Himself to us in the next verse, verse 11, **11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.** A Shepherd was a common occupation, especially for the Sovereign, the Almighty Ruler Lord.

But, in strength and gentleness the Sovereign Lord cares for the sheep. God cares for His sheep as a shepherd, in love and gentleness that causes the shepherd to take the role of the Lamb of God, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

It is a *wonderful mystery* that the Almighty Lord acts as a servant shepherd, by acting as the lamb, to shepherd His people in love and gentleness. You heard that mystery in tonight's video.

He is

A lamb who will give his life for the shepherds.

He is

The child of the stable [who] is the shepherd of love.

It is a mystery and a love so deep and wonderful it is worth sharing. It is worth sharing so that others, like us, hurt by the pain of life can know the life of the love from the humble servant shepherd king. This mystery of love is worth sharing so that others, like us, hurt by the pain of life can know the life of the love from the humble servant shepherd king.

JOY

Luke 2:1-14

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to his own town to register. **4** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

It had been a night of frustration and disappointment for Joseph. He could not find a room for his wife, Mary, even though she was in labor. It has been another night out of the protection of a roof or walls for shepherds, a hard night in a hard land. For the people of Bethlehem the robust business they were receiving was bittersweet, because it was caused by an order from a foreign ruler and government. That night 2000 years ago seemed just another difficult day that drains the joy from our lives, and drains the life from our experience.

But, in the midst of another dreary day in a world of sin, God **shouted** joy. In the story of Elijah we are told God appeared in "*a still, small voice.*" But here, God sent angels, lots of them, angels bright with the glory of God, angels telling good news of joy and peace, and angels singing the praise of God who is stronger than our sins. They shouted joy for a world that knows only pain.

That's what Christmas is, the love of God breaking into a painful, sinful, sad world. And God's love brings joy. As our video said, *Arise to a sound unfamiliar, the triumph of joy*

In this frustrating, sinful and painful world, don't keep this joy to yourselves! Share Jesus, who overcomes sin, death, and sadness. Share joy with your family, your friends, and all you meet. By the way, that is what the phrase "Merry CHRISTmas" says, that "happy holidays" cannot say: Joy that comes from God's love, joy that comes from CHRIST Jesus!

