

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.

A couple of weeks ago I had a post from Caring Bridge come across my desk. Many of you know that Caring Bridge is a web site that allows families to keep others up to date on critically ill people, without having to call everyone. Some of our members have used Caring Bridge. This post happened to be about a little boy in the valley. It seems this child was in a situation in which there was less than a 1% chance of survival. But, there was quick response by those called to the scene. The care given was just the right care. And God obviously had His hand in this situation too; I can say that not only because God is always with us, but also because the mom in the Caring Bridge post was talking about now expected full recovery for her son and the miracle of God. This little boy was in a situation where he could not help himself. But, now, because of the timely and skilled help of others, including our members, now because of the love God showed in this situation, this little boy has the future of a full life in front of Him. His life has literally been saved from a situation over which he had no control. God is good!

In our lesson for today one could say of the shepherds, life was tough and they could do little to help themselves. These men worked in a low paying job as common laborers, on the night shift. Their government was corrupt. Foreigners, occupying forces of the Roman government, were further oppressing them. Sadly, many of their struggles were evidence of even deeper problems in the relationship of the Jews in general, and the relationship of each person with God. Some might say, "There's always hope." Except, we know the end of their story. The country of Judea became more corrupt and rebellious and in 70 A.D. it was totally destroyed by the Romans. Things weren't *going* to get better. Life was tough for the shepherds and there was nothing they could do to help themselves. But, instead of medical help, an angel appeared. We are told, **10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.** In a seemingly hopeless situation, these men received the promised Christ and Savior, The Lord God Himself. In life's trials there was real hope and help.

If we look at our lives with a realistic understanding of the eternal, on our own we are in the same situation. When was the last bad decision you made? Or, when did you recently hurt someone you care about? Or, when have your actions hurt or denied the Lord who created you and loves you? I know that recently I have let worries make me cranky around my family, yesterday even. Where is trust in God when you are worrying and hurt others? These failures are not just personal weaknesses, but sin, and unfortunately as people born sinful, we face trouble because of our sin. On our own there is nothing we can do to overcome it. **10 And the angel said unto [us], Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a**

Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

We can't overcome our sin, but this child born in Bethlehem is The Savior and He came to die for our sins and forgive us.

But, our sins lead to a bigger problem than trouble in this world. This year at St. John we have had the funerals of 10 members. Sin leads to death, for everyone. There is nothing we can do to keep ourselves from dying. And our sins lead to a bigger problem than death. All who sin face not just death but the eternal judgement of their Creator and Judge. There is nothing we can do to keep ourselves from judgement. **10 And the angel said unto [us], Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.** We can't overcome our sin, or death, or judgement, but this child born in Bethlehem came to die for our sins and rise again so all who believe in Him have eternal life. **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not die, but have everlasting life.”**

The country of the shepherds continued in trouble, but because of the birth of the Savior, Jesus, the lives of these shepherds were changed, not only forever, but also for this life. They could face the drudgery of work, the problems in the county, troubles that were bigger than them, and know that God loved them enough to come to save them. They knew that no matter how big life's troubles were, God had eternal life won for them, in this Savior. They could have hope when life seemed overwhelming. **11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour.** They could love the unlovable. **Unto you is born a Savior.** Life was changed forever and in this world because they saw and believed in The Savior of God.

A couple of years ago I told what has become my favorite Christmas story, but I'm going to tell it again because it brings home the shepherds' hope and joy to us. Many countries invite Americans to their country to teach, and in 1994 some American Christians took the opportunity to teach in a Russian orphanage knowing it would also be an opportunity to share God's love in Jesus. As the holidays came around they got to tell the Christmas story and most children and staff heard it for the very first time. They listened carefully, quietly. Finally these Christian volunteers gave the children some crude materials to make a manger with the baby Jesus to shown they had understood the story. But, as they looked at one manger there were two babies. These missionaries asked the boy where there were two children in the manger. So, this boy, Misha, started telling the Christmas story again and his words were translated for them. Even having heard the story only once, he actually got the story correct until he got to the point where Mary laid Jesus in the manger. Then it changed. He said, “Mary laid the baby Jesus in the manger, and he looked up at me and asked if *I* had a place to stay.” I told him ‘I have no Momma. I have no Poppa.’ Jesus said I could stay with Him, and I wanted to but I said, ‘I can't. I don't have a gift to give.’ So I asked him, ‘If I keep you warm will that be a good enough gift?’ Jesus said it would be the best gift. So, I crawled in the manger with Jesus and now I can be with Him always.” As he finished Misha's head fell to the table sobbing. Life was tough for Misha. He saw no hope. But, when he heard the story of God's love he finally knew he was not alone and was loved. Life was changed. **11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**

May you know the hope and joy this Christmas and always, that God has come to you.
A Blessed Christmas.