

Merry Christmas! To everyone here, may this holy season be filled with the blessings of the New Born Christ Child. These are strange times we're living in, and as I was reflecting on these readings we heard tonight, I couldn't help but notice how many similarities there are between the First Christmas and Christmas this year.

- If you could not spend Christmas where you wanted to, if you can't spend Christmas with your family because of government regulations, then Mary and Joseph know how you feel. They had to leave their home and travel to comply with government rules.
- If you had to register to be here tonight, then Mary and Joseph know how you feel. They too had to register.
- If you're joining us from home tonight because there is no more room here, then Mary and Joseph know how you feel. They too were turned away from the inn.
- If you couldn't have the big Christmas celebrations that you wanted, then that's ok. The first Christmas was pretty simple too.

Christmas is different this year, but I hope it can be a reminder to us that our salvation is not in things of this world; it's not in government policies, or winning wars, or technological innovations, or medical breakthroughs, but our salvation is through a little child whose birth we celebrate tonight, Jesus Christ.

This is the Good News that the Angels brought to the Shepherds. "I am bringing *you* good news of great joy for all the people: to *you* is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord." These words are familiar to us; we hear them each year as we read the story of Christmas. But to the people living in the first century, these words were also familiar, but in an ominous way. You see, whenever the Romans, who were ruling Israel at that time, whenever they conquered a city, or expanded their territory, or proclaimed a victory, they would send a messenger into the neighbouring cities and towns, and proclaim a message something like "I have Good News for all the people, today your Lord, the Emperor has conquered such-and-such a town or city. He is your saviour." The undertone of their message to the Israelites was, "You should be glad to be governed by us Romans."

The message of the Angels tonight also brings Good News of a victory, but victory of a different kind. The Good News tonight is not found in this world, it's not proclaimed from the Friday afternoon provincial press conferences; it's not found in the news on the internet. The Good News that we celebrate tonight is that our Saviour, Christ the Lord, is born among us; our

Victory is that God became Man, for me, for you. The Good News is that tonight, sin and death are conquered; there is a hope tonight that the world has never seen before. If we truly believe that our Lord came to save us, if the Good News tonight is for us, then nothing should be able to shake our faith, or our hope. To *us* is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord!

Let us not let the dark cloud that is coming upset our hope. On Saturday, the Churches will be closed once again. They say for a month, but we don't know. Let me ask you a question. Do you think that the shepherds' visit to Baby Jesus in the stable, changed them? Did they leave as a different person than when they came? Did the experience of seeing Jesus, and his parents in the stable surrounded by the animals, bring them hope and joy? Presumably, they did not return and visit Jesus; presumably they left that night and never saw him again. But I like to think that their encounter with the Messiah had a lasting impression on them; that they saw things from a different perspective, that the troubles and pains of this world didn't seem so bad anymore; that somehow they knew that hope, peace, and joy is restored in the world through the birth of Christ. I think that, somehow, the shepherds left as changed people from their encounter with the new born King.

What was it that changed the Shepherds that night? How did they keep the experience of meeting the Baby Jesus alive in their hearts as they went back to their ordinary life? This is what we seek, this is what we ask the Lord to give us tonight/today, that all of us may leave here, with the hope and peace, and joy that the new Born King brings to us.