


“Awake”

Sunday, December 3rd, 2017

First Sunday of Advent

 **Luke 2:8-18 (NRSV)**

[On Screen]

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

In 1865, William Chatterton Dix penned the words to a poem entitled, *“The Manger Throne.”*

A few years later, the first three stanzas of that poem were set to the music of a traditional English folk song called *“Greensleeves”* and soon became known as the beloved Christmas carol, *“What Child Is This?”*

This combination of poetry and music was first published in the United Kingdom in 1871, in a prestigious compilation of Christmas music called **Christmas Carols Old and New.**

For close to a century and a half the question found in the title of this carol has become an annual reminder that something significant happened on that night in Bethlehem as someone significant lay wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger.

This child would change the world forever;
but *what child is this?*

Let us pray... Lord, today we begin the Season of Advent and seek to answer the question: “*What Child is this?*” We look through the eyes of history, while the Bible sees through the eyes of witnesses. Help us to clear our vision and recognize this Child. We pray in His holy name.
Amen.

[MESSAGE]

I really like the way our video began this morning.

There are two things you need to know to be a good sheep herder:

Number 1: Stay awake

Number 2: Ask questions

Staying awake really means paying attention.

Asking questions is important, but it is something we are not inclined to do when it comes to matters of God.

We are trained to accept, not question, and we may even feel disrespectful if we ask God to explain things for us.

I assure you, God wants to hear our questions because, it is only through our questions that we are led to the answers that offer truth.

The question in this Christmas song must have been on the shepherd's lips that first Christmas so long ago.

They are minding their sheep in the fields when they are visited by a heavenly chorus of angels singing "*Glory to God in the highest!*"

These poor shepherds must have asked:

“What child is this who gets a fanfare of angels to announce his birth?

What child is this that we should leave our sheep and run to see him?

What child is this that we must tell everyone about him?

What child **IS** this?”

It is no accident that shepherds are important characters in this story.

It’s an image that foreshadows how Jesus will relate to his followers.

Later in life, Jesus will identify himself as a shepherd – The Good Shepherd.

He comes to us as a protector and provider.

He promises to shelter those entrusted to his care.

He ultimately lays down his life so that his “flock” may enjoy eternal life in his presence.

Shepherds are mentioned more than one hundred times in the Bible.

The image of protector and provider is common to all the many stories involving shepherds.

A prime example is Psalm 23, a favorite of many:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.

Here, David praises God, not only for taking care of him, but also for keeping him on the right track.

Jesus speaks about having many sheep in John 10:

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd." John 10:14-16

Jesus wants us to understand that there is room for everyone in his flock.

A good sheep herder went to great lengths to take care of those under his or her care.

They would stay awake to protect the flock from predators.

They would make sure the flock stayed together.

And, if a single lamb was lost, they looked for it until it was found, as Jesus taught in the parable of the lost sheep found in Matthew 18:10-14.

"If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?"

What child is this?

He is the one who left all the comfort of heaven to look for the ones who went astray.

Like sheep, we are the ones who wandered away; we have turned to our own way.

The mission of the shepherd is to look for and rescue the ones who are lost.

This is what a good shepherd naturally does.

This is who this child in the manger would grow to become.

He is the one who came to seek and to save those who were lost, alone, exposed, and astray.

At the end of his time on earth, Jesus came to Peter and entrusted the shepherding duties to him.

Three times he asked Peter if he loved him; three times Peter replied that he did.

Each time, Jesus told him, because of his love for God, he should care for God's people.

What child is this?

He is the one who came to lay down His life.

He is the one who came to provide for and protect His flock.

He is the one blessed beyond measure with ones He would call His own and who would come to know His voice.

He is the one who is the good shepherd.

His name is Jesus, the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger, just as the angel said he would be.

Now go and tell everyone what has been heard, seen and experienced concerning who this child is, just as the shepherds did on that first Christmas in Bethlehem.

What child is this?

He is the Good Shepherd; He is our shepherd.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**