**Luke 2:1-20 (ESV)**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. **8** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. **10** And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14**  “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” **15** When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**“A Christmas of Witness, Mercy, Life Together”**

Grace to you and peace for the Father has sent to us His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, Amen. The story of Christmas is always wonderful to hear each year. Children help to share it, nativity scenes display it, and cards send warm greetings of it. Yet, if Christmas is only about a story, then something is missing. This is why during the season of Advent; we took time to focus on three basic points: Witness, Mercy, and Life Together. Unlike a story made up by men, God sending His Son comes for us men and for our salvation. It is living and active, still encircling the lives of people with God’s Word promising the Savior. Rather than the story of our life, tonight declares the glorious story of life God gives. What a Christmas celebration, when our “Witness, Mercy, Life Together” come wrapped up for us in Jesus Christ.

 This is a witness more glorious than what the world can give. When Caesar Augustus was having his way with the affairs of men, God was making His way known to men. It was out in the midst of the darkness that good news shined upon the shepherds. They might not have noticed such glory, if they were among all the hustle and bustle of city life. The governance of Caesar and demand for registration would have received the attention. Away from the hands of men, God found a place where His witness would make a difference to those in the darkness. The angel declared to the shepherds, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” God makes known this same witness by the light of His Word still today. It is far from a story, but a pronouncement in the darkness of our lives. Jesus lives, He lays within the manger of His Church, even among a culture caught up in the ways of man.

 This is a mercy made glorious by what God gives sinners. The shepherds did not head off to Bethlehem until they had heard the full army of heaven sing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” While there was no mercy shown at the inn for Mary and Joseph, the manger would have room enough for these mangy shepherds. The baby wrapped in swaddling clothes was God’s act of mercy in a world that only wants to make money, manage life, and motivate by the Law. Jesus comes as pure gift since He goes about the business of being Savior. St. Paul declares, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:19-20). God’s mercy today is to find Jesus all wrapped up for us in water, bread and wine as promised by His Word as Savior. The manger is not a place of war, but justifying peace from heaven held in the Child of Mary. He comes to forgive, restore and save those who only know a world at war with itself and God.

 This is a life together showing glorious praise only to Jesus. After departing from the manger, the shepherds left with more than with what they came. “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” Their life together was now in service to the love God gave by His Word lying in a manger. Bound together by the child of Mary, it did not bother them that people wondered over what they confessed of Christ. This time of the year is still for us socially acceptable, but there is a different answer waiting the rest of the year. The glory and praise in the church is not mere pageantry or some magic of the season, but God’s Son justifying sinners by faith in Him. It is life together. From the cradle to the cross, Jesus carves out His faithfulness as God and Savior “who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” This people, these baptized, the Church praises Christ by confessing His Word. He dwells with us in service as Savior, so our lives serve others with the love God’s Son bestows upon us.

What a Christmas celebration, when our “Witness, Mercy, Life Together” come wrapped up for us in Jesus Christ. More than a story, the gift we have is God keep giving by His Word and Sacraments. We cannot ignore what the Father sends for sinners by His Son. He lies in a manager humbly as a baby. He hangs on the cross out of love. He reigns victorious as king of kings over the grave. There is no need to justify yourself to a baby, but to believe in what the angels speak tonight. God’s Son cries for you in the manger as He did on the cross casting all our fear and shame upon Him. The comfort rests in God becoming man for us men and for our salvation. “For unto you is born this day.” He cares to bear with our sin and be our Savior. It all starts with a baby at Christmas, but the beauty of the manger is that Jesus manages to handle the horror of what no man can sin, death, and the Devil. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.