



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“Sheltered by the Shepherd.” – Psalm 23

3rd Sunday in Advent – December 17, 2017

Pastor Chip Winter

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Old Testament/Psalm appointed for the day and already read for us from Psalm 23.

My dear family in Christ, picture in your mind an image of authority. What comes to mind? Was it a commander in the armed forces? Or did you picture a police officer, an officer of the court, a teacher or a parent? Is it a titan of business, or someone riding in Air Force One?

You probably didn't conjure up an image of a baby. We don't usually associate newborn infants with the idea of authority or power. They do not yet have decision-making abilities. They do not run corporations, schools or military posts or bases. Still, babies command sufficient authority to keep us jumping, don't they? Ask some of the new parents you'll find perhaps a little bleary-eyed this morning. They are pretty good at making adults hop to, demanding that their needs be met. You may not know the cause, but at an infant's cry you'll go through the checklist to try to satisfy them: do they need a diaper change, a feeding or simply to be held and comforted?

Through Advent and Christmas we will find many images of the Child of Bethlehem. We sing about Him in hymns and carols. We decorate our homes and churches with manger scenes.

Do we associate the idea of authority with this helpless infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger? Does His infant authority really go any further than any other baby, alerting His parents to His momentary needs? We read in the epistle on December 3rd that this Child, the Son of God, **“emptied himself, taking the form of a servant”** (Phil. 2:7). Jesus laid aside His Divine majesty to be born among us, to live as a humble servant to the Heavenly Father’s will. He came, as Jesus Himself described it, **not to be served but to serve and to give His life as the ransom for many.** What authority do we hear in all that?

The shepherds, out watching their flocks by night on the hillsides surrounding Bethlehem, heard marvelous descriptions of the child born that night. This was the instrument of God to reconcile the world back to Himself. This was news of great joy which was to be for all people.

And then they come to the stable – for there was no room to be had in the inn. They find this infant wrapped in clothes and lying in the feed bunk. They see a weary young mother, a weary father – and this was what the fuss was all about?

Yes, it was! For this was the fulfillment of the prophecies of long ago. This was the working of God for the redemption of His creation. This infant had been present at the creation of the cosmos. In years to come it would be made plain that nothing that has been made was made without this Son of God. But the looks of this first Advent were understandably underwhelming.

But it was for the purpose of that previously mentioned ransom payment that his little Lamb, this innocent Child born to serve, was given authority. He received the authority foreshadowed by these earliest visitors from the flocks: the authority of a Shepherd over His flock. The ancestor of this infant Shepherd, the great King David of Israel, who was himself a shepherd, tells us what this Shepherd is authorized to do for the flock in His care. The Shepherd’s sheep can truly say, **“I shall not want,”** because the Shepherd’s every thought is for the care of His flock, for meeting the needs

of His precious sheep. He finds green pastures for them and leads them to drink from still waters. He searches out safe pathways for them to walk and defends them from danger. He drives off enemies that would harm His flock and safely and gently guides His sheep.

Now, sheep are notoriously thick-headed animals. They easily wander off and get into predicaments. We had a miniature schnauzer for years, his name was Robin. My uncle had one named Friar Tuck – calling him Tucker – and we fell into the Robin Hood story when in my childhood we had Maid Marian – Maizy for us. Anyway, we got Robin when the kids were very young and Robin was a fairly placid dog – he seldom barked, which is rare among schnauzers. But when left on his own, he would find a scent and, keeping his nose to the ground he would follow it, however long it lasted. The result was that if he was not watched he would end up blocks away from home with apparently no idea where he was and no clue how to return. He couldn't find his way back. We would go out looking for him, calling his name, wandering through the blocks until we would see him jauntily trotting back to us.

I believe sheep display a similar naivete. And we, as the sinful children of God do, too. We wander far from the fold, following our own desires and notions, until we are good and lost, far from our God and His desires for us.

This Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus the Christ, has the authority to lay down His life to save His flock, this Shepherd who is also the Lamb of sacrifice, the Lamb of God. This Good Shepherd will lead His flock, His redeemed people – you and me – safely through the valley of the shadow of death. He can navigate that dark and treacherous valley in safety because He Himself has already passed through it and has emerged triumphant on the other side. Death could not trap and keep the Shepherd in that valley, and it will not keep His sheep there, either.

This was why Christ Jesus was born. His Father in heaven gave Him the mission to accomplish – satisfying our judgement and forgiving our sins – and the Father gave Him the authority to accomplish it. He was given the authority to lay down His life as a sacrifice on the cross and the authority to pick it back up, again: forever leaving behind the empty tomb and its dark shadows of death.

Jesus suffered and died to pay the debt we owed, the penalty of everlasting damnation that we earned for ourselves. Jesus came to do what shepherds always do, **“to seek and to save that which is lost”** (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to gather us back to God. He anoints us, claiming us for Himself, in the waters of Baptism. He feeds us with the body and blood which won our forgiveness when we come to the altar for the Lord’s Supper. He daily reaches us in His word and guides us with the Holy Spirit.

In this season of Advent we look forward to the return of the Good Shepherd, when He comes among us, again, and this time in victorious triumph. The Epistle for this weekend gives us a glimpse into that eternal dwelling Jesus will usher in on the last day. There, with all who have come to faith in Jesus, we will stand before the throne of the Almighty and of the Lamb. We will have a place among that multitude of people, from every place, tribe, nation and language – all who have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, led safely in the company of their Shepherd.

We will stand before that throne, our sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb Who is, and always has been, our Shepherd. Safe pastures, the water of life nearby, we will be shielded from all harm. No hunger. No thirst, No more crying as we find eternal shelter in the loving arms of our Good Shepherd. Amen