

## ***“God Is Nigh”***

Meditation for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Christmas Eve, Monday at 6 PM and 11 PM, December 24, 2018  
Senior Pastor James L. Brewer-Calvert

### **Holy Scriptures: Luke 2: 8-20**

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child;<sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

### Meditation

My family has a small patch of land  
on a lake in the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York.  
The body of water is called Perch Lake.  
One summer we built an A-Frame cabin from a kit.  
“Four Men, Four Days” promised the manual;  
two months later we were still hammering away, mostly happily.

This lakefront property in the Catskills  
has been in our family for generations.  
Bright green ferns, thick maple trees, rolling hills  
encompass this organic acre of bliss and refuge.  
No plumbing. No electricity. No Wi-Fi.  
Open campfires. Open air outhouse.  
Open expressions of love and laughter.

Perch Lake water, regardless of the season,  
is what we chose to call “invigorating.”

Small waves lap up against the dock on our piece of shore;  
like the cabin, the dock is handmade, rustic,  
    nestled on sand and rocks between a row of blueberry bushes  
    that demarcate land and lake.

This spot holds a sacred place in our long-standing tradition,  
    one that predates my birth on this planet.  
At the end of a day at Perch,  
    after dinner, after campfire, after we put on our PJs,  
    we gather at the shoreline on the dock,  
        stand shoulder to shoulder in the moonlight,  
        and sing Taps.

***Day is done, gone the sun,  
From the lake, from the hills, from the sky;  
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.***

Though the sun has set, take comfort in the night: God is nigh.  
Take comfort as you rest from the day and your labors: God is nigh.  
Take comfort for all is well; the Promise fulfilled: God is nigh.

God's love is nigh  
    in the night as in the day.  
God's love is present, Emmanuel, God-With-Us,  
    in all times and in all circumstances.  
God's love is blessing and sustaining you and me and all of us, together,  
    here, now, tomorrow, forever and ever.

With this faith we dare to look starward,  
    to gaze up at the stars in dark December skies  
    for vivid reminders of hope.

Ann Weems expressed that sentiment.  
*"The whole world waits in December darkness  
    for a glimpse of the Light of God.  
Even those who snarl "Humbug!" and chase away the carolers  
    have been seen looking toward the skies.  
The one who declared he never would forgive has forgiven,  
    and those who left home have returned,  
        and even wars are halted, if briefly,  
        as the whole world looks starward.  
In the December darkness we peer from our windows  
    watching for an angel with rainbow wings  
    to announce the Hope of the World."*

--Ann Weems, [Kneeling in Bethlehem](#)

Consider the Advent encounters of the shepherds,  
shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night,  
when angels of the Lord came to them.

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keeping watch over their flock by night.*

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and the glory of the Lord shone around them,  
and they were terrified.*

*<sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them,  
“Do not be afraid;  
for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:  
<sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,  
who is the Messiah, the Lord.”*

The angels proclaimed that God had sent to us--to us!--a Messiah  
in the form of a newborn baby in Bethlehem.

Up to that point  
what the shepherds had seen and heard was a mixed bag:  
some good, some not so good;  
sometimes their joy had been lost, stolen, or misplaced.

Such is the human condition.

We can relate.

Life is a mixture of good and bad, tragedies and triumphs.

Yet into a fragmented world

God sent the Christ Child, the One True Gift  
who heals and saves, redeems and reconciles.

The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found the Son of God,  
God made flesh, born into poverty, in a shack,  
in a time of juxtaposing discord and dignity,  
the Holy Spirit made real, yoking humanity and divinity.

The shepherds must have wondered, *“What is this that God is doing?”*

They had seen life from all sides and angles,  
yet when they focused on Jesus the Christ  
they were able to go forth from the manger  
focused on the positive.

*“It is not over, this birthing,”* proclaims Ann Weems.

*“There are always newer skies into which God can throw stars.”*

--Ann Weems, [Kneeling in Bethlehem](#)

Whenever the sun sets,  
whenever we imagine nightfall obscuring hope, possibility, courage,

the joy of yon starlight testifies: God is nigh.  
When day is done,  
and the sun is gone from the lakes, from the hills, from the sky,  
trust what you have seen and heard:  
God is nigh, God is with us, shoulder-to-shoulder!  
Ponder anew on how God's Love comforts you, sustains you,  
leads you back into your family and out into the community.  
Give God thanks, and may you have a merry, merry Christmas.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*