

Christmas Eve 2025

"The Quiet Chamber"

Text: Luke 2:17-20

Dear Fellow Christians – redeemed sinners who consider it their greatest honor to bear the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ:

As those who find themselves here in “the Great White North,” you don’t need to dream of a white Christmas. All you need to do is look outside. Snow is your reality about five months out of every year. You shovel it, walk on it, fall into it, drive over and through it, throw it at each other, build with it, and most of us have even eaten it. We figure it’s going to be here whether we like it or not, so we may as well make friends with it.

Though I’ve never, many of you would probably argue that the best way to make snow work to your advantage is to ski on it. Not the slow, exercise kind but the fast, “look out for the tree” kind. If you’ve skied in mountains, you are probably familiar with the ever-present threat of avalanches. And if so, you are probably also familiar with how rescuers go about finding skiers buried in the snow. They can now find the approximate location with electronic sensors, but they still ram probes down into the snow to find exactly where to dig. And they do so urgently and rather forcefully because they know they don’t have much time.

I’m sure I would be happy to be rammed with one of those probes if that’s what it took to return me to the side of snow where air is available, but it sure doesn’t sound like fun.

Now in case you’re feeling detached from all of this, know that you are not. Every single one of us here this evening is under constant threat of an avalanche of a different sort– one that threatens to bury us, or has already done so, under “stuff.” What happens then? What happens when you find yourself buried under an avalanche of this world’s stuff? Your Heavenly Father loves you too much to just leave you there, so he uses a different kind of rod to probe for you. It’s called the law, and it’s even less fun than getting rammed by a snow probe, but, as with the snow probe, it’s infinitely better than the alternative.

With this in mind, we turn to that section of God’s Word that will form the basis for our Christmas Eve meditation this evening, which is found in the Second Chapter of Luke’s Gospel, beginning there with the 17th Verse:

^{ESV}(Luke 2:17-20) *And when they saw it, the shepherds 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.*

This is God’s Word. We ask our God to visit our hearts and instruct us through these his words with an adaptation of the simple and yet powerful prayer that Jesus himself once spoke: ***"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

It’s actually rather startling how many similarities exist among the accounts of those caught in an avalanche. Read just a few from those who were buried (and then rescued, obviously) and you’ll find several common threads in their accounts – like disorientation (the snow tumbles them before it covers them), the shock of absolute darkness after such blinding light, the panic of utter helplessness, the absolute silence that follows so abruptly after the deafening roar, and then, most curious all, an inexplicable sense peacefulness. They are aware of what happened, aware that they are probably not going to survive, but... oh well. Until the probe hits them anyway.

So what does this have to do with Christmas Eve? Is there really any doubt that for most in this country the birth of our Savior – Christmas – was long ago buried under an avalanche of stuff - presents, decorations, food, and drink? Obviously none of those things are inherently evil. They are all, ultimately, gifts given by the God that provides every good thing. What every Christians needs to personally consider is whether they are on top of, or buried under, all of that stuff.

One sure sign, or self-test, is how you gauge whether or not you (or your children) “had a good Christmas.” I remember the first time I heard a *Christian* mom lament that *“her children weren’t going to have a very good Christmas because money was tight.”* My first thought was, *“Wait. Jesus has already been born. Was he suddenly unborn?”* Don’t get me wrong. I wasn’t condemning her so much as I was condemning myself. It made me realize that I too had gotten caught up in the slide. Buried. Also more or less helpless. Who wants *their* children to be the only ones that don’t get to open an obscene number of presents? Who wants to see a spouse’s disappointment when he or she doesn’t get what they were hoping for? Who wants to be the Grinch or Scrooge? So you just give in. You allow yourself to be swept under and buried. And, disturbingly enough, you find yourself oddly at

peace with it. Everyone is excited, happy, and, at least for a couple of days, content. You're in your quiet little chamber.

Until the probe, the rod of God's law, thumps into you. *"Oh yeah, Jesus. It's Jesus' birthday, and I haven't really thought about him all day."*

I'll be honest with you. I was tempted not to share this message with you this evening for fear it would put a damper on your celebration. Then it occurred to me that if you are already doing it right, this reminder won't bother you at all. It will just reinforce the good path you have chosen. On the other hand, if you and I are not doing it right, we absolutely need feel that probe of God's Holy Law.

My wife and I stopped buying Christmas presents for each other several years ago. I'd like to think it was nobly motivated. It was not. I stopped buying her presents a couple of years before she did – mostly because I'm a clod and I don't like to shop – and she eventually gave up on me and followed suit. But then a great thing happened. Without all the distractions, I didn't find it so hard to focus on whose birthday it was.

Go back for just a minute to the accounts of those buried for a time in an avalanche, and how odd it seemed that they spoke of a sensation of peacefulness. In a way it's really not that strange when you think about it. It was dark and quiet. They were wrapped by the snow like a well-swaddled baby. It probably wasn't even that cold at first. It probably felt like a nice, quiet, sleep chamber. Only it wasn't. No matter how nice it may have felt at first, it was a tomb.

We need to learn from that. No matter how nice it might feel to be buried in stuff, Jesus warned us, ***"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."***

^{ESV}(Matthew 6:24) Our text for this evening offers us the alternative of which God obviously approves. Listen to it again: ***And when they saw it, the shepherds 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.***

Christmas is not about the law; it's about the gospel. It's about the greatest, most magnificent, most loving thing that God has ever done *for* us or given *to* us. But we can't know the value of that gift without the law. Satan would absolutely love it if we all allowed ourselves to be buried in earthly stuff so

deeply that we heard and saw nothing else. He'll even gladly provide a certain kind of happiness and contentment in that quiet chamber of death. *"Sleep now. Everything is fine."* That's why we need the law. It's the law of God that shatters that illusion that all is well, the law that rightly strikes terror in our hearts by revealing to us the true nature of the terrible predicament we are in, the law that must tell us that we are not safe and secure. And the law is no fun at all. It accuses, threatens, and condemns. When it has done its work properly, it leaves us in absolute panic. It reveals to us that all is not well. God has told us *"Don't!"* and we have done. God has told us *"Do!"* and we have not. Worst of all, it tells us that nothing that is imperfect can enter God's heaven, and that there is absolutely nothing that we can do to correct our imperfection. We've buried ourselves under the immense load of our own sin and there is not a single thing that we ourselves can do to dig ourselves out.

Do you remember Toy Story, when Buzz says to Woody, *"This is no time to panic."* Woody's response? *"This is the perfect time to panic!"* That's what God's law does for us. In pointing out our hopeless situation, it tells us that that is the perfect time to panic.

And then, and only then, the birth of Jesus Christ has meaning and relevance. The law has no power to dig us out from under the load of our sins. That's what Jesus came to do. He entered our world to do for us what we absolutely could not do for ourselves. He did this, first of all, by living the perfect life that we have not. He then offered that perfect life on Calvary's cross as the payment for every single sin we have ever committed. He then made that payment our own personal possession by creating faith in our hearts. Believing that Jesus has done exactly what he said he did, forgiveness is ours. Jesus' perfection is ours. Heaven is ours.

No earthly gift could ever compare to that gift. Nothing on earth could ever be more important, more exciting, more comforting. Undistracted by anything else, the shepherds were occupied with ***"glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen."*** Undistracted, Mary's heart became a very different sort of "quiet chamber": ***But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.***

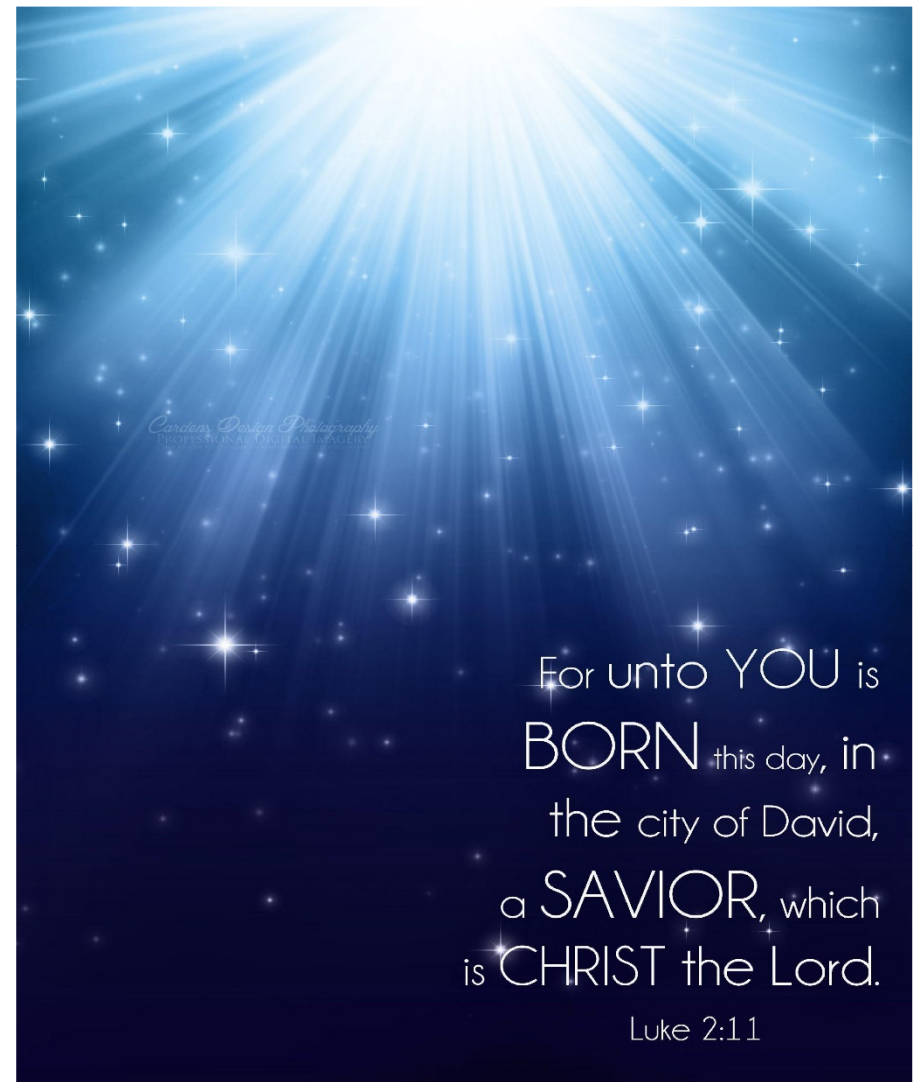
Don't allow Satan, the world, or your own sinful flesh to distract you from what God has done for you, personally, by sending his Son into your world. To that end we pray:

*Ah, dearest Jesus, Holy Child, make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled
Within my heart, that it may be, a quiet chamber, kept for Thee.
Amen*

- Announcements -

Welcome – A warm welcome to all, especially to any guests with us this evening. We consider it a great privilege to share God's Word with you—especially the simple gospel message of the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior – as retold also this evening by our children. Please record your visit in our guest book and join us again, including our Christmas Day Service tomorrow morning at 10 am.

Christmas Gift Bags – As is our custom, gift bags have again been prepared for the children in attendance this evening. Please feel free to take a bag with you for each of your children as you leave the church this evening.



St Paul Lutheran Church
Bismarck, ND

Christmas Eve 2025

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mick Johnson, President

Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Christmas Eve – December 24, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

Hymn 258 - "What Child Is This"

Invocation by the Pastor

The Call to Repentance

Confession and Absolution

Hymn 434 – "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice (Stanzas 1,5-6)

The Scripture Reading: John 1:1-14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Confession of Faith - (The Christmas Creed)

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Who created me
And Who sent His Son to be my Savior;*



I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, the long-promised Messiah, Who came as foretold, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, announced by the angels, worshipped by the shepherds, adored by the Wise Men, Who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, To free me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil;

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who has brought me to faith in my Savior, and by whose continuous work in my heart, I rejoice in my salvation, walk in Christ, show forth His praises, and will one day live and reign with Him in all eternity. This is most certainly true. Amen.

Hymn 266 - "Of the Father's Love Begotten"

Choir – Stanzas 1-3

Congregation – Stanzas 4-5

The Christmas Story, told by Children

Hymn 246 – "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

Hymn 235 – "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

Hymn 255 – "Go, Tell It on the Mountain"

Sermon by the Pastor

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Hymn 270 - "Once in Royal David's City"

The Prayers

The Benediction

Closing Hymn – 271 "Silent Night"

