

Pastor Keith E. Wiens
December 24, 2009
Text: Luke 2:1-7
Christmas Eve

SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT

Merry Christmas to you. This is the night of our dear Savior's birth. Tonight we celebrate, for God has come. God is here. We are not forgotten. We are not alone. There is hope for us. *"For unto us is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

On behalf of all of us who are assisting you in your worship this evening, on behalf of our entire staff and my family, on behalf of all of us here at First Lutheran, I bring you greetings. We are delighted you are here and we pray that each and everyone of you will have a most joyful celebration of our Savior's birth.

Tonight is the night, isn't it? Tonight is the night! Children have been counting the hours. Grownups have been worried about getting everything done. And now the night has come. It is here. And it is good. It is very good. The candles are glowing. The altar is beautifully adorned. The bread is ready. The wine is poured. You are here. God is here. This is a holy night. Yes, it is holy! *"Silent Night, Holy Night!"*

But why, you may ask, do we call this night holy? What makes this night so special? Is this night really different from other nights? On the one hand we must say no. The minutes of this night are no different than the minutes of other nights. Troops are still in Iraq and Afghanistan. The economy is still not strong. One out of every ten workers is unemployed. It is like every other night, isn't it? Homeless wander the streets of our cities. Cars crash on our highways. Folks are dying in our hospitals. What happens every other night happens also on this night. A young person is filled with despair. A child cries and no one responds. A heartbeat is aborted. On the one hand this night is no different than any other night - for our world - for you. Are you any different tonight than you were last night or the night before? You come with your worries and your concerns, your illnesses and your heartaches - and you cannot wish them away, even if it is Christmas Eve.

And yet there is something about this night, isn't there? There is something different. We sense it; we feel it. On this night our hopes soar and our dreams grow. On this night we sing "all is calm, all is bright." On this night we say to our problems and the problems of the world, "hush, be quiet, be silent." This night brings out our deepest yearnings for "peace on earth, good will to all." There is something about this night, something different, something special. This is a holy night.

(Organ/piano softly plays one verse of "Silent Night.")

Silent night, holy night! What makes this night holy? Why is this night so special? "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David; to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

God has come. In person. There, in Bethlehem's manger. Born of Mary. There is a presence now in

our world. A holy presence. And that makes all the difference in the world. All the difference.

For you see, things don't have to be perfect to be holy. They weren't that first Christmas night. Away from home, born in a barn, no room in the inn - hints that all was not right. Troubles abounded in Bethlehem, in Judea, in Damascus, in Rome. There were problems aplenty throughout the world that night. It wasn't a perfect night. But God came that night - and that made the night holy.

And so it is tonight. This is not a perfect night. Not in your house. Not in my house. Not in the White House. Not in any house. You are not perfect and I certainly am not perfect. You and I come to this night wounded by our failures, crushed by our sin, burdened by our inadequacies. But the angels sing out this night. *"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."* There is a presence now in our world. A divine presence. And that makes this night holy.

God has come. God has come to save you. To forgive you. To hold you close. To be with you. To make you holy. You are not alone. You are not forgotten. You don't have to face your problems without anyone to help you. You don't have to bear your burdens by yourself. A Savior has come. Jesus is born. There is a presence now, a holy presence. And that makes all the difference in the world. You can have a new beginning. You can live with God. There is hope for you. There is hope for the church. There is hope for the world. Redeeming grace has dawned upon us. God has come. God is here.

And that makes tonight holy. And tomorrow. And the day after tomorrow. And each day and night to come. All because of that night long ago, that silent night, that holy night, when Christ the Savior was born.