

"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: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12)

*What child is this, who, laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping. Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping? ... **

How many times during the Covid pandemic do you remember when fear was not palpable in your life? Fear of Covid, fear of catching Covid from visitors or strangers, or fear of death due to respiratory complications. I remember not being able to go anywhere except to obtain food, drink, or medical care! I remember the fear of coming together which led us to worship via Zoom for months. Yes, it was summer before we finally found ways to worship in person (*once per month*) as long as we were outside, whether worshipping on my deck, at the Lions Club Park in McHenry (MD), or on a parishioner's deck. The following Christmas, we actually moved our worship on-line (*except for a handful of worship leaders and immediate family members*). From over 110 worshipers two years earlier, we ended up with only 7 with all the other regulars joining "*on-line*," but even this night ... there were no visitors on-line. Fear was everywhere! Might this also have been true in light of the words at the beginning of today's reading, "*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered*" (Luke 2:1). Yet, Joseph brought his heavily expectant fiancé with him as he traveled as many as 30 miles to pay Caesar's newest tax.

*... This, this is Christ the king, whom shepherds guard and angles sing; haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary! **

No less today, than in the midst of the Covid pandemic, or in the day when "... a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered..." (Luke 2:1) we look for and await Emmanuel (*i.e., God with us*). The same Emmanuel who is and always been with us, who will raise us out of our fear, just as he will raise us from death. That's when I'm reminded of the words of an old vespers' antiphon: "*O Emmanuel, ruler and lawgiver, desire of the nations, savior of all people: come and set us free, Lord our God.*" Join us tonight where we will sing, "*O come, O come Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear*" ("*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*" (ELW #257))

Let us pray: **Loving God, tonight we celebrate with all the angels the birth of our Lord and Savior ... the Messiah! Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice. Sing a new song for the Lord. Come, Jesus, and live ever more fully in our lives. Come Emmanuel – God with us!**

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