**Cause for Joy (Luke 2:8-21)**

 For us, the birth of Jesus is a great reason for joy. Greetings to you dear brothers and sisters in Christ as we bring up the topic of the joy connected to Christ’s birth on this third Sunday of Advent. The world, during the time of our Lord, was living in a pressurized peace. The emperor of that day had established a so-called Roman peace by crushing and massacring those opposing him. Yes, it is true that there were no rebellions or insurrections to speak of during this Emperor’s (Augustus’) reign, and yes, every city was dutifully paying its taxes to Caesar, but joy was conditional in that world. For many, this was a life under constant pressure. Today’s scripture reading shows us, however, that God’s plan of salvation even took into account the plight of the lowest classes (in this terrible atmosphere), and thus, it was to these nobodies (the shepherds) that the Good News was directed for the first time outside of Mary and Joseph. So, today, we’re going to talk about the joy that the angel declared, and how that relates to our reality of today. Again, for us, the birth of Jesus is a great reason for joy. Let’s speak today, then, about this joy and its effects on the occasion of this season of Nativity.

 The joy of Jesus’ birth stands as an answer to all the world’s pressures on us. Jesus’ birth was the answer by God for all humanity, as to who was the true King, as to who is the true Savior of this world. God’s people were drowning under the pressure of the Roman Empire. The tax collectors were sucking the little that the people had left dry, and there was an unbearable poverty everywhere. Caesar Augustus had declared himself a peace-bearer, and many allies declared him to be the son of God and savior of the world. In all of this, however, Luke the Evangelist reminds us that within that whole selfish program of the Caesar, given that the point of the census was to collect taxes to pile his moneys even higher, even in that unjust and pressurized/forced peace, God was intervening through His Son’s birth. And that, was a joyful event – because Jesus represented a new reality. This was one in which peace was given freely, and not through bloody wars and massacres. It was a peace given to all men, and not simply Roman citizens who were friends with Caesar. It was a peace the prices of which was the life of God’s Son, and not something else or more than that. In a word, Jesus’ Kingdom was different than Caesar’s. It was one with a new economic vision: where the poor would receive help, where the rich would not be wallowing in their riches while the poor starved to death. It was one in which leaders would be different – not having more honor than those who had the lowest and most disliked positions in society. Jesus’ kingdom was one in which there would be a different system of relationships – where there was no longer room for human revenge, but rather to a call to love the enemy, instead of subjugating or annihilating them. All of the above were reasons to rejoice. And because of these, the plight of the shepherds would be changing – a new life awaited them.

 There was once man of distinction in Western India that embraced the Gospel and was baptized. By this act he lost possession of his houses, his fields, his wells, his wife, and his children. Such was the inexorable law of caste. On being asked how he bore his sorrows, he replied, "Ay, I am often asked that, but I am never asked how I bear my joys, for I have joys within with which a stranger intermeddles not. The Lord Jesus sought me and found me, a poor strayed sheep in the jungles, and He brought me to His fold and He will never leave me.''

 Jesus’ birth is a joy for us in this fallen world. Yes, it is true that we don’t have to deal with the Roman Empire today. However, we still have this world full of economic and political problems. We have unjust kingdoms, influenced by the Evil One; we have large companies taking advantage of the poor, piling up their riches on the backs of the needy and the sick. We have leaders of the country who crush their detractors and we have vengeful people in high places that know nothing of the joy of Christ or about loving their enemies and those who oppose them.

 In all this, we have the honor of experiencing all the above blessings: it is a joy for us to help the poor. It is a joy to deal justly with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ – a joy to know that our “Emperor” is the true just, loving and caring King, our Lord Jesus. It’s a joy for us to experience genuine peace, which is the reconciliation we have with God, which is supposed to rule among us as well. It is pure joy to know that we have handed over our “cases” to the Lord, and that He will be the One to decide them and to take revenge when He deems it proper. It is a joy to know that the burdens of our sins can all be brought to Jesus and to receive in return the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, compassion, love, peace and joy. The joy of Jesus’ birth stands as an answer to all the world’s pressures on us.

 Therefore, knowing all this, may the birth of Jesus be a cause for rejoicing for us, especially in these difficult days, when we still need to keep distance from each other due to the pandemic, or when bad news upsets us with negative information.

 The birth of Jesus is a joy for us. The Lord Bless You All. Amen.