

## Sermon Sparkler for The Nativity of Our Lord

“Praise Augustus a Savior who has made war to cease and who shall put everything in peaceful order.” So reads the Priene inscription, regarding Gaius Octavius, the revered emperor who won the Roman civil war beating out Lepidus, Brutus, Cassius, Sextus Pompey, Lucius Antonius, Fulvia, Mark Antony, and Cleopatra and in so doing won a “peace.” That’s Roman peace, peace through superior fire power, Roman salvation, salvation through slaughter.

This, however is not the peace of God, there is an alternative kind of peace and salvation, an alternative Savior. Where does such a savior come from? Does he come from the ranks of the Equestrian Order, born in the heart of Rome and on a crib of power? By no means! He’s born in backwoods Nazareth, an insignificant pimple on the armpit of Octavius’ empire; born in a trough because even the guest room is full.

Under the noses of the Powers that be, God is at work, God, in fact, reigns! God reigns with these shepherds, who live outside the city gates, away from the halls of power, which makes them good for getting and disseminating gossip, and as we’ll see gospel—in fact a tour guide in Israel called them “The CNN of Jesus’ day.”

They are people found outside the boundaries of “civilized” society yet trustworthy in their own way. I can’t help but remember a bumper sticker on my parent’s cooler growing up, “If you can’t trust a biker, who can you trust?” Likewise, “If you can’t trust a shepherd who can you trust?”

You can trust them when they tell you about a whole host of angels paratropping in. This is frightening stuff. Imagine a Marine Corps band, playing, but also fully decked out for battle; that’s the kind of singing host we’re talking about! This is an invasion of Caesar’s world; Peace brought not by sword and power and the sign of the Roman Eagle, but by the spiritual power of a tiny vulnerable baby—swaddling cloth and manger his only sigil.

- ✠ What false peace, saviors, and salvation are on offer these days for your folk? How can we name them in such a way our congregation will still hear them, especially on a day where so many people have already heard the Christmas story as told by systems enthralled by false peace, saviors, and salvation?
- ✠ Who seems to be outside the boundaries of decency today? What would it be like to hear good news from God proclaimed by them?
- ✠ Surely God reigns everywhere, yet where is God reigning in your context? How is your congregation entering into that reign?
- ✠ Take a moment to think about the last time you were vulnerable, what did that feel like? What insights might that give us when considering God’s incarnation in the Christ child, among Joseph and Mary and the Shepherds?