

The Angel's Candle

Flames for the Faithful Series Rev. Michael J. Mattil

"And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

The fourth candle on the wreath is lit, the one called the **Angels' Candle**. The circle is complete at last, and fills our view with light. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed," the prophet once had said, and now the light has come.

So, what do we see in the full light of the wreath? We see a manger--strange sight to behold, but one that **SHEPHERDS** would understand and appreciate, a place where sheep are fed, in a place as down-to-earth and real as **BETHLEHEM**, location filled with memories. We see a manger, and a baby there, more clearly visible in the increasing light, "the glory of the Lord." It was a glory foretold in **PROPHECY**, those early glimmers of God's grace, those hints of hope, symbolized in just one candle flickering at first:

- "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from the midst of you," Moses had foretold, "and when that happens, listen!"
- "A star shall rise out of Jacob."
- "Light shall dawn for the righteous."
- "The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."
- "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."
- "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God."
- "The new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb."

What do you see in the full light of the wreath? The prophecies of God fulfilled! When angels were sent to announce the news, "the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

The glory of the Lord revealed at **BETHLEHEM**, "the city of David," that blessed place where earth and heaven met, where God's own Son first came to dwell among us, full of grace and truth, the Word made flesh. The second candle on the wreath proclaims him human and divine, a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes who is nonetheless nothing less than the Savior who is Christ the Lord. By the light of the second candle we see Joseph and Mary, come to Bethlehem at God's direction in fulfillment of the prophecies, to be the agents of God's plan, right here, among us, in this place of straw and stone, of sheep and lambs, of flickering flames and angels waiting to

descend. What do we see as wreath light glows on the little town of Bethlehem? "All is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin-mother ... and Child."

We see the hillsides bathed in light, where **SHEPHERDS** watched their flocks by night, the glory of the Lord revealed, "Good tidings of great joy." And in that light we begin to see our fears dispelled, chased off like shadows with the dawning light. No longer need we wander, lost, like sheep without a shepherd, doomed to perish in the wilderness. No, the Good Shepherd comes to seek and to save the lost, to gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom, to bring them home rejoicing. "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep!" Look! Even by candlelight the Shepherd's care is evident, for that is how shepherds are: "watching over their flocks by night," awaiting light.

The wreath is glowing fully now, and in its light we now can see how truly dark it was before, the world plunged into the **darkness of sin**, Adam replying from the bushes where he hid, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid." By one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin. And so death spread to all, because all have sinned. The cherubim were placed to guard the gate of Eden then, and the only light was a flaming sword. The world was plunged into darkness.

What do you see in the full light of the candles now? Look closely, for in the full light of the Advent candles, even now one may begin to see ... **a cross**. Yes, even here at the foot of the manger the cross is visible, for that is where the story leads, and that is where the glory shines. The glory of the Lord shone round the shepherds once and darkness gave way to light. And at the cross, where darkness fell again, the glory of the Lord began to shine.

Look! Look there beyond, and in the growing light you may begin to see a cave, another cave somewhat like this cattle shelter here in Bethlehem ... but one no longer occupied. The angel of the Lord descends again: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but he is risen, as he said!"

The world has been waiting long for this--not just four weeks of candle lighting, and shopping and baking and buying and decorating ... but for centuries. In 742 B.C., "the year that King Uzziah died," **Isaiah had a vision** of the glory of the Lord, and of the angels' part in it: "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphim

were in attendance above him. Each had six wings. With two they covered their face, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! The whole earth is full of his glory!' Then I said, 'Woe is me! For I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and live among a people of unclean lips. Yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!' Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it, and said, 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

When angels came, the shepherds shared the news too. They made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And thus they joined the angels, and the prophets, in proclaiming God's good news. And so may we, by word and deed. And as we tell, by words and actions, what we see here in the light, **GOD IS GLORIFIED!** That is the task of angels, you know, to glorify the Lord. That is the task of people too--especially people, to whom the good tidings of great joy have come.

"Glory to God in the highest," the angels sang. "Glory to God in the highest," we reply. And in that praise the light may shine more brightly still. "Let your light shine," the Savior said. The candles lead the way ... to Bethlehem ... and Calvary ... and to the open tomb ... and to the brightness of eternity at last, where the praises of God will never end: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth!" The light shines!