

September 25 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – Adoration of Shepherds Medallion

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is the Adoration of the Shepherds, located in the left front side of the sanctuary and framed in the Upper Medallion.

Collectively, we see the beauty of the story of Luke 2:1-20, pictorially characterized with Joseph, Mary, the infant Christ, two shepherds, and a lamb in the stable under the canvas of the night sky. Joseph's cloak and cowl are brown in color, representing his faithful humility and sincerity to God and Mary. Mary's cloak and cowl are blue in color, signifying her hope, sincerity, and piety as a bond-servant of God. The infant Jesus is clothed in a gown of white with a glowing nimbus around His head, embodying His divinity, innocence, and purity. Both Joseph and Mary are also shown with a nimbus, expressive of their sacred reliance upon God's grace and faithful obedience to Him. The shepherds are clothed in cloaks and cowls of green, brown, and purple, which convey their humility, sincerity, and expectant faith and fulfilled adoration of and in Christ Jesus as the One who saves, the true Good Shepherd, and the Prince of Peace and Lord of Lords of the kingdom that never ends. We see the gift of a white lamb, symbolizing the name bestowed to Jesus by John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!". A hanging lantern provides light to the earthly scene, while representing the "Light of the World" who lies in the manger – "a light has dawned" as the Prophet Isaiah writes. Joseph is seen holding a large white cloth, which may serve as a source of privacy for mother and child but may also symbolize the burial cloth of the crucified Christ that is to come. The linen garment in which Jesus was wrapped speaks of His work as the Great High Priest on the Day of Atonement as conveyed in Leviticus 16.

The upper medallion is filled with many other symbolic features: golden oak leaves representing God's unending and sufficient strength; garlands of green laurel leaves symbolizing God's eternal Word and triumph over sin through salvation in and through Christ Jesus; fern leaves that signify the humility of Jesus, "who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant in the likeness of men, humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). The upper medallion is framed in a circle, which symbolizes the everlasting life that God has given us in Christ Jesus through His birth, life, death, and resurrection. On top of the circle frame rests an angel, robed in red on a half shell, who is God's messenger of the Good News of God's sacrificial love, saving grace and presence throughout our life's faith journey.

The story of Jesus' birth is detailed in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:1-20). Luke was a close friend of the Apostle Paul, who referred to him as "the beloved physician" and was the only Gentile to write any part of the New Testament (Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts). Both are addressed to the same person, Theophilus, also a Gentile, so that he would know with certainty about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Luke gives a historical view of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He emphasized that the gospel of the Kingdom of God is for all humanity through Christ.

Luke tells of Jesus' birth in the frame of human history, i.e., in the time of Roman emperor Augustus and a census called for all to return to their ancestral towns. For Joseph, this is Bethlehem since he is a descendant of King David. Joseph takes Mary to whom he is engaged and is expecting with child. We know that both Joseph (Matthew 1) and Mary (Luke 1) were faithful servants of the Lord and were obedient to God's sovereign plan as revealed to each of them by the angel Gabriel. Upon their arrival,

no room is available anywhere and Mary gives birth to Jesus in the humble surroundings of a cave or a stable used for the keeping of animals. The revelation of the birth of the son of God is made known first to the shepherds in the surrounding fields. Shepherds of that day were the lowest rung of the social order, considered ritually unclean and dishonest such that they were not even allowed to testify in court proceedings. However low in the social order, Luke suggests that these shepherds were not ignorant of the promise of the Messiah but expectant. During the prophetic period of Israel's history, the Jewish people were promised that God would raise up a redeemer from the seed of David who would bring the physical deliverance from their Gentile enemies, restore the Temple, and reestablish the kingdom rule of David. It has been considered that these shepherds were not ordinary in that they were chosen for the specific task of tending the Temple sheep intended to be sacrificed for Passover. It was their job to make sure the lambs were without blemish and completely unharmed before being sacrificed. Here in the angelic proclamation of the Good News, the shepherds' initial fear is overcome by joy and adoration of the Lord with the praise and glory of the great company of the heavenly host.

It is in the shepherds' response that we see how God's sovereign plan touches those whom He has called. They were given clues: swaddling clothes and a feeding trough/ manger. The shepherds did not ask further questions or need clarification. They went with haste! When they had seen the Christ Child, they spread the word at what had been told them about the child while continuing to glorify and praise God for what they had experienced. Such men were the first to meet the Savior of the world, forever changed, expressing a divine adoration for Him and so it should be with us:

*Sweet adoration flows from Your children
Glory and honor and praise are a part
Of our constant devotion, love set in motion
For the Divine One, who reigns in our hearts.*

We celebrate in the restoration of our relationship with our Creator through His perfect sovereignty in the coming of Christ Jesus our Lord, who is indeed the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world through the shedding of His blood.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(913\) Lauren Daigle - Light Of The World \(Lyric Video\) - YouTube](#)

Looking ahead – Sunday October 2

First Window on Left Facing Chancel (Upper Medallion) – The Adoration of the Shepherds – Prophecy Fulfilled