

And the Shepherds Returned

It is with great reluctance and regret that most of watch the gathering shadows of the dusk on Christmas day. It pains us deeply to see the season passing, not to return again for so long. But always Christmas must be left behind.

On the radio last night it was reported that there was a lull most everywhere on the world's battlefronts. The RAF did not raid Germany and no great war news was released to mar the celebration of the Christmas spirit. But just imagine how painful it must be for the military men now to resume their operations just following their brief interlude for a Christmas observance. After singing and hearing "peace on earth good will toward men" how terribly difficult it must be to go back to the grim necessities of bombing attacks and total war!

The gospel records of the Christmas story closes the account in this way:

"And the shepherds returned, glorifying God and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen." Luke 2:20

The shepherds could not stay forever because they had left their flocks and their homes - their duties and their responsibilities.

The two words "glorifying" and "praising" still need to be understood. They are not synonymous. The very mood of Christmas is the expression of praise. All of our Christmas celebration is in the mood of praise. But "glorifying" is something different. It is something much more than merely voicing our gratitude. It is the very transformation of life itself. It is the causing of all that is within us to bless the name of our Lord. To glorify is to advance the glory of God by faithful action.

On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus rose high to dwell in ecstasy with God. His very countenance did shine as he basked therein in God's glory, breathing its beauty. And Peter and James and John wanted to stay there and continue to enjoy that ecstasy. But Jesus ~~insisted~~ insisted that they come down from the mount, and when they did return the first thing that he did was to heal a child of a sickness. (Poem)

St. Francis of Assisi once said: "One must always be willing to leave an ecstasy to help a brother".

After Christmas there will still be people in need - hungry, naked, sick, in prison, and lonely. We shall still need to attend to these needs.

Poem of Robert Frost "Stopping by the woods on a winter evening"

And we too, with the shepherds, must return - but how can any one of us who has seen the Christ Child go back to the same old life and habits?