

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today another little lamb has been brought by the quiet waters of Holy Baptism through the door into the Shepherd's sheepfold. Today our Shepherd has taken up another tender lamb into His loving arms that in due time He may take her home. Tonight Peter and Rebecca might begin singing not just to Anika and James, but also to Sophia: "I am Jesus' little lamb, Ever glad at heart I am; For my Shepherd gently guides me, Knows my need and well provides me, Loves me ev'ry day the same, Even calls me by my name" (LSB740:1).

But this lullaby is not just for our little ones, and not just for bedtime. It is for all of us — Jesus' little lambs all. And it's a quiet and gentle yet confident song of faith for all who follow Jesus. It's a song of Jesus' loving care for us now, and of our ultimate destination "when [our] short life is ended" (LSB740:3).

This figure of Jesus our Lord as our Shepherd is a comforting one; it's what today is all about. Our collect, our hymns, our readings, and the preaching all highlight Jesus as our Shepherd. And we'll get to that. But Jesus uses another "*figure of speech*" in our Gospel to describe Himself. "*I am the door of the sheep. ... I am the door.*" I want to begin with this figure, for we have an object lesson before us today in Sophia Ruth.

The Church is not just a voluntary association of like-minded individuals. It is the mystical body of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we enter into the Church, we are united with Jesus' body; and that happens through Holy Baptism, as St. Paul says, "*in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*" (1 Cor. 12:13), into Christ ... united with Jesus by Baptism "*in a death like his*" so that "*we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his*" (Rom. 6:5). It's all about our salvation, as Peter says, "*Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*" (1 Pet. 3:21).

In our Gospel, the sheepfold represents the Church, but the doorway is still Jesus, and the purpose is still salvation, as Jesus says, "*If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.*" And He is the only door into the fold as Peter preached: "*there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). All others are thieves and robbers, Jesus says, who do not have in mind salvation. They want to steal and kill and destroy. Jesus saves, and Jesus gives life, as John testifies: "*life is in [God's] Son. Whoever has the Son has life*" (1 John 5:11-12). Again, baptism delivers this life to us, for being baptized into Christ and dying with Him, "*we believe that we will also live with him*" (Rom. 6:8), and I can imagine nothing more grand.

Truly, to live with Jesus is life in abundance, and it anticipates eternal life with Him, through the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). Life in abundance is a life of faith in the Crucified One, in Him who was lifted up unto death for us, and who rose again victorious over the grave. It's a life lived in conformity with Christ, not the world; walking in the steps He trod, not blazing one's own path. It's a life lived out in love, not hate, not indifference; in righteousness, not sin; in endurance not resignation; in forgiveness not vengeance. Life in abundance can mean suffering, but suffering for doing good, suffering for the name of Jesus, is a gracious thing, a commendable thing. And Christ brings us through cross and suffering to life eternal.

The life of the baptized is life in abundance, and that is a life devoted to Christ, to the apostles' teaching, to the Holy Sacraments, to gathering together as church. Christ's sheep go in and out to partake of verdant pasture, and to drink of the refreshing water of life. With the little ones just welcomed to Jesus, like Warren baptized two weeks ago and Sophia baptized today, it may begin with the consoling lullaby, "I am Jesus' little lamb," but it continues with Bible stories, and more singing, and prayers, and coming to church. And soon, they'll be carrying a cross around the house in procession. And we trust in the promise: "*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Prov. 22:5).

Train up a child to listen to the voice of the Shepherd. That's the other figure of speech Jesus uses in our text today, and there is no doubt that He has in mind Himself, for in the verse immediately following the end of today's Gospel, Jesus says, "*I am the Good Shepherd*" (John 10:11). Jesus is the authentic shepherd of the sheep; He is not a fake or a cheap substitute. He's not "*a thief*" or "*a robber*." Jesus entered the sheepfold at the request of His Father, "*the gatekeeper*." Jesus is the one who entered legitimately into the sheepfold as the true shepherd to make the Father known (John 1:18), and to lead us to Him, for Jesus knows His sheep. He knows us each by name. He knows the youngest ... Sophia and Warren. He knows the oldest ... Bryce and Doris. And He knows all of us in between. The Good Shepherd says, "*I know my own and my own know me*" (John 10:14). We are His because we have been given to Him by the Father, given to Him that He may give us life. Jesus said, "*this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day*" (John 6:39).

Jesus is the one that the Father sent from His bosom; He was sent to bring us "*grace and truth*" (John 1:17). This is the voice that the sheep's ears are tuned to, the voice that proclaims grace and truth — "*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:31-32) — "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give*

*them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28) — grace and truth.*

The sheep of the Good Shepherd listen to His voice. The sheep of the true Shepherd follow Him as their leader whether inside or outside the sheepfold. Surely, it is easier on the inside, inside these walls, the world walled off from us, thieves and robbers kept away, wolves held at bay. Surely piety is easier in here surrounded by God’s flock, with visual reminders of Jesus, who He is, what He did. But we are not monks — who, Luther reminds us, were not all that pious; and this is not a monastery. This is a church, with sheep that come in and go out. We come in to be fed and forgiven, to have our wounds treated with the balm of the Gospel and our mouths filled with the food that endures to eternal life. And we go out into the world, Christ still leading us, bearing witness to our Shepherd with our words and deeds, *“praising God and [we pray] having favor with all the people”* we meet.

But often, we are met with disfavor and disdain. Often we are wounded by our own sin and the sins of others against us because of the name of Jesus. Let not your hearts be troubled. Remember, *“By his wounds you have been healed.”* Daily, in remembrance of your baptisms, “by ... contrition and repentance” drown “the Old Adam” in you. Slay him “with all sins and evil desires,” “that a new man [may] daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Small Catechism, Baptism, Part IV); St. Peter says it more succinctly: we *“die to sin and live to righteousness.”*

Therefore, *“Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love”* (Joel 2:13). Keep coming back into church; come to the Divine Service. As wandering sheep beset by enemies all around us, keep returning *“to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”* He has *“healing in [His] wings”* (Mal. 4:2). Be safe; be healed; and go forth again following Christ with more boldness, for *“The LORD is your keeper; ... The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.”* From Sophia to Bryce, *“The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore”* (Ps. 121:5, 7-8).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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