

Christmas – December 24/25, 2018 – Reflection

And God looked at everything He had made and found it very good. The bible's recounting of the beginning of everything ends in a beautiful garden where God surveys all He has made: the birds of the air; the fishes that swim in the seas; the animals that walk the earth or burrow in the soil; the trees that give fruit and the flowers that bloom; and the man and the woman ... like a proud Father, God sits back and rejoices in the wonder and the beauty of Creation ... so good ... so perfect.

So sad it did not stay thus. The people were ambitious, self-centered, greedy. They had everything. They had God with them ... so close they could walk with Him in the cool of the evening, strolling through the garden, the closest of friends. It wasn't enough. It would never be enough. Why walk with God, when instead, you could walk as God! The forbidden fruit of arrogance they ate and they lost their innocence; they lost their love; they lost their home; they lost their God. As the fruit soured in their stomachs, they felt shame; they pointed fingers of blame: she gave it to me; the serpent tricked me ... and all was not very good anymore.

The man and the woman now lived a very different life from in the beginning. They had sons: two who would grow to manhood. One would be gentle and Godly as if he somehow remembered the garden his parents had lost. The other would be hard and bitter and jealous. In a fit of rage, this one would strike his brother a fatal blow and then hide

the lifeless body. When God asks the murderer, "Where is your brother?," Cain protests, "How should I know ... am I my brother's keeper??" Once again, heart breaking, the Creator asks, "What have you done?"

This night is God's answer to all of human faithlessness and failure. If the world could not seem to come to God, God would come to the world. This night is the answer to Cain's heartless question ... "Am I my brother's keeper?" The heavens shout in reply, "Yes ... yes, you are ... yes, we all are!!" God sends His only begotten Son to keep us; a Good Shepherd to guide us and find us when we are lost; a Brother and Friend willing to lay down His life for us that we might live.

That is why the very first people to hear God's answer to the world's selfishness; the very first people to see God's answer to the question of Cain were shepherds, shepherds leading their flocks, keeping them safe, laying down their lives before the wolf to guard the lambs. The shepherd's staff, the shepherd's crooked cane is the sweet sign of this night to remind us that Jesus is our Good Shepherd guiding us, watching over us, finding us, laying down His life for us, keeping us close to His heart and that we too must look out for one another, take care of each other so that no one whom the Father has given might be lost.

On this blessed night, as we lick the sweetness of the candy cane, as we stir its mint into our cup of warming hot chocolate, may it remind that we are in God's keeping, and that, yes, I am my brother's keeper.