

Christmas Eve 2007

Good News of Great Joy

Luke 2:8-20

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Good News of Great Joy

Scripture

In one of Lessons this evening we heard about the shepherds' visit to the manger in Luke 2:8-20:

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:8-20)

Lesson

Have you ever wondered what difference it might have made

if Jesus had been born today when George W. Bush is President of the United States rather than when Caesar Augustus was Emperor in Rome?

One thing is sure—it still would not have made headlines. News bulletins are for world events, and Jesus' birth was an obscure event.

But Jesus' birth had enormous significance. God the Father sent his Son, Jesus, to be born of a Virgin named Mary. Jesus then lived a perfect, sinless life. He eventually died on the cross to pay the penalty for sinners such as us. He was born to die. And he died so that we might live.

None of that was immediately obvious at the time of Jesus' birth. That is why God the Father took the initiative to get the word out about Jesus' birth.

The first people to hear about Jesus' birth were shepherds. There were senators in Rome, princes in Jerusalem, and philosophers in Athens. But there were shepherds living out in the fields, and to them the wonderful news was given.

God delights in doing the unexpected. It is indicative of how God works even today.

This evening I want you to notice three features about the good news of great joy that was given to the shepherds.

I. The Good News of Great Joy Was an Unexpected Surprise (2:8)

First, the good news of great joy was an unexpected surprise. Luke 2:8 says, **“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.”**

The shepherds were minding their own business or, rather, their own sheep—just another day in their lives, another night in their shepherding. Perhaps the most exciting thing that happened was a visit from a marauding wolf, which is why they kept watch.

But suddenly an angel appeared, and a bright light, the glory of the Lord, filled the sky.

The creation story in Genesis begins in a similar way, with God speaking in the darkness. Throughout history, God brings light into human darkness. The prophets looked forward to the day when the people walking in darkness would see a great light.

But for these shepherds it was an unexpected surprise.

God still breaks into human history in unexpected ways to bring light into our darkness. He comes to those not expecting or even seeking him. He comes to those going about the ordinary business (and busyness) of living.

Shepherds were not highly esteemed in those days. The very nature of their work precluded regular observance at the temple and synagogue. Their honesty was not rated highly. For example, they weren't allowed to stand as witnesses in court.

God still surprises people like that today (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27–29). Some of you can look back to last Christmas and you are surprised to find yourselves here today. Who would have dreamt that God would meet you this year and bring you into his family?

Others here are perhaps still in the dark, going about your business with little thought of angels and glory and God.

God can break into your life. This Christmas could be an unexpected surprise for you as you understand for the first time what Jesus' birth means.

II. The Good News of Great Joy Was an Unusual Sign (2:12)

Second, the good news of great joy was an unusual sign. Luke 2:12 says, **“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”**

Bethlehem may have been a “little town,” but finding the right baby wasn't easy, so the shepherds were given an identifying sign—not just a baby **wrapped in swaddling cloths**, for most babies would be in that attire. The identifying sign would be a baby **lying in a manger**. This baby was in an animal feeding-trough, his first bed.

The New Testament word for **“sign”** means not just an iden-

tifying mark, but something that has in itself significance. So what is the significance of the **manger**?

It indicates the depths to which the Son was willing to stoop in love (2 Corinthians 8:9).

It marks the beginning of the life of one who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

It marked the kind of lifestyle he would adopt in his earthly ministry (Luke 9:58).

He was born a Savior in a manger, and he died a Savior on a cross.

The manger also meant the shepherds could visit him freely. Charles Haddon Spurgeon says: “We might tremble to approach a throne, but we cannot fear to approach a manger.”

III. The Good News of Great Joy Was an Unbelievable Story (2:17-18)

And third, the good news of great joy was an unbelievable story. Luke 2:17-18 says, “**And when they [i.e., the shepherds] saw it [i.e., the baby lying in the manger], they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.**”

These shepherds were the first Christian missionaries. They had seen the Christ, and they told everyone what had happened to them.

The good news about Jesus is something to be shared, and the best people to share it are ordinary people who have had a personal experience with him.

You may not know everything, but if God has unexpectedly broken into your life, you have something to share.

We have someone to share—a baby in the manger and a savior on the Cross!

The great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, “Would it have been fitting that the man who was to die naked on the cross should be robed in purple at his birth? Would it not have

been inappropriate that the Redeemer who was to be buried in a borrowed tomb should be born anywhere but in the humblest shed, and housed anywhere but in the most ignoble manner? The manger and the cross standing at the two extremities of the Savior's life seem most fit and congruous the one to the other."

Conclusion

Have you ever heard the story of Larry Walters, a 33-year-old man who decided that he wanted to see his neighborhood from a new perspective?

He went down to the local army surplus store one morning and bought 42 used weather balloons. That afternoon he strapped himself into a lawn chair, to which several of his friends tied the now helium-filled balloons. He took along a six-pack of beer, a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, and a BB gun, figuring he could shoot the balloons one at a time when he was ready to land.

Walters, who assumed the balloons would lift him about 100 feet in the air, was caught off guard when the chair soared more than 16,000 feet into the sky—smack into the middle of the air traffic pattern at Los Angeles International Airport!

He had just begun shooting the balloons when he lost his grip on his pellet gun, and it dropped from his hands.

He stayed airborne for more than two hours.

Soon after he was safely grounded and cited by the police, reporters asked him three questions:

"Were you scared?"

"Yes."

"Would you do it again?"

"No."

"Why did you do it?"

"Because," he said, "you can't just sit there."

Friends, when it comes to God's intervention in human history, you can't just sit there. Jesus' birth was an obscure but extremely significant event. The good news of great joy that came to

the shepherds that first Christmas was an unexpected surprise, an unusual sign, and an unbelievable story.

God invites you to believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, on this Christmas Eve.

Believe that he really is the Savior of sinners.

Believe that he really is your Savior. Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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