

Christmas Sunday

*And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of 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.
(Luke 2:10–11 ESV)*

For Unto You
December 28th, 2014
Luke 2:8-20
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Luke 2:8-20. This is the story of the Shepherds and the Angels and the baby that changed the world. Hear now from God’s Word:

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 great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of 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 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Most of us know this story very well from “forest level”. We know it as the story of how Great News was shared with simple people about a baby that would change the world. We love this story, we love the characters, we love the feel of it and we love the subtle themes that become for us the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. For many of us, this is THE CHRISTMAS story. This is the story that Grandpa read, this is the story that we got dressed up for as a child in order to play our part in the Christmas pageant. My daughter Peyton was in a play just last week and she played the role of Mary. She was very eager

for everyone in our family to see her playing the lead role and when she described her performance to those who had missed it she said: “I was pondering Jesus in my heart – that’s what Mary did you know – she pondered Jesus in her heart. At one point I forgot and was looking for my auntie Michelle to wave at her, but then right away I went back to pondering Jesus in my heart.” This story gives to so many of us our language of Christmas. We know it. But I think maybe we know it at “forest level” and I think there are a few things we miss at tree level. I want to zoom in this morning. I want zoom past the big picture, past the narrative and story and zoom right down in to the level of words.

When I was in seminary there was a phrase that was to teach young pastors where meaning comes from. The saying was “grammar is the handmaiden of theology”. I don’t know whether that phrase is still going around, you could ask some of our young people who are still in that world, but the phrase means that the words of the text supply the content of our faith. The words tell us what the event is about. Events are interpreted by words. We believe in both, meaning we believe that this EVENT really happened. We believe there were shepherds in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. We believe an angel came and spoke the Gospel to them. We believe a choir of angels came and praised God for what he had done. We believe that a baby was born in Bethlehem the City of David who is the Saviour of the world and our Lord and King. We believe his mother was the Virgin Mary and we believe she really did ponder all these things in her heart. THAT EVENT HAPPENED – that event matters but grammar is the handmaiden of theology. Meaning, the words of the text tell us what the actions mean. By the way, the shepherds, never even having been to seminary seem to have made that connection intuitively. Look at verse 20:

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, **as it had been told them.** (Luke 2:20 ESV)

The story itself would not have been remarkable if it had not been interpreted and explained by the words that had been told them. I would imagine that all those shepherds had seen a baby before – maybe even a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. A baby born to poor people is hardly cause for universal rejoicing. The event needed an explanation for the shepherds to intelligently rejoice. It still needs an

explanation in order for people to intelligently rejoice. We mustn't ONLY be sentimental about a wonderful, magical old story. We must also understand WHAT IT MEANS. We must allow the words of the text to tell us why this story matters. To do that, we need to zoom in. Look very carefully at verses 10-11:

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of 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. (Luke 2:10-11 ESV)

The angel literally says: "I proclaim the Gospel to you". He uses the word *euangelizomai* which when you see it written looks an awful lot like the word "evangelize". It is the word from which we get English words like "Evangelical", "Evangelism" and "Evangelize". All words that mean "to proclaim the Gospel". Evangelicals are "Gospellers". Evangelism is "to share the Gospel". The Angel says "I am giving you the Gospel. REJOICE! This is the Good News that you've been waiting for!" And then he says something very interesting. He says:

¹¹ **For unto you** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11 ESV)

For unto you. Again, words matter. Those three English words come from one Greek word. A very small Greek word. They translate the word *humin* (pronounced *whom-inn*) which literally means "for your advantage". It is what scholars refer to as the dative of advantage. The angel says: "Who Jesus is and what Jesus will do IS FOR YOUR ADVANTAGE. THIS IS FOR YOU! CHRISTMAS IS FOR YOU! It is a gift that you desperately need." Do you hear that? Are you able to hear that? Sometimes we become so aware of our selfishness and greed at Christmas that we overreact and become more pious than the Bible. We say that Christmas is about others and Christmas is about Jesus and let's be clear – Christmas is about Jesus but the Bible says that Christmas is FOR YOU! You need this. O my friend, let me be clear, Christmas is a wonderful time to do good deeds, to serve at the Food Bank to take groceries to a single mom – YES, for all that is holy and good – DO GOOD DEEDS AT CHRISTMAS – YES – BUT. Understand this. The Bible doesn't say that Christmas is for doing good. The Bible doesn't say that Christmas is for others. The Bible says that Christmas is FOR YOU. YOU NEED THIS. Who Jesus IS corresponds WONDERFULLY and EXACTLY with

what you need. You need to wrestle with that – WE NEED TO WRESTLE WITH THAT in order to rejoice intelligently.

In the time that we have left I just want to wrestle with those words that mean to interpret this event. I want to ask and by God’s grace answer one simple question: How is Jesus – who he is and what he does – TO OUR ADVANTAGE? Why is this the GOOD NEWS THAT WE NEED? Once again the answer is found in the words of the text. The angel says:

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David **a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** (Luke 2:10–11 ESV)

The Good News that is FOR YOU is that Jesus is the Saviour that we need and the King we have been waiting for. Let’s talk about those very good things.

Jesus Is The Saviour That We Need

You heard pastor Evan talking about the growing awareness of that need in the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah gave voice to this need 600 years before Jesus was born. He had come to realize, both through experience and with the help of the Holy Spirit that God’s people were hopelessly broken and entirely unable to follow the path of life. He spoke about that in Isaiah 53:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6 ESV)

According to this verse we have a directional problem and we have a guilt problem and both of those problems keep us from the presence of God. Let’s talk about the directional problem first. We all like sheep have gone astray. According to the Bible every human being is born with a sense of the Divine. Theologians refer to this as the *sensus divinitatis* – popularly you might hear people speak of “a God-shaped hole” in each one of us. The idea is that every person everywhere has an instinctive knowledge that there is a God, he is good, he created us and we should search for him. God implanted a homing beacon inside every single person created in his image. St. Augustine prayed famously on behalf of all human beings saying: “We are restless, Lord, until we find our rest in

Thee”. People know that there is a God and they know that they should find him. And yet, in reality, we all like sheep have gone astray. Sin obscures our sense of God. Sin disrupts our hearing of his voice. The sins that we commit become a blockage in our ears and a blindfold on our eyes. Romans 1 says that very thing:

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who **by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.** ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So **they are without excuse.** ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and **their foolish hearts were darkened.** (Romans 1:18–21 ESV)

Sin becomes a smudge upon the windows of our minds. It blackens out the truth outside that ought to be perfectly visible. It isn't that God isn't speaking – IT IS THAT WE CAN NO LONGER HEAR because of the sin that we have committed. Sin makes us blind to God and deaf to the sound of truth and the longer we live and the more we sin the darker our windows become and the deeper our lostness and ruin. That's why we share the Gospel with kids – because the longer we wait, the harder it gets to see and hear the truth. It isn't God's fault that we don't see, by our unrighteousness we have suppressed the truth. We are the reason we can't hear or see – we built the dark that we are lost in and we need someone to come and find us and take us by the hand and lead us home. That is what Jesus came to do and that's why in Matthew's version of the Christmas story we find these words:

the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” (Matthew 4:16 ESV)

Jesus is the light that leads us back to God. He saves us from the darkness that we have made for ourselves.

But according to the Bible and according to Isaiah 53, it isn't just that we can't find our way home, it is that covered in our sins, as indeed we are, even if we could get home, we would not be welcomed in our present state. That is why Jesus had to do something else. Look again at Isaiah 53:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him **the iniquity of us all.** (Isaiah 53:6 ESV)

It isn't just that we're lost, it is also that we are guilty. The word translated as "iniquity" there is the Hebrew word *awon* and it has to do with guilt. As sheep that have gone astray, as people who have fouled the windows of our heart and wandered into wickedness and ruin, we have more than a directional problem, we have a legal problem. We have sinned against the Holy God of Heaven. That's not good. God does not fellowship with sin. The Bible says of Him:

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. (Habakkuk 1:13 NKJV)

God has one rule for those who would share his presence, Old Testament and New, his requirement is the same.

¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:15–16 ESV)

To be God's people; to enter into his presence and enjoy him forever, we must be holy as he is holy and that's a serious problem. In fact, that is THE problem in the Bible. God is Holy and WE ARE NOT. We ALL LIKE SHEEP have gone astray. We have ALL done things we should not have done and we have ALL left undone things that ought to have been done. We are sinners. We have guilt that separates us from the presence of the Lord and we need a Saviour. We need someone to pay our debt and to settle our account before God. Isaiah the prophet knew that someone like that would have to come FOR US. That's why he said:

and **the LORD has laid on him** the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6 ESV)

This is the heart of the Gospel. The angel came to tell us the Gospel and this great truth lies at its very centre. It is the truth that theologians call "imputation". The word is very fancy, but the concept is very simple. It simply means this. When Jesus hung on the cross he hung there to pay for sins he did not commit. The wages of sin is death. The Bible says that, in Romans 6:23. Sin deserves eternal separation from God. God made the world and he owns it and so he gets to make the rules and the rules haven't changed since day 1. God said to Adam at the very beginning:

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it **you shall surely die.**” (Genesis 2:16–17 ESV)

“If you obey me – if you are content to live in my world, under the authority of my word, then you can enjoy it and me forever – you can eat from every tree of the garden – including the tree of life and live forever. But if you reject my word, if you reject my right as Creator and Lord, then you will be exiled from my presence, from my garden and from the tree of life and you will die. The wages of sin is death.”

That was the rule on day 1 and that is the rule today. And that is a problem because we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way – but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Imputation means that we can “put” all our sin on Jesus such that his death is the death we owe God. It satisfies the Word of God that governs the whole of his creation. God said disobedience would cost a death. God sent Jesus to live for us and to die for us so that we could come back and enjoy him forever. This is the Good News that you need. You need it because you are lost and you need it because you are guilty. All of us need it. We ALL like sheep have gone astray and each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on JESUS the iniquity of us all. Jesus came to find us in our dark, to lead us back to God and to pay for everything that stands between us and our eternal home. He is the Saviour that we need.

And he is:

Jesus Is The King We Have Been Waiting For

The Gospel that the Angels gave to the Shepherds spoke of a Saviour and it also spoke of a King:

For unto you is born this day in **the city of David** a Savior, who is **Christ the Lord.** (Luke 2:11 ESV)

David was the Great King of Israel in the Old Testament but he was not Jesus. We often say that David was like an arrow shot at the sun. He points us in the right direction but like all men, he ultimately falls short. Bethlehem is the City of Kings and in its shadows,

the angel says, comes one who is Christ the Lord. The word “Christ” is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “Messiah”. It is not Jesus’ last name it is his title. Messiah or Christ, means “Anointed One”; it means “The King Chosen By God”. This king, chosen by God is called THE LORD. That word means “Master” or “Ruler”. Jesus is the King chosen by God who is coming to RULE OVER THE WORLD. He is coming to do what we could never do. You see WE were supposed to rule over the world – do you remember? God said to us, he said to ADAM and EVE in the beginning of days:

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and **have dominion** (Genesis 1:28 ESV)

God made men and women in his image and likeness and he told them to have dominion over all the earth. You know the word “dominion” because our country Canada is called a dominion. We are not a republic like the United States, we are a dominion – do you know why? Because our head is the Queen or the King, depending upon who sits upon the throne. We are a people and a land UNDER THE KING. The word dominion comes from the Latin word *dominium* which means “Master” or “Sovereign”. A dominion is the land under the authority of a legal Sovereign. This whole CREATION, according to the Word of God was supposed to be under our DOMINION. We were supposed to be kings and queens over creation. But we were also supposed to be obedient under God. How many of you know that you can’t lead anyone unless you are following God absolutely? That’s what Pastor Jody’s sermon was about 2 weeks ago. We couldn’t do this because we couldn’t follow God. The world is messed up – relationships are ruined, nature is ruined, culture is ruined – because we can’t lead because we can’t follow. So what do we need? We need someone from God to do for us what we could never do for ourselves and to pay for what we did do in his body on the cross. We need Jesus and THANKS BE TO GOD, the angels say - Jesus has come!

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11 ESV)

He is the Saviour that we need and the King that all the earth has been waiting for.

The effect of his coming is announced in the Angels’ song of praise:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14 ESV)

The coming of Jesus to be who he is and to do what he did results in two things. Glory to God in the heavens and peace for people upon whom God's favour rests. There is a sense in which Christmas gives to God what God wanted. God created people to glorify him and enjoy him forever. Our sin and our fall represented an apparent challenge to God's will. Would sin rob God of what God wanted? Can God's will be thwarted by the things that he has made? Such an idea is an affront to the majesty and Sovereignty of God. The life and death of Jesus answered that apparent challenge. Jesus glorified God. He showed the watching world that God's will triumphs over all. God always gets what he wants and God wanted a people who would know him as creator, love him as Saviour and follow him as Lord. Jesus secured that for God. His life and his death resulted in glory to God in the highest AND on earth – peace among those whom he has favoured. Peace is what the Gospel gives to you – if you grab hold of it in faith. Peace with God – the right to go home and enjoy him forever – and peace with other people. It also brings peace to the earth. The planet itself, Paul says in Romans 8 – labours under the absence of her leaders. One day, Jesus will come back physically to the earth and he will reign over all creation as a man – and we will reign with him and under him – and the result of his reign will be peace upon THE EARTH. This too will be much to our advantage.

Conclusion:

Those are the words that give meaning to this event that we call Christmas. The words carry hard truth and good truth. The hard truth is that you need this. If this event means what the angel of heaven said that it means then, I guess, you are a sinner. You are a sheep that has gone astray. Your sense of God has been fouled and obscured by your trespasses and sins. You have smudged the windows of your soul and you can no longer tell what is good and what is evil and you cannot find your way home. You are a sinner and you need a Saviour.

If this event means what the angel said it means, then, I guess, you are also a failure. You have not led as you were created to lead. All your labors upon the earth have been imperfect, and in many cases destructive to yourself and to others. You cannot be in charge. You need a king. You need Jesus. You see the hard truth is that you need

Christmas. You can and should help others and spread good cheer and all of that, but don't you dare go through this season and not remember that this was for you. You need this – that's the hard news. The Good News is that you can have this right here, right now, through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you turn from your sins, if you confess your need and your lostness and your guilt and cast yourself upon Christ he will not turn you away. He accepts everyone who comes to him in humility and faith and when he takes hold of you, he will never let you go. He said that in John 6:

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me **I will never cast out.** ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And 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. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:37–40 ESV)

Are you hearing that? Because that's Good News! That is peace on earth among those whom God has favoured. That's the Gospel and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.