

“Good News of Great Joy For All the People”

Luke 2:8-20

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Some ideas and insights from Adam Hamilton's book, *The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem* (2011)

We have been on a special journey for Advent following Mary and Joseph's footsteps from Nazareth to Bethlehem. In the long run, we have arrived at the town of Bethlehem! This morning, I am going to talk about what exactly happened on that first Christmas night. For sure, there weren't any Christmas carols and Santa Claus. Even we can't imagine Christmas trees and colorful Christmas lights in those times. Truly, I just imagine that it must have been a quiet night! The Son of God, the baby Jesus was born on that night. What was the good news by the way? Why is the birth of Jesus so important to us?

I want to begin my message acknowledging a couple of challenges that I encountered from some church members last week. They asked me about historical Christmas facts. One child told me that he watched a documentary film of the birth of Jesus on TV. According to him, Jesus was not born in a manger, but he was born in a cave under the church building. Another man gently challenged me whether Christmas is the real date of Jesus' birthday or not. He told me that the real date of Jesus' birthday would be in the middle of July based on his research and study. I believe that they found more accurate and factual information than the Bible. Even when I studied the Christmas story at seminary, I had questions why the Gospels of John and Mark didn't mention the birth of Jesus at all since Jesus' birth is significantly important to early Christian brothers and sisters.

We need to remember one important lesson. If we stick to historical facts, we may lose more important messages from the true meaning of the Christmas story. In early Christian days, each disciple and faith community had their own different perspectives of the birth of Jesus and their attitude and viewpoint on Christ Jesus, their Messiah. For example, the Gospel of Mark had little narrative about the birth of Jesus. Mark wasn't as interested in the humble birth nor did he have accurate information about the birth of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew put an emphasis on the birth of Jesus from the legacy of King David focusing on a new born King! That's why we see the story of the three magi riding on camels. But the Gospel of Luke has more focus on the culture of the shepherds who were considered low-ranking or marginalized people in society. God chose the shepherds first as the audience of good news for all the people. They heard

good news from an angel. If you imagine our Christmas story with images of Jesus' birth cattle lowing, angels flying when Mary gave a birth in the barn, that may not be true. This morning, I want to invite you to join me in rethinking why Christmas is so special and meaningful to all of us. Today's Scripture reading gives us two important clues why Christmas is so beautiful and is good news to us all.

As we know from our Scriptures, an angel of God appeared to the shepherds and said, "Do not be afraid- I am bringing you *good news of great joy for all the people.*" The essence of the Savior and Messiah is "good news of great joy". Joy is a gift from God. Without joy, we cannot possibly experience God. Joy is different from happiness. We find happy feelings through objects like food, success, and other sources of pleasure, but we cannot find joy through our self-satisfaction. Joy is like a spring welling up from our inner self like a gift from God. When we see a baby or a new born baby, we find joy at a baby's smile. The Gospel of Luke invites us to experience God and find God in a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. You could make the assumption that this child is weak and powerless, but never underestimate the power of a child. Children can go where none of us would dare. That's why God chose a child to bring the powerful message of God's love to the world. God knows the power of a child. Steve Garnaas-Holmes describes how God's power is like the power of a child: "God does not come into our lives with overpowering force. God comes with no more power than a baby has: the power to evoke our love. God comes with no more authority than a crying child, the authority of one who knows suffering, and will not be fooled by empty comfort."

Also, we don't want to miss two characters in our Christmas story; the angels and Shepherds. The gospel of Luke emphasizes that shepherds were the first to be invited to see the Christ Child which was very shocking news if you were one of first-century Israelites awaiting the Messiah's coming. Shepherds symbolized "the weak", "the least significant" and "people in need". God does not come to holy places, to sanctuaries and temples, but to mangers and graveyards, shelters and caves, to broken places. God does not come to the triumphant and those in high places; God comes to shepherds, the poor and the weak, and to us as good news of great joy.

When we think about God's angels, we tend to picture winged creatures flitting about in the night sky singing, or cute babies with wings-cherubs who are singing to the shepherds. Both Hebrew and Greek words for "angel" mean "messenger". The angel announced to the shepherds, "I am bringing you good

news of great joy.” Good news of great joy for all the people which is Jesus’ birth.

This church has messengers. I am so proud and grateful for the ministries that many of you are involved in. Our youth are helping with Loaves and Fishes Christmas stockings. We are also collecting new and used socks for helping our neighbors who are in need. I know many of you individually are involved to support and help others through your sharing and giving in this Christmas season. This year, our church is going to have a special offering to support Heifer International through the gifts of livestock to hungry communities around the world. Angels point to God’s call on our lives to be God’s messengers today-demonstrating, speaking, and bringing good news of great joy to others by our words and actions. This is what the Christmas story is all about. Amen.