

Christmas Sermon  
Luke 2:8-20

December 22, 2019  
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As we begin our time in the Word, I want to share a few updates with you about things that are going on here at the church that we are unbelievably excited about. So many of the families of this church picked up Operation Bright Christmas cards, you scratched your card off, went and bought Christmas presents for families in our city that needed a little extra encouragement this time of year. There were so many tables that looked **just like this**, filled with presents from this church. And **parents were able to come in**, one after the next after the next, and along with volunteers pick out presents for their kids. More than 200 families were blessed through this ministry. One of them wrote in and shared her gratitude. She said, "Thank you for teaching me to open my heart. Because of my husband's medical issues, I didn't know how we were going to pay our bills. If it had not been for Operation Bright Christmas, our five girls would not have had a Christmas. God heard my prayers and has answered them. He is so loving." You got to be a part of that. Well done.

Can I tell you well done on another account. Two weeks ago I shared a message on generosity and talked about how the Israelites gave so much and gave so cheerfully that they had to be stopped from giving, and I shared that, YTD, our church had received 752,000 above our budget for the year to help us in our Freedom Initiative, which was incredible, but only about 25% of our goal. Well, in the last two weeks that number has gone from 752,000 to 1.1 million dollars. Gifts of all sizes have come in. One widow in our church gave a generous check and on the memo line wrote, "Cheerfully given." I am inspired and humbled beyond words. As your pastor I want to commend you and say well done. So many people have joyfully responded to God's word and given cheerfully. As a person who is a part of this church and worships here, I want to say thank you for giving to build up this body and help us accomplish our mission.

It is that time of the year where we are all inclined to celebrate a little more than usual. Did you hear about what this Amazon delivery guy did when he was dropping off a package at a customer's house? The homeowner was in the holiday spirit and left a care package for the delivery people, drinks and snacks and left a note, telling the delivery folks to take what they'd like--Merry Christmas. [Check out how this guy responded!](#)

Maybe you heard the story last week of a real estate company in Maryland that has about 200 employees, and the boss decided to hand out 10 million dollars' worth of Christmas bonuses. The average gift was 50,000. You can see [here](#) it was entirely unexpected! **They hugged each other** and embraced. That's what you want to do when you get an unexpected gift.

My son got an unexpected gift this week. Wednesday was his first birthday. We are usually pretty stingy on giving him food with too much sugar, but we decided to let him celebrate his first birthday the right way. **Take a look.**

Whether it's a bonus, our first cupcake, a postcard in the mail from a friend who is traveling, a friend who pays for our meal, we love unexpected gifts. They catch us off guard and then warm our hearts.

If you have your Bibles, will you turn with me to Luke 2. It's Christmas time. This is the time of the year when we celebrate the most unexpected of all gifts to ever be given--the gift of Jesus Christ. We are going to look at the good news of the gift that God gave and we are going to see how people responded.

**8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

**13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."**

**16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**

This is an incredible passage. I want to focus on the message the angels gave the shepherds: **"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.** Let's look at each of those phrases in the angel's message. First, the angel says that he has **good news!** The Greek word for that phrase is *euangelion*, which is also translated, gospel. In the ancient world the word gospel was used to describe a royal announcement, sent out into all the world, to inform people about a significant event that has occurred that will change the course of history. When a gospel was sent out, it typically announced that one of three different events took place: a major military enemy has been defeated, a new ruler has taken the throne, or there has been a birth that we all need to celebrate--the birth of the future king. That is the message the angels are bringing. There is a child who has just been born, and his birth is good news!

The birth of that child is good news! And that good news leads to **great joy.** Now, forgive the potential political nature of this analogy. I do not intend to endorse any particular candidate or party from this platform. However, I remember vividly the way people responded just a few years ago when Donald Trump was elected president. Any time there is a new leader, some people grieve and other people rejoice, but it seemed to be a little more intense with this last election. There were a lot of people who said, "That's not my president." Other people said they were going to move to New Zealand. In Kentucky, where I lived at the time, there was very well known private college that hosts the vice-presidential debate, and they actually cancelled classes the day after the election. The president of the college wrote an email to the student body, consoling everyone for the unexpected loss, saying they needed time as a community to mourn, and the teachers wouldn't be in an emotional state to be able to offer instruction that day. Now, I am not trying to take any political stance. What I'm trying to establish is

that when a new leader comes to power, it is not always news that causes people to rejoice. Sometimes they mourn. It really depends on what you think about that leader.

Listen to what the prophet Isaiah said about this baby who was born to be our leader: Isaiah 9:6-7 **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.**

When a child like that is born, there will be good news that brings great joy, and it will be for who? The angel said it would be for **all the people**. Think about what that means, and how encompassing of a statement that is. Most all of the time, whenever there is good news for one group of people, that is bad news for the other group. If it's good news for the Democrats, it's bad news for the Republicans. If it's good news for the Patriots, it's bad news for the Colts (bad news for all humanity). If it's good news for home sellers, it's bad news for home buyers. If it's good news for police officers, it's bad news for the criminals. We live in a polarized world where good news for someone almost always implies bad news for someone else. But the birth of Jesus is good news for all people. And do you know how the angel showed that this good news was really for everyone? He appeared to shepherds. When it comes to ancient social ladder, shepherds were at the absolute bottom rung.

This summer Keren and I had the privilege of having **Dr Ajay and Indu Lall** stay at our house for a couple of weeks. They run the ministry we help to support in Central India. They have been friends and ministry partners of ours for several decades now. The ministry they started roughly 40 years ago now has several thousand churches and over 500,000 Christians worshipping every week. They are going to the hardest to reach places in India. When they were with us Ajay told us about the [caste system in India](#). It's unspeakably evil way of segregating and devaluing people based upon the family they were born into. You have your academics, your political and military leaders, your business men and women, your day laborers, and then finally, in this category, you have your untouchables: those who clean the streets, those who clean toilets, those who do the tasks no one else wants to do, and they have no option, no choice to do anything else. This is the lot they are relegated to based upon the family they were born into. And do you know that there is actually a class system within the untouchable class. There is an ordering, a ranking of status within this group, and do you know who has the absolute lowest ranking all people within the untouchable cast? Shepherds. Those whose living is to work with dirty, stinky animals. The children of the shepherds aren't even allowed to go to school. Why do they need to be educated? They're just going to work with animals all their lives. They are at the furthest margins of society in India.

Can I tell you some good news. 4 Christian families in a village called **Lucknow** invited shepherds to their house to develop a friendship. They shared with them the Christmas story and told them that they must feel so honored that God considers them to be high caste. What do you mean? We are the lowest ranking people of the lowest caste. But the Christians responded: When the Son of God became the Son of Man and was born among us, the angels gave good news to the shepherds, Jesus was born in a manger, shepherds were there. It was shepherds who were the first to see Jesus in the flesh. And then Jesus grew up and called himself the good shepherd. Within a few months of that first shared meal, more than 5,000 shepherds in Lucknow accepted Jesus. They now have 25 churches in that region. **Here's a picture of**

**one of them.** There is now a Bible college, and 55 students training for full time ministry. What you give to this church helps to support that work!

The birth of Jesus is good news that brings great joy for all people! Friends, the social strata of India today is very similar to the social strata in Jesus' day 2000 years ago. And if the message of Jesus was good news for shepherds back then, it is good news for all people today. Black or white, rich or poor, young or old, introvert or extrovert, whether you are an enneagram 1-10, there is no person on this planet for whom the message of Jesus' birth is not good news that is intended to bring great joy.

After hearing this message from the angels they made their way to Bethlehem. **2:16-18 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Jesus, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.**

These shepherds didn't waste their time. We are told that they hurried off to find Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. And where was Jesus? Lying in a manger. Think of all the places the Son of God, the prince of peace, the ruler of the world for all eternity would likely to be found ...lying in a manger has to be the least likely place imaginable. But they didn't allow appearance to deceive them. We would be wise, like them, not to allow appearances to deceive us.

Two years ago I read the biography of **Elon Musk**, the leader of Tesla, SpaceX, and Solar City. The only man in history to start three different multi-billion dollar companies. Unlike his present companies, the first company he started wasn't founded to eliminate fossil fuels or take people to Mars. It was simply to help people use the internet to get to their restaurant of choice. We take that for granted today, but in 1995, it wasn't as easy as that, and he pioneered the concept! He and his brother created the company, wrote the software, and started making sales. It was all done by code that he wrote, which was run on a small console the size of a DVD player. But when they wanted to get investors and they showed them the device, again, this was 1995, no one believed that such incredible technology could be contained by such a small piece of equipment. One by one they would bring potential investors in, show them the equipment, ask for the money, and again and again they would be told no. These were brilliant investors; they just couldn't imagine something so small having so much power. So Elon Musk had an idea. He took that small little DVD player sized computer, put it on a cart, and then placed a huge box over it - a refrigerator box. He painted it up, made the box look nifty, expensive, important. The next investor examined this magnificently large box, and upon learning what it could do, plopped down three million dollars, which allowed the company to expand and just four years later, sell the company for 307 million dollars.

We can't be fooled or deceived when something of great value comes in a way, a shape, a size, a form that we don't expect it. No one expected the Son of God to come to earth humbled, small, dependant, an infant in a manger, but God chose the most unexpected of ways to come into the world. The shepherd's eyes were open for the unlikely activity of God. This Christmas season, will our eyes be open?

When we spend time with family, will we remember that because of Jesus we have been brought into an eternal family? When we enjoy a holiday feast, will we remember that because of Jesus we have been given the bread of life, and spiritually speaking will never be hungry again. When we look at our

Christmas tree, will we remember that in Jesus, the greatest gift in the history of the world was placed not under a tree, but on a tree.

This is Christmas time, and if we keep our eyes open, we will see the grace of God everywhere we look, and then, just like the shepherds, we will get to carry that good news to others. Earlier in the year I invested into a stock and I told my buddy who is a financial advisor about it. As a financial advisor, he follows the stock market pretty closely, and he started paying attention to the stock I told him I invested in. And because he is paying close attention, every once in a while I'll get a text from him that says, "Congrats, your stock just soared." And I check it, sure enough, 10% increase, 30% increase. This one investment has gone through the roof, but oftentimes I didn't even know about it until my buddy gives me the good news. And that's an exciting message to share.

How excited should we be to share the message of Jesus! This is not average news, "The weather tomorrow is supposed to be nice." This is not above average news, "The Colts are heading to the playoffs." This is really good news, "Your stocks have gone through the roof." This is the greatest news ever told: unto us a Savior has been born! To those living in darkness a great light has appeared. To those surrounded by chaos, the Prince of Peace has come. To those weighed down by anxiety, we have a Wonderful Counselor. To those who grew up in a broken home you now have someone to call Everlasting Father. To those who right now feel really weak, you lost a loved one this year, you lost your marriage this year, you got a terminal diagnosis this year, to those who feel really weak right now, the little baby who has been born is named Mighty God, and when you need it most, he will be your strength. This is good news of great joy, for all the people, and just like the shepherds, we get to hurry up and make our way to see Jesus. We get to hurry up and tell others about the Jesus we have seen!