

December 10, 2017

Good News of Great Joy: Be Not Afraid

Luke 2:8-20

We come to worship to thank God for his grace or to cry out for his grace. Christmas is God's message of hope, grace and love.

Jesus' birth changed the trajectory of human history from downward in sin and death to upward and eternal life. Jesus' birth changed the trajectory of your life from sin and death to eternity when God became a man.

Jesus' birth is a miracle. Your rebirth is a miracle. You are a new creation.

The gift of Christmas is that there is good news of great joy for all people: a gift from God our Father to each one of us: to every person. It is a gift of good news to all men and women boys and girls. It is a gift we cannot earn: a gift we do not deserve. Even though this gift is from God it is like any other gift. We have two choices: accept the gift or reject the gift.

As we look towards Christmas we have good news of great joy that we are able to celebrate. All over the world in open celebration, or in quiet hiding places where being a Christian could mean death, the Body of Christ remembers when God became a man so we might have everlasting life. His name is Jesus because he saves us.

Christmas is a time for reflection and celebration. The angel still declares "Be not afraid. I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

Christmas is the time of promise; the promise of peace with God, peace within ourselves, peace with others. This great gift from God is peace: a peace which passes all understanding, a peace completely unlike the world's peace.

That first Christmas was the beginning of the good news we now call Christianity. "God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have ever-lasting life. Indeed, God did not send the Son

into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

Over and over in both the Old and New Testaments the message is ‘Be not afraid’. This phrase “Be Not Afraid” is found 365 times in the Bible.

How could our Creator, who is perfect, who is holy, draw us so close we become his children? God’s perfect judgment demands a sacrifice for sin. God’s perfect mercy provides it. That has been the good news from the beginning.

Good news of great joy. Christmas is about the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Sin, or evil, or a sin nature, whatever term you use, is the source of our pain and hurt, lies and guilt, destroyed relationships, pride, greed, and abuse. In his death this baby would take this away.

Just like people today, Adam and Eve became aware of their sin and fear set in. The depth of their sadness and guilt is not strange for many men and women today. Looking back as they left the garden Adam and Eve asked the same question people ask today. Is there any good news?

God was thinking not only about Adam and Eve but also about you and me and others when he declared to Satan in the garden Jesus would come and crush his head. So in the beginning God declared the good news of a Savior. (Genesis 3:15)

Job declared good news. “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.” (Job 19:25) In the midst of all Job suffered he is an example of a person who knows there is good news and he did not fear.

The Psalmist would say “I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.” (Psalm 17:15) How could they speak with such assurance?

The prophet Micah told the people where the good news would appear. It would be in Bethlehem. “One of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth the one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” (Micah 5:2)

And then, about two thousand years ago, somewhere, far to the east of Judah, wise men saw an astronomical event: a star that was out of the ordinary. We can almost

hear them talking to one another: is this the good news the prophet Daniel had written about. Has the one who would destroy sin come?

If anyone here this morning is hungering for good news, here it is. If you believe Jesus is Lord and God has raised him from the dead you are saved and God the Holy Spirit abides in you.

If this morning you are searching and asking is there really good news it means God the Holy Spirit is touching you. If you are asking ‘does God, who knows all about me, really love me?’ The good news of great joy is yes, God does love you, he is here and yes, he does know all about you.

The Apostle Paul writes ‘how can people believe unless they hear about Jesus: unless they hear the good news? How will they hear the good news of great joy unless someone tells them? And who will tell them unless they are sent?’ (Romans 10:14-17) You and me, we are the sent ones.

We are to believe like Joseph and Mary. We are to run like the shepherds to tell others there is good news of great joy. We are to be gift bringers: bringers of the great gift: good news of great joy. Be not afraid. Christ is here.

Long before Jesus was born people listened to the prophet Isaiah and wondered if they would see the good news. All of us are familiar with the 14th verse of the 7th chapter of Isaiah “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the virgin is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. That is God is with us.” (Isaiah 7:14)

Isaiah said people who walk in darkness would see a great light. Those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light would shine. He described the light who would be the Light of the world. Can you image what he must have felt as he spoke the following words given to him by God? “A child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:2-6)

Jesus would be born. This child born in Bethlehem is the good news of great joy. This baby Jesus “is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn of all creation. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all

things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:15-20)

The gift of good news of great joy continues from Old Testament people and Prophets to Joseph, Mary, and shepherds and to you and me.

“There were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’” (Luke 2:8-14)

It was happening. The good news is here! What a great God we have!! We can agree with the Palmist and declare “Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!” Everyone that has breath should praise the Lord. (Psalm 150:6)

Unto us a child is born. God’s peace is on the earth. In his son, Jesus the Christ, God has demonstrated his love for you. In this child, Our Savior, the son that is given, God’s grace makes a new relationship between you and God, who created you. Tell others there is good news of great joy.

No one should leave this sanctuary on any Sunday or Christmas Eve without the assurance that God loves them and because of God’s grace their sins may be forgiven. No one should leave this place not knowing they are loved by God. This child, born to Mary in Bethlehem, came as a baby so everyone might live; so sins would be paid for. Everyone can be a child of God and have a relationship with him. This is Jesus, God with us, God’s unmistakable good will toward men and women and children.

Listen! You can hear the good news. Come! Come joyful and triumphant for Mary has had her baby. Unto you is born in the City of David a baby and Joseph has called him Jesus. He is the Light of the world. He is God with us. He is the Word made flesh.

Because God loves us the good news of great joy is fear not. God wants a relationship with all people based on the truth that is reliable and is genuine.

Jesus said we can know the truth, and the truth will make us free. (John 8:31-32) This truth sets us free from fear. Fear of the unknown, fear about whether God loves me, fear about whether or not I will measure up, fear that I will fail to meet some criteria, fear of what happens when I die, fear of confusing what is right with what is expedient, fear of the knowledge of my own sins, my own shortcomings, my own failures, my own meanness, fear about what to teach my children, fear about what to tell those I love, and fear about tomorrow it will all fade away. When I am free from fear I am truly free.

The Word has become flesh and lives among us. (John 1:14) There is good news of great joy. Think about it! Because of this extraordinary event, when God became a baby boy, you can know Jesus better than you will ever know yourself. Things happen, and each day passes, and we change but Jesus does not change. “He is the same yesterday, today and forever.” The good news of great joy does not change. (Hebrews 13:8)

Jesus did not say He was the way. He did not say He will be the way. He says I AM the Way. (John 14:6)

In Christ Jesus God is calling out to us. There is a way to a relationship with God. We are to “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; “Let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; Let us return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on us, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon us.” (Isaiah 55:7)

This good news is beyond our understanding: God sent his son to die for the sin of the world and that includes our sin, you and me. God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are our ways God’s ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God’s ways higher than our ways and God’s thoughts higher than our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)

God tells us his word that goes out from his mouth will not return empty, but it will accomplish that which he purposes, and it will succeed in the thing for which God sent it.” This word from God’s mouth will not return empty. This word, the good news, tells a hurting world God loves all people. (Isaiah 55:6-11)

What an extraordinary thing. God became a man. What an ordinary way to do it, coming as a baby boy. God, as a baby, intersected with human history, with the

sinful nature of man and this world. God presented to all people good news of great joy: there is now a new choice.

It is the promise of God. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us and Jesus says come.

The gift: a Redeemer: a relationship with our God. Do not be afraid for this is good news of great joy: our Savior has been born!

In this season we call Christmas let your voice be a voice of good news; a voice of great joy. God became a man, coming as a baby boy, so that we might know the truth.

Jesus is the Alpha and Omega the Beginning and the End. Because of God's Promise all things are possible. (Revelation 22:13)

Because of this good news out of you will flow living water. Christ in you the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:17)

Be ready with an answer for those who ask you about the hope you have. (1 Peter 3:15)

Invite others to Christmas services so all people might share this great gift: good news of great joy. Be not afraid.