**SUNDAY, 12/5/21**

**SERMON**

**LUKE 3:1-6**

Eight-year-old Jana was very excited

          about her part in the Church play on Christmas Eve.

But she wouldn't tell her Mom and Dad what part she was playing.

She wanted it to be a surprise.

The night of the performance Jana was so excited she could hardly stand still.

Her parents and grandparents were all in the audience.

One by one, the children took their places for the opening scene.

The shepherds were fidgeting in one corner

          as Mary and Joseph stood solemnly behind the manger.

In the back, three wise men waited impatiently.

Jana was calmly sitting on a chair off to the side.

Their teacher began:

          "A long time ago, Mary and Joseph had a baby,

                    and they named Him Jesus.

          When Jesus was born,

                    a bright star appeared over the stable."

With that cue, Jana got up and picked up a large tin-foil star.

She walked behind Mary and Joseph and held the star up high for everyone to see. When the teacher told about the shepherds coming to see the baby,

          the three young shepherds came forward,

          and Jana jiggled the star up and down excitedly

          to show them where to come.

When the wise men responded to their cue,

          Jana took a few steps forward to meet them and lead the way.

The play ended, and everyone in the audience clapped and cheered.

On the way home Jana said, with great satisfaction, "I had the main part!"

"You did?" her mother questioned, wondering why Jana thought that.

“Yes," she said, "Because I showed everybody how to find Jesus!”

Even if it's simply carrying a tin-foil covered star,

          God can use us in the most unexpected ways.

It was the case in John's day.

It's the same in our day.

All through the Old Testament we read how God loved and cared for us.

Even in the time of Malachi God was watching over his people.

He sent messengers into our world to prepare the way.

Each of us is meant to make a difference

          and help others to discover the joy of experiencing God's presence.

God wants us to know our sins are forgiven.

He wants us to live in peace.

And He shines his light in the darkness of our lives.

He wants us to be His messengers and help others to find peace and comfort.

Jana knew she had a very important part in the Christmas play.

She showed everybody how to find Jesus.

God is still calling us to do the same.

Often it is the small acts which can make a difference in people's lives.

When we help them experience God's love and presence,

          they begin to experience His joy and peace.

Marcus was an elderly gentleman who

          had been confined to a wheelchair for years.

 There was a circus in town and he had gone to see it.

He bought his ticket and wheeled his chair to the gate.

But when he reached the gate he learned that his wheelchair

          was too wide to pass through it.

The circus people offered him no assistance.

People going to the circus simply walked around Marcus sitting in his chair.

But the Sheriff found a way to help.

The Sheriff arrived on the scene at this moment,

          and sizing up the situation

          he promptly kicked down the gate.

That gate was never again put up,

          and Marcus went to the circus every year after that

          without any difficulty.

The Sheriff noticed the problem and was willing to find a way to help.

That is the kind of action God calls us to do.

Even the smallest act of kindness helps others to experience God's presence.

God sent John the Baptist to tell the people about the coming Savior.

Like Jana, he was sent by God to show everybody how to find Jesus.

And God continues to call on us to do the same.

In 1981, a radio station reported a story about a stolen car in California.

Police were staging an intense search for the vehicle and the driver.

They called on all the local radio stations

          to make announcements every 15 minutes

          in a frantic attempt to locate the thief.

On the front seat of the stolen car was a box of crackers.

Unknown to the thief, the crackers were laced with rat poison.

Overrun with rats at his small farm,

          the car owner had intended to use the crackers as rat bait.

The police and the owner of the car

          were no longer concerned about the robbery.

They only wanted to save the life of the thief.

He was doing everything he could not to be apprehended.

Finally they located the car.

Everyone was relieved to discover the thief

          had not touched the poisoned crackers.

The thief was overwhelmed when they did not arrest him.

He was shocked that the owner of the car was not going to press charges.

When he realized how many people had struggled to save his life,

          he began to think he ought to give up being a thief,

          and try to live a better life.

A voice of one calling in the wilderness:

          Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.

Unexpectedly as he meets us here

          He gives us strength and hope for all the twists and turns of life.

A boat was sailing on the Atlantic Ocean, filled with cargo and passengers.

They were in the middle of a fierce storm, and the seas were rough.

David was a passenger on the ship.

He was lying on his bunk, deathly seasick.

Suddenly David heard the frantic cry: "Man overboard!"

David thought to himself:

          "God help the poor fellow.

          There is nothing I can do."

But after a few moments he said to himself:

          "I have a lantern.

          If I hold it in the porthole, perhaps it could help."

As sick as he was, he struggled out of his bunk

          and hung it to shine light out of the porthole.

The man was rescued.

He told how he was certain he was going to die:

           "I was going down in the darkness for the last time

                    when someone put a light in a porthole.

          It shone on my hand,

                    and a sailor in a lifeboat grabbed my hand and pulled me in."

But what if David had not struggled to get of bed?

What if he didn't bother with the lantern?

After all, there were others who could help.

Often the smallest task we do, makes a big difference in someone's life.

There is great power in the shining of our light to the world around us.

Throughout the world people's lives are broken,

    children in our neighborhoods are neglected,

    people are hurting, and frustrated, and lost.

We can make a difference.

With God leading us, we can discover ways to help.

We can help make the rough ways smooth.

That is the message we learn from a little baby in a manger.

AMEN