

December 24, 2008
Nativity of our Lord

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Luke 2:10-12

Christmas Joy

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11**Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. **12**This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

A child's joy and Christmas

Do you have Christmas joy? My daughter Abigail does. It started the day after Thanksgiving when we put up the Christmas tree. Abby was so excited. The next morning she ran out expecting Christmas presents under the tree. When she saw no presents, she wondered why Santa had not come. We told her we had to wait four weeks until Christmas. She said, "Okay!" But the next day, she did the same thing. We quickly realized that Abby did not understand time. We bought an Advent calendar in order to count the days. You should have seen her this morning when we moved to the final spot in the calendar. She started dancing and singing. Abby has Christmas joy.

Seeing Abby get so excited for Christmas has reminded me of my own childhood. One year, I woke at 2:00 am and saw Santa had come. I was so excited I woke my brother. We danced for joy and then woke our parents.

Another year, my brother woke me at 3:30 am. He told me that Santa had given us new bicycles. We decided to be nice to our parents and not wake them. Instead, we put our clothes on and rode our bicycles around the house. We experienced Christmas joy!

Children understand Christmas better than adults do. For children, Christmas is mysterious and magical. Christmas is a time for gifts. For children, there are no strings attached. They have no bills to pay. They simply receive gifts from people who love them. This is pure grace!

In our reading from Luke, the angel Gabriel makes a gracious announcement to the shepherds. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (2:10). Notice it does not say, "I bring good news of joy..." Rather, it says, "I bring you good news of great joy." This great joy is not for a select few but for "all the people."

You might remember Bethlehem is less than eight miles away from Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, you have the religious leaders. You have the learned. You have the rich. You have the influential. Clearly, they should receive the message. But Gabriel spoke to lowly shepherds. Why? The good news is not for a select few, it is for all people.

Many of us have a hard time believing this. We think the gospel is for the religious types - the good people. Too often we are like little Johnny who really wanted a bike. His mom said, "Johnny, we do not have the money. Why don't you write a letter to Jesus and ask him for a bike. Johnny decided to do just that. He began, "Dear Jesus, I have been a good boy this year and I would like a bike. Johnny." Now

Johnny knew this wasn't true so he ripped up the note and began again: "Dearest Jesus, I have been an OK boy this year and I would like a bike. Love, Johnny." Again Johnny knew that wasn't true so he wrote another note: "Fairest Lord Jesus, I thought about being a good boy this year so can I please have a bike? I love you very much, Johnny." But Johnny knew that wasn't true either. So he went down to the local Catholic church for some help. As he entered the sanctuary, he got an idea. He went forward, took a statue of Mary, hid it under his bed and then wrote the following note: "Jesus, I got your mom. If you ever want to see her again, give me a bike. You know who."

We do not need to take Mary hostage to receive good news. The good news is for all people: lowly shepherds and sinners like you and me.

Gabriel continues his announcement by giving the reason for great joy. Verse 11, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (2:11). Each phrase is important.

- "Today a Savior is born." If you remember, Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:9). On the cross, Jesus said to the criminal, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). For God, the present is always the moment of salvation. Even now, in this place the day of salvation is now and it is for you.
- "In the city of David." David was the beloved king. David was the shepherd who tended his people. The people loved David. Jesus was born in the city of David because he is the beloved shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.
- "Christ the Lord." Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one of God. He is the one who fulfills all the OT promises. He is the seed that will crush the serpents head. He is the descendant of David whose rule is for eternity.

By saying, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" the angel is really saying, "For you, this very moment, in this place, a Savior, the Messiah, Yahweh, the King is born. A new shepherd has come to shepherd his people. He is crushing sin, death, and the devil. His reign is for eternity."

The sign of this good news is the baby Jesus wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. There could be no better sign of grace. Jesus is not found in a golden bed, but in a manger. He does not wear a silk robe but rough cloths. "Though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). The good news is for all people: lowly shepherds and sinners like you and me.

There is more. Notice that there are no strings attached to this announcement. Nowhere does Gabriel say, "Clean up and make yourself presentable." There is no mention of morals. It does not matter if you have been naughty or nice. God expects no payments. This is grace language. It is pure gift!

That is why the shepherds returned to their fields telling others what they had seen and heard. That is what you do with good gifts. You tell others the good news.

*Down in a lonely manger the humble Christ was born;
And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.
Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;
Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!*

The best part in this whole story is discovering how God feels about all of this. He is the most overjoyed. What do you think my parents did when we woke them up at 2:00 in the morning? They got out of bed, turned on the lights, got the video camera out and joined in the fun. How could they not. Their boys were happy. Their joy came in seeing our joy.

That is how it is for God. Remember, Jesus is the shepherd. The good shepherd is willing to leave the 99 sheep in order to find the one lost sheep. When he finds it, he gladly carries it home. Once home, he throws a party and invites others to join him. It is God's great joy to save a lost world.

Talk about Christmas joy!

**In Jesus name
Amen**