

**Luke 2:8-14**

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before 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; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

Christmas is sneaking up on us fast, this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, and we are preparing for the arrival of a very special person. There are two birth narratives in the Bible; Matthew has the wise men and Luke has the shepherds. I ask you to take a moment and think about some really good news. Some may remember the end of World War 2. Some have had a successful surgery, or recovery from an illness. Many of us have had the birth of child that showed up healthy. Maybe you were surprised by an A on your report card, or a job offer with better pay, working conditions, and benefits.

In today's Scripture God chose shepherds, despised and treated as outsiders, the lowest workers of social status to be the 1<sup>st</sup> to hear the Good News and bear witness. An angel came to them and, like Mary nine months earlier, they were terrified. We prefer to think that if we were to see an angel, it would be a good thing and we would not be afraid. However, reality might be different. I belonged to a church that had a 24 hour prayer vigil on Good Friday. We each took ½ hour shifts and I signed up for what was convenient in my work schedule. It was suggested that men take the late night shifts and I signed up for 2:00 am. Even though I knew that I was in the sanctuary and I knew that this was a safe place, when it is late at night and you are all alone, it can be a bit scary. If someone or something suddenly appeared, I would be terrified! Now think about the shepherds, at night, all alone, in the dark. Suddenly someone, or something unknown, is out there. Image a movie underscore and the cello plays creepy, tense, and eerie sound. The anxiety intensifies and the uncertainty gives you goose bumps. There are times when you notice goose bumps on your arms. Then there are times when things are so scary that you feel goose bumps all over as your whole body is shocked.

The angel standing before them has to reassure them not to be afraid. The angel is bringing some good news. Now good news all by itself is a good thing. However, this is not just good news, there is a more to it; this is good news of great joy. This is fantastic news - terrific news! But notice this one particular detail, this isn't just great news, this is great news for all the people. This is as good as it gets; the best case scenario. Please pay close attention to this next detail. This good news goes to you. This is not good news of great joy for somebody else's benefit. This is good news of great joy for you. To you, right now, in the city of David. The city of David is Bethlehem. Luke testifies that this is fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Luke is emphatic and testifies that this is the Messiah. However, he takes it a step further and proclaims that this is the Lord.

Think about all of this framed in its original setting and context. It is the Lord that is born today! The author of Luke has a specific aim that is revealed in this testimony. Testifying that he is born in the city of David attributes to the specific identity of who the child is. Reporting that he will be found in a stable and a feeding trough is testimony to his humility. The Lord is here for everyone including the outcast and the poor. Framed in its original setting and context, the shepherds find this hard to believe. So, here is a sign (divine verification of a truly unique occurrence) you will find a child in a manger. They don't put babies in mangers, it is simply not done. Therefore, when you see it, you will believe it.

The Lord comes to the earth, takes the route of humility instead of wealth and royalty, and comes for you. This is fantastic news of tremendous joy. This news is for you - the minority, poor, hungry, discriminated against, outcast, common person. This is not to King Herod, not to Augustus Caesar, not to the elitist priests and scribes, or the self-righteous oppressors.

The expectations of the world have this framed differently. The great, long expected Messiah will restore King David's throne and set Israel free from the heavy yoke of the Romans. He will come with mighty power, come down from the skies, shake the earth, and catch the world's attention. He will come to royalty, the wealthy, and the powerful elite. But the expectations of the world are wrong because God's way is to strip the world of pride.

When you feel hopelessly despondent and can't see your way through the fog of the cruelty of the world, God comes to you. When you are rejected by the world, this good news of great joy comes to you. When you feel like an outsider, know that you are being judged by others, and looked down on by others, this good news of great joy comes to you. When you are rejected, criticized, and condemned by others this good news of great joy comes to you. God comes to you when the world rejects you. Here comes God to simple people like you and me. Here comes God into simple places like in our lives. Here comes God to you.