

## Good News of Great Joy!

- Luke 2:8-20
- Cindy and I had the privilege a week or so ago to see “Miracle of Christmas,” the Sight and Sound production going on right now in Branson, Missouri. I got just a glimpse of what it might have felt like for the shepherds out in the field, watching their flocks by night, when an angel suddenly appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. Because right over the heads of the 2000 people in the theater, including Cindy and me, Gabriel came flying through the night sky and appeared before the scraggly and terrified shepherds on stage. And lo and behold, Gabriel looked a lot like Judah! We always knew our youngest son was really an angel.
- Let’s take a fresh look at this much beloved story this morning and see two things. First, the birth of the Savior was good news of great joy. Second, good news of great joy is meant to be shared.

### 1. The birth of the Savior was good news of great joy.

- The first thing Luke notes about the episode with the shepherds is that they are in the same region, meaning “near Bethlehem.” These were most likely temple shepherds, charged with raising and tending the sheep and lambs for the sacrifice, As they were watching their sheep on *this* night, an angel appears to them. And the shepherds did what every one of us would do if Gabriel or Michael showed up right now on this stage. They fell on their faces, most likely. The Bible says they were “filled with great fear.” Luke was an historian and not given to exaggeration. If anything, he understated the case. They were terrified. Think about it. An angel. Not one of these little cupid-like creatures with wings and curly hair, chubby with rosy cheeks and floating on a cloud. No this was a powerful creature made by God for his glory alone, who dwelt in the presence of the Lord and had just come from there and the Bible says, “the glory of the Lord shone around them.” It was night time, 2000 years ago, no electric lights around, and this one angel, lit up the countryside with the shekinah glory of God. It was terrifying! It was awesome in the correct sense of that word. It was glorious! The angel appears to poor shepherds, who as Caleb said last week were the least, the last, and the lowest of society, and the angel tells these men the greatest news that had ever been proclaimed on the earth. Good news of **great** joy: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” When the young people gathered at the Moore’s last week for a Christmas party, Caleb shared devotions and taught the young people something he learned from a student of Jewish history when he and Celia were in Israel a few years ago: The shepherds would find this baby wrapped tightly in swaddling cloth to protect it, and laid in a manger, just as would have been done by these same shepherds with a spotless newborn lamb that was born for sacrifice in the temple. This was the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!  
The shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” That leads us to...

### 2. Good news of great joy is meant to be shared.

- The shepherds did not settle for just seeing and meeting Jesus the Messiah. When they got to the manger and saw that it was exactly as the angel had said, they could not keep silent. First, they told the story to those who were at the birthplace. I can imagine Joseph asking when the men arrived, “How did you know we were here?” And the shepherds began excitedly to tell the story of the angel’s announcement. Mary and Joseph looked at each other perhaps and said at the same time, “The angel came back.” But then the next verse is interesting: **and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.** (vs. 18) Who are the “all who heard it?” Maybe there was a crowd at the birthplace, but I doubt it. The wise men would not show up until nearly 2 years later. Who did the shepherds tell? I have to believe that the best scholarship on this is true, that the shepherds, after

seeing the Savior with their own eyes, went to at least their friends and family. Probably. But maybe also to the whole city! Perhaps this is why God chose shepherds in the first place, because he knew they would not be sidetracked by peripheral issues like raising sheep.

- Lee Eclov writes this: “Surely the shepherds asked if they could hold the baby. The Lamb of God would first be held and handled by those who knew how to appreciate and care for a lamb. They must’ve lingered as long as they could—looking, marveling, and worshiping. But dawn started poking through the cracks in the stable door and the shepherds knew it was time to go. As they left the stable, Bethlehem was waking. The rude cacophony of roosters crowing for attention. The aroma of bread baking. People attending to animals. David’s descendants from other towns drifting into the streets to catch up with their kinsmen over breakfast. Romans and their tax collectors setting up their tables. People must have been puzzled at the sight of shepherds at that hour. They were supposed to be out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks. But for once those shepherds weren’t thinking about their sheep. They had news that they couldn’t keep to themselves any more than you can hide a smile when your heart is bursting with joy. One of the most outspoken among the shepherds told what had happened. “The Messiah was born *here!* Last night! Angels—*angels!*—announced him to us and we *found* him!!” “In a stable,” interrupted another. “In a *manger!* The Messiah lying in a *manger!*” Other people came running up, leaning in to hear. The shepherds repeated their story again and again, and it was passed from one person to the next, from street to street.”
- Good news of great joy. The shepherds finally returned to their sheep, but they were different men now. Francis Schaeffer wrote years ago, “Can we imagine one of the shepherds remarking, ‘It’s very nice that I’ve seen an angel, and it is nice I have seen the Christ, the Messiah the Jews have been waiting for, for so long. It’s nice that I’ve believed in him (unlike some of the other people in Bethlehem) and that I’m going to be in heaven. But really, in practice, it’s not going to make any difference at all in my life.’ This is inconceivable.” They had seen and held the great I Am. Their lives were forever changed. And Mary? She “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”
- So can we. Treasure these things. Ponder these things. And **tell** these things!
- Prayer
- Communion