

## **Luke 2:(1-7) 8-20**

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then 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!"*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Good evening to everyone and Merry Christmas! If you are visiting with us this evening, welcome to you. We are blessed by you and your family being with us tonight.

What a great night! A baby in the manger. Shepherds in the field. An angel from Heaven bringing Good News of great joy. You know, if I had a time machine, that field with those shepherds would rank as one of the top places and times that I would visit. It had to have been amazing.

It was described as the glory of the Lord shining around them all. From the words, it sounds like the sky started to glow, night became like day, and the shepherd had to shield their eyes from the intense light show.

And maybe that was what it was like, I don't know. Maybe it was, but I imagine something different, something even more than that. Kind of like a greater shining that not only lit up creation but penetrated each of the shepherds to their core. More of a spiritual blazing, the likes of which they had never experienced before. No wonder they were terrified.

Something that was so amazing, something that they didn't understand, was coming to life right in their midst. And then there was even more. The sky filled with angels...singing, praising God, raising the roof, so to say. It had to be exhilarating and intimidating and miraculous all at the same time! It had to be life changing, and, you know, that is exactly what it was meant to be. That is exactly what it was meant to do. It was meant by God to change our lives.

I wonder sometimes whether we mischaracterize, misunderstand, what happened in that field outside of Bethlehem that night? We heard about it again tonight, like we do most Christmas Eves. The angel shows up and tells the shepherds: "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." We hear those words and I think that we get this vision of Walter Chronkite breaking into current programming to bring breaking news with the sound of a ticker tape machine clacking in the background giving the impression that he was reading the news as it was happening. (Sorry...for those younger people with us, the sound of a ticker tape machine would be like your smartphone beeping and beeping and beeping to alert you that it has important news for you to look at.)

But, it seems that we think that the angel came to just report the news, give three cheers, and then fade back into Heaven. You know, he did his job, the chorus sang, and they had to then rush back to get the kids to soccer practice. If that is the case, if that is what we think, it seems to me that we are missing the meaning of Christmas. We may have the facts but we are missing what was really meant to happen as a result of that night.

What happened on that first Christmas day was, and is, really big! You see, the angel came to humanity, shepherds at first, not to just bring information and head back. The angel came to point us to transformation. The task of the angel that night was not just come and speak so we could know something. The angel was sent to point to something, to someone, so that we could find how to *be something*, again.

Now, of course information was involved. The angel told the shepherds what was happening. The shepherds then went to see for themselves. They then went back and shared what they saw with everyone they met along the way.

At one level, I suppose that they were sharing information, but it was so much more for them. They were spreading of the Good News of great joy. While information was involved, they were actually telling others of the path to something big, something transformational.

You see, the Good News of this day was meant to change each person's life. It was meant to change *your* life. The presence of Christ in the world was planned to change everything by guiding us to something that is beyond our doing. It is Charlie Brown's Christmas tree at the end of the Christmas special. It is Scrooge grinning and handing out turkeys on Christmas morning. It was the Grinch's heart growing three sizes bigger, as he experienced the joy in

Whoville. It is the amazing transformation of everything. So, how has that been going for you and your family this year?

The coming of Christ into the world was meant to bring the ability to see deeper, past the distraction of our world. It was meant to bring a profound joy to each one of us, to each life. It is meant to show us all that the joy that God offers, through the baby whose birth we are celebrating tonight, expands and fills our lives. Nothing in this world can bring us that same joy...*nothing else*. But everything else, from the simplest thing in creation, when experienced through our transformation, will then bring us joy beyond our imagination. Christmas is meant to transform us and the world into something amazing. It is meant to bring the re-alignment of all things and blessings to all people.

Is that what we are looking for tonight? Is that what we will embrace in the morning? Is that what we will hold on to into the weeks and the months and the years ahead? I hope it is. I hope that it is because it is only through the coming of that small babe that can we find the true joy and huge blessings for life.

Here is an adaptation of how one Pastor put it in regards to the blessings we seek at Christmas:

Blessed are you who find the true meaning of Christmas in the babe born in Bethlehem. To you a little child in a manger will always mean hope and promise to our troubled world.

Blessed are you who find the true meaning of Christmas in a bright star that shone over Bethlehem. Your lives will be a reflecting beauty for all to see and guide to all who will follow.

Blessed are you who find the true meaning of Christmas in the wide eyes and trembling hearts of the Shepherds in that field. You too will share your experience with everyone you find along the way.

Blessed are you who find the true meaning of Christmas in the joy of giving lovingly to others. The giving of food when others are hungry. The giving of shelter when others are cold. The giving of a place of worship for others who need to draw near to God. The giving of yourselves when others are alone. You shall share the gladness and the joy of the shepherds, who were the first disciples, the first followers of Christ, and of all the disciples of the church down through the years.

Blessed are they who find the true meaning of Christmas in the fragrant greens, the cheerful holly, and beautiful lights of the season. To you shall come bright memories of love and happiness.

Blessed are you who find the true meaning of Christmas in the joyful sounds of Christmas time. In the voices of the choirs, the ringing of the bells, and in the silence of prayer. You shall have a song of joy ever singing in your hearts.

Blessed are you who find the true meaning of Christmas in the message of the Prince of Peace. You will find purpose for life, peace to share, unity to bring, and a filled heart that will overflow blessings into the world.

Tonight is an amazing, blessed, and transforming evening. That is what God means it to be. If that is what you are looking for, prepare to be amazed!

Amen