

## Wesley United Methodist Church

December 24, 2019

“The Joy of Christmas.”

Luke 2:1-20

One of my favorite Christmas stories is about the young boy who was given a very important role in the church Christmas play. He was to be the angel and announce the birth of Jesus. For weeks he rehearsed the line that had been given to him, “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy!”

The grandparents got in on it and any time the family was together and the boy was there they would dress him up in his costume and he would rehearse his part for them. “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy!” They were sure that when he grew up that he would be another Brad Pitt.

The great night came for the Christmas pageant and everybody was in place. All the grandparents and extended family were there. Visitors had come in and all the children were in costumes, complete with bathrobes for the three kings and fake wigs and halos for the angels. All the mothers were excited and everyone was really in to this.

As the pageant started, the excitement was electric around the room. The dramatic event in the first part was the announcement of the angel, “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy!” The spotlight hit this young boy and as he stood center stage in the middle of all this excitement he got stage fright. Every grandparent, aunt, uncle, and neighbor came to the edge of their seats, wanting to say it for him. You could see them in unison, mouthing, “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy!” Still, his brain was frozen; he couldn’t say it. He tried it, but it just wouldn’t come. Finally, in a courageous moment he filled his lungs with breath and blurted out the words, “Have I got news for you!”

The boy got it right. Do we have great news or what? At Christmas we celebrate the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Christmas means that we don’t search for God; God searches for us. Christmas means that God put skin on to show us how much he cares for us. Christmas means that God became one of us in Christ so that we would understand the depth of his love and be changed by it. And if this is not good news, I don’t know what is!

I want us to go back to the joy of Christmas, I want the message to penetrate our lives and our hearts. I want us to go look beyond the glitter and wrapping and get to the real gift of Christmas. I want us to throw away our pre-conceived notions about this time of year and be transformed by Christmas.

How do we do it? Our text in Luke gives us some clues, and it is all about the shepherds. I believe the shepherds in our text give us the key to finding the joy of Christmas. What is it about the shepherds that is so special? At the time of Jesus, shepherds were considered the lowest in society. They were dirty. They did not bathe very much. It was not acceptable to associate with them. Back then a common prayer was, “Please don’t let my child become a shepherd.” Why would God reveal his message to shepherds? Why would God choose to tell the shepherds first?

God chose to reveal the gift of Christmas first to the shepherds because they were the most receptive to the message. They did not have anything to prove. They had no reputation to protect. They had no fear of being called crazy. More than anyone they were open to the impossible...God was being born among them!

What did the shepherds have that no one else had? What did they possess that gave them this ability? What can they teach us about how to be impacted by the joy of Christmas? One thing we notice is that the shepherds had eyes to see. After they had heard from the angels, they said, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see what has taken place...” They got there and saw the scene. It was not spectacular. To any other eye it was worse than ordinary, but the shepherds were amazed. They were able to see Christ.

Most of us don’t see this well. We see what we want to see. We go about our lives passing by holy events and we don’t even notice. We rush through life and are unaware of where Christ is in our midst. We walk right by situations where God is active and working. We just don’t see it.

I imagine when the shepherds told others about what they saw there were some who replied, “How could you see something like that? We have never seen anything like that.” If there is one thing I want for Christmas it is for everyone to see what the shepherds saw, that Christ is the Savior of the world...the whole wide world. Not just America, but for everyone...red, yellow, black, white, we are all precious in his sight. If peace, hope, love, and joy are to come to this world, we must have eyes to see that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the whole world. The Bible says that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

We also notice that the shepherds had ears to hear. The shepherds heard the angels singing but not everyone heard it...just the shepherds. They were in the fields, far enough away from the bustle of the city to hear the sacred sounds.

We live in a noisy world. Just stop for a moment during your day and listen to all the noise around you. We get so used to noise that we can’t stand silence. The sad thing is that most of the noise we hear drowns out the sacred sounds,

the real sounds, the holt sounds of God. There is so much noise that we don't hear very well. If we want to hear from God, we must find the silence that the shepherds found.

We hear what we want to hear. We see what we want to see. We respond how we choose to respond. In order for us to hear and receive the power of Christ and Christmas we must move away from our distractions and listen.

Most of all we recognize that the shepherds had the courage to commit. Later in our passage the shepherds went back, praise God, and told everyone what they had seen. By doing so, they decided to believe. They decided to proclaim at the risk of looking foolish. They decided to commit. They were so filled with joy they could not contain it. They had to share it.

We live in a crazy world that does not like to commit to anything. Folks wonder why they never change, why they never experience life the way they want to. Folks wonder why they have no joy. Joy can only be found by committing to the love of Christ and the purpose Christ has for your life.

Christmas is just a nice concert easily forgotten unless we embrace Jesus' love for us and commit to him. Until we commit to the Christ in Christmas, life is just an endless and boring series of experiences and obligations. We will not see. We will not hear. We will not find joy until we decide to commit. We will not have the joy, hope, peace, and love that we hunger for until we commit. Ann Weems said it best: "If Christmas is not now, if Christ is not born into the everyday present, then what is all the noise about?"

There is an ancient Christmas legend that tells of how God called the angels of heaven together one day for a special choir rehearsal. God told the angelic choir that he wanted them to learn a special song for a very special occasion. The angels got very excited and they rehearsed the song for weeks. God was quite demanding of his choir but the angels assumed it was for a very good reason.

Finally, God felt they were ready to sing the song but before they did, he had one important thing to tell them...they would only perform the song once. Some of the angels complained. They just didn't understand. The song was so beautiful and they sang it so well. Why sing it only once? God told his angels to trust him and later they would understand.

One night, God called the angels together and said, "It's time." He led them to a field just outside Bethlehem and the angels sang their song as an angelic choir. And boy did they sing it! "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will toward all." As the angels sang, they began to understand the significance of the song and why they were singing it. The song was announcing the birth of the Savior of the world.

When the angels finished singing, God led them back to heaven and reminded them that they would not sing that song again as an angelic choir. They could hum the song occasionally as individuals but they would never perform it again. One angel was overcome with curiosity and courageously asked God why they could not sing that majestic anthem again. They did it so well. It felt so right. Why couldn't they sing that great song anymore? "Because," God explained, "my Son has been born and now earth must do the singing."

Will you sing? God is waiting. A Savior has been born. Amen.