

Luke 2:8-20 (*The Message*)

⁸⁻¹² There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

¹³⁻¹⁴ At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

¹⁵⁻¹⁸ As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

¹⁹⁻²⁰ Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

"Glories Stream"

Well those angels have been busy again this year!! Some of you may remember the sharing of "Angel tracks" during our Advent journey last year. I am still finding those tracks around our church building and in my home as I decorate for this holy season!! The Celebration Players reminded us of the supposed role of these heavenly messengers, too.

Our scripture text for today captures the third appearance of angels in the first two chapters of Luke's gospel. He has been setting the stage for Jesus' birth narrative. First, the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah giving him the promise of a son, who was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. That promise was fulfilled! Then Gabriel, speaks with Mary and promised her a son, who would save his people. That promise was also fulfilled!

Now that the Christ Child has been born, an angelic messenger appears yet again. By this time, the *readers* of the gospel story have come to believe that the words spoken by the angels are indeed worthy of a trusting response. As in previous encounters with angels, however, this appearance to the shepherds at work in the fields caring for the sheep, evokes fear! You see, shepherds in the first century were not accustomed to the sudden appearance of a light the magnitude of the Lord's glory, nor with beings illuminated by that glory. They had not heard what had happened to Zechariah and to Mary. When glory

streams from heaven afar, the shepherds must have wondered if this was a force of good or of ill.

But the angel announces (in more traditional language), “Fear not! For behold, I bring you good tidings of great JOY which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the City of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!” Do you know how many centuries, how many generations, the people of God had awaited the promised messiah? Remember last Sunday we mentioned that the text from Isaiah which foretold the birth of the Prince of Peace had been delivered more than 700 years before the birth of Christ. Those who believed had waited a LONG time, and must have been tempted many times to give up hope that God would fulfill that prophecy.

And why would God send such a message to the shepherds? those on the bottom of the socio-economic heap? These shepherds were at worst, slaves of the owners of the land and livestock, or at best, the least paid among the employees, for they served the “night shift,” when they were most likely to encounter vicious animals and villains preying upon the owners livelihood.

And to such as *these* God not only sends one heavenly messenger, but a whole heavenly host who would join in glorifying and praising God using that now familiar song, “Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace, good will to all.”

How great our JOY! How great the joy of all whose very lives are saved through faith in the blessed messiah! How great our joy is when we consider that God sent Jesus to be love incarnate, teacher and friend, sacrificial lamb, everlasting life! *But I fear* that in the evolution of society, we have become very adept at **hiding** our JOY! For many, either it would **not** be socially acceptable to express pure, unmitigated JOY, or we have dampened the spiritual ecstasy of celebrating the birth of the long-awaited messiah! Let me show you what an uninhibited expression of joy looks like:

[VIDEO]

~~ Note how difficult it is to resist smiling when we encounter such innocent joy and laughter ~~

Have you been so overwhelmed by the expectations imposed upon you, and the brokenness of the world, and the negativity of social conversations, that you seldom are able to see and experience and respond to the JOY that God sends each and every day? The angels remind us: “We’ve got Good News!” They may even say to us today, “Hey, don’t forget that you are not alone!” In fact, what the angels are telling even the shepherds, and even us, is that God’s presence has just made a “landing.” *YOUR* savior (not just “a” savior) – Everyone’s savior – has come. This is Good News for ALL.

We get so distracted, overwhelmed, fearful, influenced by that negativity, that we underplay the celebration of the story of One who came to replace panic with praise, fear with JOY. **What would the world be like if we all became as radiant as heavenly beings or stars, with glory streaming, and joy spilling out all over the place?** What if we would regularly just laugh without a care, like a baby encountering a simple piece of paper being torn? The JOY would be contagious! We need people, and a church, that remembers to belly-laugh, gasp in delight, seek out beauty, and who see the world and God’s activity in it through the lens of wonder. For we believe in a God who is “awesome and a wonder-worker.” The JOY should be contagious!

Glories Stream - JOY

December 9, 2018 – Second Sunday of Advent

Rev. Rebekah Sweet

I promised you last week that I would give you an assignment for each week of Advent. And if you are a part of our e-prayer chain, you received a reminder of last week's homework in your inbox. This week, I encourage you to tell at least three people what brings you JOY during the season of Advent and why. What brings you JOY and why? In so doing, I contend that we, and those we encounter, will be more attuned to noticing the "Good News" all around us as a blessing sent from God!

Amen.