

“LIFE IS FOR EVERYONE (Part 1)”

Pastor Mike Corwin

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

TEXT: LUKE 2:8-14

I – SHEPHERDS:

The Bible paints a good picture of Shepherds. The first reference to a shepherd – keeper of sheep – was to Abel whose sacrifice to God was acceptable while his brother’s was not. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob were all shepherds, keepers of sheep and goats. The greatest king of Israel was David, who started out as a shepherd over his father’s flocks. Jesus would be portrayed as our “Good Shepherd” and we are all called God’s sheep until we mature in our faith and then we are supposed to be shepherds of God’s flock.

Yet in the time of Jesus’ birth shepherds were not thought of so highly. At the time of Jesus’ shepherds were considered to be the lowliest of working people. They were thought of as untrustworthy and dishonest. Because of their work and surroundings they were considered to be ceremonially unclean according to the religious laws. They were social outcasts. When you spend all your time with a bunch of smelly animals who are dumber than the rocks you were surrounded by you don’t learn to hold out your pinky while you drink tea.

These were people who couldn’t get a regular job. They had few friends besides other shepherds. They were forced to stay out in all the bad weather with the animals, and protect them from other animals, sometimes at the expense of their own lives. These are the folks that had been born on the wrong side of the camel tracks. They didn’t protest or hold signs because it was very clear their lives did not matter!

II – TEXT:

So I can see why they were confused that first Christmas.

Luke 2:8-14 (NLT)

The Shepherds and Angels

⁸That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹²And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

Can you imagine what they thought? I have no problem believing they were terrified! Normal people wouldn't give them the time of day, why would an angel appear to them unless it was the angel of death to give them bad news. An angel would be down at the boss's mansion giving him Good News, not out here in the fields with the unclean citizens of Israel.

And this was some amazing news. The one the prophets had been telling about for centuries, the Lord, the Messiah, had been born. Then they knew they were pulling their legs. That it was some kind of joke. What Messiah would be born in a barn, wrapped in rags, and laid in a feed trough. They could sing about it all they wanted. It was just another way to make them feel small and insignificant.

III – TO US?:

If the shepherds of that day were taken by surprise by the announcement of the Savior's birth, how much more so are people in disbelief over 2000 years later when we tell them that Jesus was born for them?

How do the ones who were born on the wrong side of the tracks react? Those who are treated like sheep as they form a line and march through the line trying to obtain help and treated like a number with no compassion or understanding by the worker handling their case? Was Jesus born for them?

How about those who never finished school, who have no diploma or degree, who can't get a decent job...was Jesus born for them?

How about the people who have prison records and have lost their rights due to a felony conviction...was Jesus born for them?

How about those with addiction problems...was Jesus born for them?

How about those who come from broken families, who have not had the best upbringing...was Jesus born for them?

Those who have been verbally, physically, or sexually abused...was Jesus born for them?

Those who live in poverty, or are homeless, those who don't have enough food to eat or money to pay the bills...was Jesus born for them?

Those with a different color skin, different sexual orientation, or just a social outcast...was Jesus born for them?

Tell us Cindy Loo...was Jesus born for Grinches as well as for people like you?

“LIFE IS FOR EVERYONE (Part 2)”

Rev. Becky Stephens

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Text: Luke 2:15-20 (NLT)

Let's hear the rest of the text from Luke 2:15-20.

¹⁵ *When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”*

¹⁶ *They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.*

¹⁷ *After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.*

The Gospel reminds us that God appears to the less than perfect and less than powerful. The shepherds were the first to hear this angelic news bulletin. The scandal of this night is that shepherds were at the bottom of the social ladder. They were dirty and smelly from living out in the fields.

Despite the fact (or perhaps precisely because of the fact) that shepherds were considered among the lower-ranking members of society, God referred to himself as a shepherd and to his people as his sheep. And when God chose a people for himself, God chose shepherders. When God chose young David to be the great king over Israel, God was choosing a shepherd boy. And when God promised one day to send a new king, like David, God described that coming king as a shepherd who would search for the lost sheep. When the child born in the stable became a man, he would describe himself as “the good shepherd” who would lay down his life for his sheep.

In Luke’s account of that first Christmas, several night-shift shepherds were watching their sheep when an angel appeared among them. This alone might have frightened them that night, but Luke tells us there was more: *“The glory of the Lord shone around them”* (Luke 2:9). God’s glory was being revealed in the birth of Jesus. The angel continues: *“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”* (2:10-11).

Good news of great joy for **all the people**—this is what the birth of Jesus is. How we crave good news of great joy! We turn on the nightly news and hear COVID death updates, natural disasters, violent protests, shootings, political chaos and economic woes. Unlike any previous generation, we have constant access to bad news—news that produces fear and anxiety. The angel announced to the shepherds, *“I am bringing you good news of great joy!”*

Today, Jesus’ birth is still good news of great joy. It is good news because he is *“a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”* To be the Messiah is to be the long-awaited King who will rule over heaven and earth.

To be the Lord (a title Caesar himself claimed) was, like being the Messiah, to be sovereign, ruler or master. But this child was not only Messiah and Lord but also Savior.

Jesus saves us from our guilt and shame, from hopelessness and despair, from fear and death. He *“breaks the power of canceled sin, he sets the prisoner free.”* We have watched him save addicts from their addictions and give them a new life. We have seen him save men and women from being self-absorbed, resentful, bitter, and angry, and transform them into people who live with freedom, hope, and joy. He came to save us from the brokenness of our human condition and to deliver us, lead us and send us out in his name to bring healing and hope to a broken world.

This Good News of great joy was for *“all the people.”* It was not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles too. It was good news not just for the poor shepherds, but for the wealthy wise men who were yet to come. This child would hold the key to changing the world in which we live and to saving each person who would turn to him in faith. We **all** need saving, and salvation is available for all through the child whose birth was announced that day to the shepherds. The glory of the Lord, whatever it may have looked like to the shepherds that night, was most clearly seen in the child who lay in the feeding trough—God in humility coming near to us, Emmanuel, to become for us *“the way, and the truth, and the life”* and ultimately to give his life for the human race. John, in his unique account of the Christmas story, says, *“The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

Jesus came to save us from the bad news that seems to be all around us and to be for us *“good news of great joy.”*

One final word about the shepherds. Notice the effect Jesus had on these shepherds after they had seen him in the manger: *“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen”* (Luke 2:20).

Friends, in this world we are living in today. We need to hear the Good News now more than ever—Christ was born for us! Regardless of our financial status, our ethnic background, citizenship, education level or lack thereof, whether you have a record or not, addiction issues, or if you are homeless or own a brand new too-big-for-you kind of house—Christ was born for you!

It doesn’t matter about your upbringing or how many divorces you have had or whether you have been abused verbally, physically, sexually, mentally or emotionally—Christ was born for you!

It doesn’t matter the color of your skin or your sexual orientation or whether you fit in or not—Christ was born for you!

People today think that God will not speak to them or that God does not love them because they do not go to church, or because they are aware of their sin, or because they think their lives are less than holy, or because the church has told them they are not worthy. God help us! By appearing to the shepherds, God showed God’s willingness to appear to **any** who will listen.

And when we have heard the Good News, it is our job to *“return, glorifying and praising God for all [we have] seen and heard.”* We must be the ones who continue telling the story of how Christ came to us. We must be those angels, those messengers for someone else—for all the people. So that others, too, can *“go, with haste, and find the babe...”*