

God with us! - Christmas Eve Service

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Preacher: Jayson Turner

[0 : 00] Good evening. Good evening. Am I on? All right. Merry Christmas.

Do you guys enjoy that? Thank you worship team. Thank you choir. Appreciate that. Well, I want to welcome you this evening to our Christmas Eve service on behalf of Scott and our staff were. We're thankful and thrilled to be able to worship together and to lift our voices with other believers across this planet. Celebrating the advent of our savior. So would you join me in prayer? And then I've got a few thoughts for us this evening, but let's pray first. Father, we just want to pause and be still before you and Lord tonight.

We're thankful to gather to worship the King of Kings, Lord of lords. To celebrate the fact God that you're a God who is crazy about this planet.

[1 : 15] You came to rescue not to condemn. And so we thank you for Jesus. We thank you that the advent that you promised occurred as will your return.

And so tonight Lord, would you give us something that we could leave here with being reminded that you are for us and Lord that you have delighted to enter into this planet to rescue centers. And so we are humbled. The fact that we would be able to gather and worship you tonight. We pray all this in Jesus name. Amen.

So this evening we remember and we celebrate the fact that God God is a God that is actually committed to our joy.

To the joy of anyone willing to bow their knee to Jesus in this life. God is so committed to our joy that he entered into the world that he created in order to clean up a mess that we were responsible for.

[2 : 29] And so Christmas is the fulfillment of God's promise to offer joy. In fact, it's a promise based all the way back in Genesis chapter three verse 15.

The promise that a snake crusher would come and God would reverse the effects of sin on mankind. God's perfect plan.

And so God inserted himself into his own story in a most humbling way. He came in a remote village.

Entered into where livestock would have been kept. A number of scholars believe that it could have been a cave. It is the most inauspicious of beginnings.

Almighty God arriving on planet Earth without pomp and without pageantry. So what I'd like to do tonight is just reflect on a portion of the Christmas narrative and consider those first worshipers, those folks that experience joy on that first Christmas.

[3 : 45] We know that in the region of Bethlehem, which is a city just six miles of Jerusalem, that a young couple betrothed, which is like being engaged but amplified.

It's a legal binding relationship without having consummated that relationship. But this young couple betrothed the wife Mary is a virgin and yet she is with child.

And this couple has made their way to their ancestral city to register for a census. And we see here the hand of God, the fact that this couple would go to Bethlehem.

We see the providence of God using the most powerful ruler of the day, Caesar Augustus, or some know him as Octavian. He is the adopted son of Julius Caesar.

He calls for a census and this census actually helps fulfill a prophecy made 500 years prior. The prophet Micah says it this way in Micah 5, too, but you O Bethlehem, Ephraeth, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me, one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old.

[5 : 21] Catch this from ancient days. So Caesar Augustus intended a census to help expand his kingdom.

And yet Almighty God had purposed in eternity past that this census was not for Caesar. This census was rather for Jesus.

In fact, in the New Testament Paul writes in Galatians 4, he says, but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law.

I love that phrase, when the fullness of time had come, God had purposed to send Jesus. And the fullness of time had come, God's timetable, God's eternal clock.

It was time to send Jesus and it was a wonderful time for God to enter into our time and space.

There was political stability for the rise of Christianity.

[6 : 34] This is the golden age of Rome. It had just moved from a republic to an empire. There is safety so this message of good news can travel packs from Anna, the safe travel throughout the empire.

Roads were built so that the gospel could go forth. And because of Hellenism, this Greek culture that Rome adopted in large part, meant there was a common language, Koine Greek, so that things could be written about Christ and they could be shared throughout this empire.

That event was on God's eternal clock, just as his return is as well. And so we pick up our narrative in Luke chapter 2, verse 8.

We'll just look at a couple of the verses here this evening. But it says in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

These are the first worshipers of Jesus outside his immediate family. Shepherds, what do we know about shepherds? Shepherds are ordinary folks. They're common, often overlooked.

[7 : 57] A shepherd enters the room and probably would go unnoticed. In fact, rabbis of the day considered shepherds as religious outcasts.

Their testimony was not admissible in court. They were thought low of. It's not a profession that a parent would sort of boast to another parent about that my kid has just gotten in the shepherding program at Eastern or Wazoo.

It's not a proud profession. These were the lowest tier of society. These were nobodies.

And so what started as a normal, ordinary night for these men, just like many of the nights before, things changed on this evening in an instant.

It says here in verse nine, and an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shown around them. And it says they were filled with fear.

[9 : 08] These shepherds, coworkers, probably bantering as coworkers will do, maybe recounting the events of the day.

They took my flock up here and they grazed up there and the water was down here. And that one sheep I had to go after and protect it from the wolves.

So maybe just recounting the day's events, doing what they had always done every night prior to this particular night. And then something out of the ordinary occurred.

And it happened in an instant. In fact, it says, and an angel of the Lord appeared. This word appeared, it means suddenly.

It's a word that could be used of an assault that is something that you don't see coming. An angel appeared out of nowhere.

[10 : 09] And maybe you've had an experience like that, perhaps not an angel, but perhaps you were distracted and someone entered the room and you had no idea. And maybe your headphones were on and they tapped you on the shoulder or they said something and it just startled you.

And you were shocked. And then you got angry. Well, these shepherds here didn't have time to get angry because these were angelic creatures, angels, heart skips a beat.

And angels, contrary to Clarence and it's a wonderful life, they're majestic creatures. God has an army of them.

And it says here that and the glory of the Lord shown around them, the glory of the Lord, the majesty of God, that word glory is used to describe the brightness of the moon, of the stars, of the sun.

I mean, how many lumens is this? No doubt blinding to the eyes. No one stares at the sun. Well, this is the glory associated with the maker of the sun and it would have been frightening.

[11 : 29] And I think for these men, these common ordinary shepherds, I'm sure for some they're like angels are real. Oh, no.

Well, this angel has a word for these common men. It says in verses 10 and 11 and the angel said to them, fear not for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior who is Christ, the Lord.

So this is good that the angel begins with fear not, which is sort of the obligatory phrase that every angel knows much better than be afraid.

Fear not means it's good news that's coming. It's not bad news message. You're not going to die tonight. In fact, you're going to be blessed tonight beyond comprehension and these angels that then gather.

This is good news of great joy tonight. This word great. Megas, we get the word mega.

[12:52] Abundant. Exceeding. It's too good to be true. Joy. We have news for you shepherds tonight. Good news of great joy has been initiated.

And it's joy that was promised on God's clock. 500 years prior by the prophet Micah. It was promised 700 years prior to this by the prophet Isaiah, which is shocking.

In fact, that we have documents, we have the great Isaiah scroll. It's there in Israel. It's underground in safe storage, the shrine of the book.

And this scroll of Isaiah, this 27 foot long scroll of Isaiah is intact. And it's dated 100 BC or thereabouts.

So we have these prophecies prior to the advent of Christ. Prophecies such as Isaiah 7 14. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[14:04] Or Isaiah 9 6 and 7. For unto us a child is born. To us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulders and his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, Prince of peace.

And the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. As things unravel and get worse on planet Earth, there is a promise that there is a king that will rule a kingdom that will be full of peace and goodness and truth and it will never end.

This is good news of great joy. An eternal king with an eternal kingdom has arrived. This is good news of great joy.

And certainly for these shepherds, they probably didn't fully understand what was taking place this evening, other than there was a Messiah promised. We're not sure if they pieced together that this king, God in human flesh would grow up and die in their place to offer forgiveness and new life to any that would bow their knee to him in this life.

They probably didn't connect those dots, but this is the thing that should befuddle us from this narrative, this story of Christ's first advent.

[15:37] The king, the eternal king has entered our time and space. This announcement, it didn't come to the priestly establishment.

It didn't come to the royal family. God chose to communicate the greatest news ever shared to a group of nobodies.

Joy is possible for all people through Jesus. And so the fact that this news was offered first to shepherds, it tells us this, that the gospel is not for the elite in society, it's for everyone.

It's for everyone. Jesus came to rescue the stay-at-home mom, the teacher, the contractor, the sales associate, the barista, the college student, the engineer, the farmer, the doctor, the plumber, the personal trainer, even the pastor.

This announcement, it could have been made anywhere. It could have been made at the Zippo Drive-In, it could have been made outside the library.

[17:10] There at the tent encampment. The fact that God gave this news to shepherds, it tells us that Jesus is a lover of people.

And status has nothing to do with this offer of life. Simply recognize that you aren't enough to be your own savior.

Every one of us, as God ordained, has a birthday and every one of us will have a death day. And the only thing that will matter on that death day is whether you know Jesus as your king, as your savior.

And Christmas tells us God is crazy about this planet. He came not to condemn, rather he came to rescue.

No status is required to be part of God's family. Just a willingness to repent of your sin and bow your knee to the king that entered our world 2,000 years ago.

[18 : 21] And as the narrative goes, these shepherds, they then go into Bethlehem, into town, they find Jesus, they worship. In fact, it says in the narrative, they go in haste.

They are so excited. That would have been quite a night to be part of. Something just totally out of the norm.

Well, tonight you can be part of that night because the offer of great joy, it's still good.

We at 4th here, we believe that joy is found in a life surrendered to the king of kings. That's what we talk about when we gather. It's no secret.

We love Jesus. He's a great savior. And he's forgiven some really great sinners, which is why we gather.

[19 : 20] Jesus is king. He's kind. He's a humble king. He came to earth to exchange his life for ours for anyone willing to repent of their sin.

He's willing to forgive anyone of anything. And the fact that God came and gave this first announcement to shepherds, it tells us that, that no one's too dirty.

You know, it's interesting because in the Talmud, which is the Jewish traditions recorded, began in the 2nd century, the Talmud describes shepherds this way.

Shepherds are dishonest. Shepherds were prone to violate the Jewish law. Philo, who was a Jewish philosopher, a contemporary of Jesus, describes shepherds this way.

They're mean. They're inglorious. So if we have in our mind like some holier-than-thou shepherds, I think we have the narrative wrong.

[20 : 35] God said, I'm going to give this news, this message to people that perhaps think they are too dirty, too unclean to receive my favor.

And I would say, if God is willing to forgive shepherds, He's willing to forgive you. No one's too dirty. And so if the Lord, the Holy Spirit, is nudging your heart tonight, surrender your life to the king, to the king of kings.

Experience joy, the joy of a forgiven life. God is willing to forgive anyone of anything.

And it says in the Gospel of John that to those who believe in Christ, He gave them the right to become children of God.

He came for the shepherds, the ordinary, the forgotten, the unclean, which means He came for me and He came for you.

[21 : 44] Tonight we're going to end with a couple songs and we're going to light our candle. We're going to have our advent candles up front and the middle candle represents the Christ candle, that He is the light that's come into deep darkness.

And we're going to have a candle lighting and as the light moves out, let it remind you that light, the light of the world has actually invaded our world.

And it happened 2,000 years ago to some ordinary, spiritually desperate people just like you and me.

The light which represents Jesus came on a mission to die for sinners. And because light has come, that means joy is possible.

And as believers, for those that have trusted in Christ, we now carry that light. And we have been called to live on mission and to share that light, to share good news, that there's a God in heaven who would die for the worst of sinners.

[22 : 54] Amen? So let me pray and then we will endeavor not to burn this place down. So let me pray.

Father, in heaven, we delight to gather here this Christmas Eve 2022. And Lord, maybe it's just been an ordinary set of events as Christmas is before for some here.

Maybe there are some here that don't know you. They've never trusted in you. Jesus is their personal savior. I pray that this Christmas would be the day, the season where they would finally bow their knee to you, Jesus.

Because you are a magnificent savior. You're God in the flesh. You lived a perfect life. And then you climbed upon a cross to die in our place.

God rescuing us. Protecting us. Saving us. Hiding us. God hiding us from the wrath of God.

[24 : 02] And so Lord, if there's folks here that have never trusted you, I pray that tonight they would simply pray, God, Jesus, would you forgive me? Would you be my savior?

Simple prayer. And know that good works aren't enough. That it actually takes someone perfect to be able to pay a debt we can't pay.

Lord, thank you that you came on a mission not to condemn but to rescue. And that you died for sinners.

And Lord, we worship you tonight. Would you give us courage as we leave here, Lord, that as we carry this light, the good news, the gospel, that we would be about talking to folks?

Because everybody's birthday and everybody's death day is a guarantee. Thank you, Jesus, that you're my savior.

[25 : 11] Thank you that you have called these folks together to be your light in this city. Might we celebrate you well this Christmas?

It's in your wonderful name, Jesus, we pray. All God's people said. Amen.