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Good News of Great Joy
Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ 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: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b] praising God and saying,

*¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"^[c]*

¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

No matter how many times I hear this story,
there is always something different that **stands out**.
What has caught my attention this year is the words of the **angel**:

*“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you **good news of great joy** for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord.*

Great Joy.

Now who doesn't want that at Christmas?

Aren't we **all looking for joy** at Christmastime?

Would you like to feel happy, instead of the stress or sadness?

We all would, right?

So **where** do we find it?

Most of us look in the **expected places**---

We look for happiness as we **decorate** our homes for the holidays.

We look for it as we spend **time** with family and friends

We look for it as we **cook and share food** with one another.

We look for it as we **shop** for just the right gift, and when we **exchange** those special presents.

But how often do we **find lasting joy** in these places?

If you're like me, we see a **glimpse of happiness**—but it's often fleeting, right?

We feel great decorating the tree,

until we get to the ornament that reminds us of the person who's not coming home.

We find just the right gift, or we receive something that blows us away, but soon our hearts and minds move on to the next thing.

Can you remember every gift you've received every year? I can't.

And how **long does the happiness** of family and friends last?

About as long as it takes for them to argue or step on each other's toes, right?

And usually that takes no time at all!

We all have the difficult folks, the annoying relative, the one who'll do anything to interject politics into the Christmas dinner!

None of us have the picture perfect family, or the perfect Christmas home, or the perfect gifts, do we?

We are **real people, with real problems, and real pain**, and we can really see that at Christmas!

So ***where's the joy*** that the angels announced to the shepherds?
 I bring you ***good news of great joy*** for all the people.
Where's that joy?
 What ***IS*** that joy?

Well, I can tell you this—that joy is ***not the same*** thing
 as ***happiness***.
 Happiness is something that happens as a result of a ***good circumstance***.
 And often we can find some happiness—
 in those good moments around the table, or the tree.
 There's nothing wrong with it, it's great to be happy!

But happiness is not the same as the joy announced by angels.
 Happiness is temporary, but ***joy can last***.
 Happiness is a good situation, but joy can come ***despite a bad situation***.
 Happiness is a product of what ***we do***.
 But joy--joy is something that ***God does***.

In fact, the angels give us a ***clue*** about where joy comes from.

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³

Isn't it funny how angels usually start their announcements with
'do not be afraid'?
 Probably because we don't usually see angels, do we?
 It would be startling, and probably a little scary to see one!

But this angel says I am bringing you ***good news of great joy***.
 And ***what is the good news?***
 It's the birth of a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.

So the joy ***comes from what God is bringing***,
not what we are ***giving***,
 not in the people around us, or not around,
 or how we are ***getting along*** with one another.

In fact, this good news of great joy happens **regardless** of who we are, or what we're doing at Christmas.

It's a joy that happens **in spite of** our circumstance.

In other words, things can be really bad, and God can still bring us this joy!

Now that's **incredible news**, isn't it?

In fact, the **whole story of Jesus' birth** is about joy that happens in the midst of **difficult circumstances!**

Mary and Joseph didn't exactly have a picture postcard Christmas.

She was **pregnant** before their wedding, a scandal to say the least.

Joseph chose to stay with her, a daring and surprising choice.

And Luke tells us that they had to **travel** away from home, to Bethlehem, when Mary was 9 months pregnant—

now, ask any recent mom and you'll hear how ridiculous that would be!

And to make matters worse, there was **no room** for them at the inn,

so they made an animal's **stall** their room,

and she gave birth and laid the baby in a **feeding trough, a manger.**

In the middle of this incredible mess---came the **joy of a newborn Savior!**

And shepherds were the first to hear of it, and share the good news!

Shepherds.

Simple, uneducated, unaccepted, dirty, rough and rowdy guys,

who were low on the social scale...

By the time of Jesus, **shepherding was a profession** usually filled by guys who could not find respectable jobs.

They were **stereotyped** as liars, degenerates, and thieves.

The **testimony** of shepherds was not admissible in court,

and many towns had **ordinances** banning shepherds from the city limits.

The **religious elite** didn't like them, because they were usually working instead of observing the Sabbath, and they were considered ritually unclean.

The **Pharisees** classified shepherds with tax collectors and prostitutes, "sinners" by virtue of their vocation!

But it was to shepherds that God broke in with the good news of great joy!

Think about that.

Shepherds were the **first to hear** the good news of great joy,

a Savior born in Bethlehem.

First to hear it, first to announce it!

These simple, lowly guys ***left their flocks*** to go see this great joy--
But before they took off, they saw a ***multitude of angels*** singing praise to God!

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b]
praising God and saying,*

¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest heaven,*

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”^[c]

¹⁵ *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.”¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.*

Imagine it, friends—the heavenly host came to lowly shepherds!
And they became preachers of the good news!

Paul reminds us in ***1 Corinthians 1:26-28*** that God chose
the ***foolish and the weak*** to share the incredible good news of great joy.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters:^[a][b] not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;*

Our world says that the ***strong, and wealthy and powerful are important***,
But God chooses to use people who are ***weak and poor and powerless!***

Like those shepherds minding their sheep.

Like us, no matter who we are, or where we’re from.

And you know what’s so awesome?

The shepherds were ***ordinary people doing ordinary work***,
when God broke in with the good news of great joy!

Why is that so ***important for us today***, at Christmas?

Well, ***we are ordinary people*** doing ordinary things in our ordinary lives,
But God can break into our lives, with the good news of great joy!

God breaks into our lives in the ordinary moments, the daily tasks.

The shepherds were guys left out by society,
They may have even been guys who had left the faith!
And **God chose them** to hear and announce the good news of Jesus' birth!

The joy of Christmas is found in **regular life**.
It **doesn't have to be** around the table, or the tree, or with family and friends.
It might just be when we are just minding our own business,
doing what we usually do.
Soon we will be putting away the tree, and the decorations, and friends and
family will return home.
But the **good news of great joy remains**.
The **real reason** for Christmas **remains**.

And the joy comes from the **same message** announced to the shepherds.
A Savior has been born for us!

But we're past that day in Bethlehem.
So **where is Jesus born today?**
I was reading one pastor,
who said that the manger where Jesus is born today----is **your heart**.
Today, **Jesus is born into our hearts**.

Another said that Jesus is born **wherever people need Him the most**.
It's not confined to a church, or a well-lit tree,
or giving of gifts.
Jesus is born wherever, whenever people really need Him.

The **shepherds surely needed** the good news of great joy!
And God came directly to them!

Do we **need the good news of great joy?**
Do we need **more than just fleeting** happy moments or thoughts?
I know I do.
What about you?

Well, listen up, because
Jesus is born wherever people need Him.

Do we realize how much we need Him?

Dr. Dwight Gunter says,
 If our greatest need had been information,
 God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology,
 God would have sent us a scientist.
 If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
 But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior.
 The good news is that God sent His Son to be our Savior.
 This is the good news that brings real joy. "[Joy.](#)" Dr. Dwight Gunter, *Preacher's Magazine*, 2007.

This is ***where the great joy really comes from.***
 From the birth of Jesus into our hearts and lives---
whoever we are,
wherever we are,
whatever we are doing.

It's ***not confined to the expected*** times and places.
 And certainly ***not confined to December 25th!***

This is a ***joy that lasts,***
 Because Jesus is a Savior who ***keeps on giving*** us love, and hope, and grace!
 For all eternity!

It's a million times ***better*** than happiness,
 Because there's ***no end*** to the goodness of this good news!

So how about we do something special this Christmas?
 How about we ***let go of all the hyped up expectations,***
 and just ***let God be in our hearts?***

How about we ***take a moment,*** or several,
 and ***remember*** who has been born for us, and what He came to do?

How about we stop for a second in the middle of it all,
 and ***remember the announcement*** that came to those shepherds in the
 fields?
 Most of us have it memorized already—

it holds just as much power as the Lord's Prayer, or the Apostle's Creed. (If you watch *Charlie Brown Christmas* every year like I do, you know it already!)

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord.

So how about we ***hang onto*** that message, today, tomorrow,
And as we put away the tree, and throw out the wrapping paper?
How about we hang onto that good news,
No matter where we are, or what we are doing?
No matter how alone we might be or feel.

Do you remember what happened to the shepherds
after they went and found the baby Jesus?
They went back to keeping their flocks by night!
Glorifying and praising God!
They carried the good news of great joy into their ordinary daily lives,
just as God wants us to do at Christmas, and well beyond!

For the joy that comes from the good news of a Savior,
is a ***joy that lasts***,
it's a joy that ***transcends*** the nativity scenes and Christmas trees,
and all the gifts.
It's a joy that ***goes well beyond*** the candlelight service,
and the gathering of friends and family.

It's the great joy that ***changes hearts and lives***.
Our hearts, and our lives.

It is the ***Good News of the Gospel--now, and always***.
This is good news, to ***repeat*** again and again in your heart,
Hear it and ***repeat*** it, until it really sinks in.

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord.
Amen.