

Good News Great Joy All People

by Carter Conlon

This sermon reflects on the story of the shepherds in Luke chapter 2, highlighting how God chose to reveal Himself in the midst of weakness and struggle. It emphasizes the profound message of God's willingness to dwell in the weakest of humanity, offering salvation and transformation to all who open their hearts to Him. The sermon encourages listeners to embrace the good news of great joy, symbolized by the birth of Jesus, and invites them to experience a life-changing encounter with God by simply opening their hearts to Him.

Scripture: Luke 2:8, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Romans 10:9, Revelation 3:20, 2 Corinthians 5:17

Topics: "God's Revelation in Weakness", "Embracing the Good News"

Description

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Transcript

Now, it was a difficult time, Luke chapter 2, in the history of the people of God. Roman Empire was set on conquering all of the known world of their day. They were set on imposing an alternate worldview, which they considered superior to all the other cultures that they conquered.

They considered that conquering by might and Roman culture, Roman literature, everything of Rome was the new world order. That's the way they actually put it forward. Very much like the day which we are living in because the hearts of men never changed.

And it was a dark time because the people of God even were being corralled by cattle and they were being told where they had to go and when they had to be there. It wasn't like COVID and all of the rules that are coming because of it, but somewhat similar to the COVID situation that we're facing today and everything else is coming with it. On top of that, the people were being sent into their home communities to be counted and some translations declared was just for the purpose of knowing how many people there are so nobody could escape taxation.

It was really this, probably not much deeper than that. And even worse, there were shepherds abiding in verse 8, it says of chapter 2 of Luke, now they're in the same country, shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. So in those days, if you couldn't get a job, you became a shepherd.

It's really the bottom line. It's the bottom rung on the employment, all of the opportunities for employment. If you couldn't get anything else, you started as a shepherd.

It was cold, it was inglorious, there was no opportunity for advancement. You were what you were as a shepherd. And it was dark and they're out in the field.

Now they're being corralled like cattle, the people of God, their country has been conquered by a foreign power, their religion is being ridiculed. They must have been wondering, where is God in all of this? Where's the promise of God? Where's this Messiah that's supposed to come to us and set us free from all oppression? And not only is it socially bad at the time, but they're stuck in a job that none of them probably wanted. It wasn't a glorious job, it's cold, it's even dangerous.

Because there would be wild animals come out and attack these sheep, and you could end up giving your health or your life for a job that you didn't even want to be in in the first place. Just a bunch of guys, you know, we make it rather glorious in all of our church plays. We have them in really clean robes and standing there majestically in the moonlight.

It wasn't like that at all. They were cold, they were huddled around a fire. They're probably complaining about taxes and they don't like the job that they're in.

And they're not the people that you would ever think that God would make himself known to. I love the way he does things. I hope you do.

I hope you have a smile in your heart tonight too as well, because I just love the way God chooses to do things. He bypasses all of the religious that are using all of their finery for their own comforts. And he just sort of like passes over all of it.

And he goes to the place that nobody's ever expecting any revelation of God. And then suddenly in this place, an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around about them and they were greatly afraid. You know, they most likely, maybe initially thought maybe we're under judgment, you know, the presence of God has come.

Maybe the conversation wasn't quite as holy as it should have been. Maybe they were saying things, complaining. I don't know.

Maybe they were even accusing God of not being there for them as a nation. And suddenly a messenger of God reflecting the glory of God appears before them. A fearful thing, even when you're walking in right relationship with God.

And the angel said to them, do not be afraid. I bring you good tidings, that means good news of great joy, which will be to all people. So those three things, I want you to remember those three things.

It's good news of great joy for all people. Not mediocre joy, not mild joy, not you know, so-so news. It's good news, which should bring great joy to all people.

That means you, that means people who are here in the sanctuary tonight, people that are online, people that are sitting at home depressed. This is good news, which should bring great joy to you. So on those three thoughts, on those three pillars, I want you now to join with me as we go in to the very meat of this story.

For there's born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you. You will find a babe or a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, which means almost like discarded strips of cloth that some say weren't really much useful for anything else, but to maybe wrap newborn children in, lying in a manger.

So this is the good news. And this is the sign, you will find a babe, a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God.

So I see this as thousands maybe of angels are leaning on the canvas that separates time from earth from heaven, and they're listening. It's only one angel has appeared to the shepherds, and he's making this declaration of good news and great joy to all people. And this is just the way my mind works.

I suddenly see the canopy splitting and thousands of angels coming into the heavens. And this news that has just been brought causes them to begin to sing this song, glory to God in the highest, on earth, peace and goodwill towards men. Glory to God.

A song of praise like perhaps we've never heard. A song of praise that the angels, the created heavenly beings could not contain themselves from singing this song. Something so great had just happened in the world.

There was a sign that was so phenomenal. The sign indicated that what had just transpired is should and ought to bring glory to God. It ought to be peace on the earth and be a display in a sense of God's goodwill towards whom? All people.

Goodwill means His willingness to be good, His willingness to be God, His willingness to come and dwell, His willingness to do what only God can do to all people. And so now here's the question that came into my mind when I read this the first time many years ago. You see, He's God, He's God, God, God, God who creates the universe by His spoken word.

God who has the power to command life and the power to command death. God who has the power, all authority, all power. God who has all the worship of every created being in heaven.

God who sits as high as anybody can ever sit. God who has all authority. He's got all acclaim.

He's God. You don't get any bigger than God. You don't go any higher than God is.

You don't get any stronger than God is. You don't get any more righteous than God is. You can't possibly have any more power than God has.

If you were God, how would you come into the world? At least with a chariot, right? At least with maybe 12 horses, 12 white horses pulling this thing in the heavens. I mean, Elijah was taken away in a chariot of fire. Why wouldn't God come in a chariot of fire? Wouldn't there be some kind of display of your power? And so what are you trying to prove when you come as a baby? What is the sign? Why a baby? Have you ever thought that? Why a baby? This is God as a baby.

I mean, realistically, he could have come as a full grown man and still gone to the cross. He's God. He could have made himself fully God and fully man.

So why? What was he telling us? What does it speak to you and I? And why did it cause angels to burst through the canopy of heaven into the earth and start shouting this song of praise that is deeper than anything we've ever sung in our lifetime? Here's the way I see it. This all-powerful, all-knowing, all-mighty, all-deserving, all-wonderful, all-righteous, all-virtuous God comes down to us in the form of the weakest of humanity. He indwells a baby, a baby that has to be carried, a baby that has to be fed, a baby that has to be clothed, a baby that has to be changed, a baby that has to be bathed, a baby that has to be taught how to walk, a baby that has to be taught how to speak.

He comes down into the human race as the weakest among us to show you and to show me that he is not offended by our weakness. He's not offended by our struggles. He's not offended by our mess.

He's not offended by our inability to walk. He's not offended by our speech. He's not offended by the fact that we've created a mess and don't know how to get out of it.

He's not offended by our inability to get up and go forward. He said, I'm coming down and I'm showing you that I am willing to be God in you, for you, through you. I've not come down for those that are righteous.

I've come down for those that are sinners. I didn't come down for those that are strong. I came down for those who know they need a Savior.

I came down to dwell and to make my dwelling place inside the physical bodies of those who open their hearts to receive me as their Savior. And you will be my body and I will be your God and I'm not offended by your struggles. I'm not offended when you make mistakes.

I'm not offended when you fall. I'm not offended when you speak things you shouldn't. I am willing to be God to you.

If we fully understood the distance between us and the Holy God, if we had such a thing as a crown, we'd be throwing that thing on the floor tonight. We'd be on our faces shouting, glory to God in the highest, on earth, peace and goodwill towards men. No wonder you see the angels dwell in the presence of God.

They understand his majesty and they saw the incredible journey he made when he came to the earth and became the weakest among us. God, God, get it in deep, all powerful God, all knowing God, all strength is in God, all glory is in God, everything is in God, yet he comes and indwells the weakest among us. As a sign, this shall be the sign, hallelujah.

Not that you're going to run into Bethlehem and find a 10 foot bronze giant or find something that we can't relate to or something that is just out of our reach or something that represents God that leaves us without hope. No, he appears to the weakest. He appears to the, my wife said the best title you could give to this message is Jesus came to the night shift.

He bypassed those that thought they could get to heaven in their own works and by their own righteousness and by fulfilling all their laws and dressing themselves according. He bypasses all of that and comes to people with this great announcement. People who have, they have no claim to glory, they have no claim to strength, they have no claim to righteousness, they don't even see themselves as having a future and he says, I'm bringing a sign.

There's a great sign that brings joy to all people, all people. That's why it was all people because you can't get weaker than a baby. God says, I'm going to show you, I'm going to give you a sign that I'm willing to be God to everyone who opens their heart.

You can't get weaker than a baby. Do you understand? Anybody weaker is dead. You can't get weaker than a baby, but I'm going to show you that I'm willing to indwell every life, every heart, every person, everyone who opens their heart to me.

Then the scripture says, so it was when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste and they found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen him, they made widely known the saying, which was told them concerning this child.

They came with haste and this is what I am going to encourage people online to do tonight. No matter how weak you are, how big a mess you've made or what you've done with your speech or how unworthy you feel or how lousy you feel about your life and your future and your job, this message is for you. This Christmas, a message has come to you of great joy, which brings glory to God.

It's good news of great joy to you, to all people, that you don't have to clean up your act to come to God because he came to you in your mess. You see, you understand you don't come to him, he came to you. All you do is open the door.

One of the churches in Revelation, he says, behold, I stand at the door and knock and whoever opens, I will come in and I will sit down with you and have a fellowship with you. Don't make it complicated when it's not complicated. The doorway to the cave was not barred.

You didn't have to take a ticket and wait in line. They just came rushing in because they were invited, because the angel had come, because they had seen a choir like they'd never seen in their lifetime, and they understood that whatever it is we're about to look at is the sign from God that his goodwill has come into the world and that there's great joy that is now available to all people. All you have to do, as much as Christ himself and Mary, they didn't put a barrier at the doorway to that manger, the shepherds just came in.

In the same way, if you will remove the barrier of your heart tonight, put away all your excuses as to why you can't come to God and God can't come to you and just let him come in. Let him come to you the way the shepherds came to him and he will come. If you open the door, he will come and come into your life and he will become the source of your strength and as much as he had to be carried and he had to be changed and he had to be taught how to speak, he will now carry you and he will change you.

The Bible promises that and he will teach you how to speak right and how to think right. The Bible says if you open your heart to Jesus Christ, you will become a new creation. The old things in your life will pass away and all things will become new.

You'll become a testimony to the reality of this great news of God's salvation through his son, Jesus Christ. Just admit you can't save yourself. You can't work your way into heaven.

You can't try to be better. Just admit your situation and just say, Jesus, this Christmas, tonight even, would you come into my life? Would you be my Lord? Would you be my Savior? You see, I heard this great truth

back in 1978 and I remember going to work one day in the middle of the afternoon and I seemed to have run out of arguments and I pulled my car over on the side of the road and this was my prayer. A friend of mine had been telling me these things that I'm telling you and I just pulled over and it just seemed too good to be true.

Can it be that easy? Will he actually come and live inside of me? Will he actually change me and forgive me if I open my heart? So I pulled over on the side of the road and my prayer was not a prayer of great faith. I said, Jesus, if it's true, if it's true what this man is telling me, I wasn't sure it was even true, but my if was sincere. I'll tell you that right now.

So if it's true, I said, I open my heart to you. I invite you into my life to be my Lord and Savior. That was my whole prayer.

Then I put my car in drive. I went to work. I was a police officer at the time.

I worked my shift and I went home. I didn't feel anything. I didn't feel different.

The next morning I woke up and I tell you, when my feet hit the floor, I knew, I knew at that very moment I was a different man. Something had happened to me. See, what had happened to me is the God who came to the earth as a baby in the form of a baby had now come to me in my mess, in my weakness, in my struggles, in my trials.

And he had actually come and taken up his residence as the Bible says he would. He had forgiven my sin and taken up his residence inside this earthly body. And I became a new creation.

You know, once I saw a picture, we've lost most of our pictures because our house burned down in about 1990. And we lost everything. But somebody saved a picture of me as a cop before I got saved.

It was scared me when I looked at it. I said, oh, thank God that man is dead. Thank God he's gone.

I don't like the look of that man. I didn't like the look in my own eyes. I didn't like the look in my face.

It was a different man. You see, the Lord came to me in my mess, my weakness, my selfishness, my anger. And he changed me from the inside out.

That's the promise of God. It's good news of great joy to all people. So tell me, who's weaker out there tonight than a baby? You see, you're without excuse.

That's why this was such a great sign. You can't claim that you're weaker than a baby. You're not.

The baby is the weakest among us. But Christ proved that if you'll open your heart to me, even in your weakness, I will come and I will be your God. And you will grow up and you will change.

And I will be glorified through your life. So just simply admit your condition, believe that Christ died in your place, and confess him with your mouth. Jesus Christ, you are the Lord of my life.

Just say it out loud. Say it out loud in your room tonight, wherever you are. Just say, Jesus, I give you my life.

I believe that you died for me. I believe that by turning to you, you're willing to forgive my sin. And I confess you with my mouth as my God and my Savior from this day forward.

Like it says the shepherds, they saw it. I saw it in 1978. They realized it was true and they went out and they made widely known the things that had been told them about this child.

You will end up doing that yourself. Say, I got to tell you what God has done for my life, in my life. That's what I'm doing tonight.

I'm doing what they did. I have to tell you, he didn't come to me in strength. I didn't have it all together.

I didn't have very much together. But he saved me, indwelt me, and changed me. And so I'm going to lead you in a prayer tonight.

We're all going to pray it here together tonight in this sanctuary. And if you will pray this sincerely, sincerely, this will be the best Christmas of your entire life. You will never forget this Christmas.

You will be singing with the angels. You'll be running with the shepherds. You'll be just giving God glory.

Suddenly, your job won't seem so bad anymore. Things will begin to change in your life.

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