

Good News :

It's Christmas!

Turn with me to Luke 2 and I want to just share some simple thoughts with you from the announcement the angels made on that first Christmas night. There are some important details in that message that I believe we need to hear this morning.

Reading from the King James Version at verse 8-11. "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. **And the angel said unto them, "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."** Luke 2:10-11

Fear not. I love the fact those are the first words God spoke in the New Testament. The angel Gabriel said it to Zachariah and again to Mary. Fear not. Jesus spoke those same words frequently to his disciples. Fear not. Don't be afraid. It is still a word that God speaks to us, a word that we continually need to hear. Fear grips the heart when men and women encounter the glory of God. An angel like Gabriel standing before you produces fear, but that's not the only thing that brings fear. Look at the world today – the economy, the job situation, health care, global warming, violence and terrorism everywhere, men and women sinning without restraint and without remorse, without conscience. It wasn't exactly a friendly place in first century Israel. The truth is, it is a frightening world we live in and yet God's word to the shepherds that night and his word to all of us this morning is "Fear not!" Do not be afraid. But how can we keep from being frightened by all we see?

Behold. Here is the answer the angel gives. **We keep from being frightened by looking at the right thing, by looking in the right direction.** Fear not at what you see all around you, instead, behold the answer, behold the glory of God, behold the giver of life and hope, behold the savior. Look to him and the fear is gone. It requires that we look in the right place. It requires that we look to Jesus. Looking anywhere else leaves you frightened.

I flipped on the television a couple of nights ago, probably 1:00 am, and Jim Bakker was on the air. He was warning us we need to prepare for whatever is coming and for \$1,000 we can buy 20 years worth of food to stockpile. 20 years worth - it comes in buckets. First of all, I don't

want to eat some kind of freeze dried, discount version of MRE's for 20 years. Secondly, I don't think I want to hang around for 20 years of whatever it is he's predicting is coming on this world. I'm all for being prepared but "behold! Fear not!" Look in the right direction. When you see these things coming to pass our hearts don't respond with fear but with anticipation!

Behold. Observe. Look responsively. Focus. Really see. Look and take note of. Pay attention. We miss a lot by simply not taking notice. The shepherds were no doubt all men which explains why the angel had to get their attention and remind them to look. "Behold. Hey, pay attention here Wally, we've got some really big news to share with you. Focus." Guys don't behold very well. The truth is, most of us don't do a very good job of beholding what God has set before us. Most of us miss it. We are looking the wrong way, looking at the wrong things.

The innkeeper missed it. The mother of Israel's promised Messiah was sitting in his hotel lobby and he missed it. He didn't observe, he didn't behold. I know, you're thinking, "How could he have known, it was just a pregnant woman." You're right, but Jesus was just an eight day old baby when Simeon and Anna gathered him up in their arms and blessed the Lord because they had seen Israel's redeemer. It depends on whether you are looking or not.

Behold. So many have missed him, but John said to all who receive him, to all who look upon him and behold him in faith he gave power to become the children of God, to all who believe upon his name. Don't miss him.

May I suggest that as we wrap up 2011 and begin a new year, take some time to behold. Look in the right place, in the right direction. Look to Jesus. Look with eyes of faith and behold how God's faithfulness has seen you through this past year. There is good news that outweighs the bad if you are looking in the right place. Behold, Jesus has come.

I bring you good tidings. The word tidings is the translation of the Greek word from which we get our word evangelize. It means to announce, especially good news. The angels came to announce the good news - the gospel of Christ. Jesus has come and he brings life to all who will receive him and believe. It is good news, freeing news, life altering news.

It's time for good news, isn't it? We need some. You have to search diligently to find much in the way of good news on this planet, but heaven has good news. The angel said so. Behold the good news of heaven has come to earth. Look at the good news and keep on looking. Remember, don't be afraid. Look. Behold. Good tidings. Heaven's good news.

I bring you good tidings of great joy. It's not just good news, it is the best news. It is news that brings joy. And not just joy, but exceedingly great joy. The news we have, the good news of the gospel of Christ, is news beyond anything we've ever experienced or heard before. An encounter with the gospel, an encounter with Jesus produces joy in the life of all who will believe and receive him. In fact, joy is a fruit of the Spirit, it comes to us from God by the Holy Spirit. Things in this life can produce some measure of happiness, but it is God and his redeeming life and presence that brings joy. This kind of joy comes even in the face of hardship. Heaven's joy remains even when circumstances are against us and when life seems unkind and unfair. Listen to what Paul wrote concerning the saints of God in Macedonia, **“Out of the most severe trial; their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.”**

2 Corinthians 8:2 There is a combination for you – overflowing joy and extreme poverty! Where does that kind of joy come from? It doesn't come from possessions or from this world – it comes from faith in the eternal one. Peter declared in speaking of Jesus, **“Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”** **1 Peter 1:8.** King James translates it as “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Jesus has come to save us and that means joy unspeakable and full of glory. We have good news, the best news, and that means unspeakable joy!

...which shall be to all people. This passage thrills me. It shall be to all people, not just a chosen few, not just some people, but all people. It is not just to the Israelis. It is not just to the talented, the handsome or beautiful or wise. It is good news of great joy which shall be to all people. It means we are included. The offer is intended for all people and all people includes you and it includes me. I read this week a comment Jim McGuiggan made concerning John Bunyan. He wrote, “Wasn't it John Bunyan who said he was glad that John 3:16 said ‘whosoever’? If it had said ‘John,’ he remarked, ‘I would have thought it was some other John; but since it said ‘whosoever,’ that let me in.”” The angel said this was good news for “all people” and that let me in too. It said this was good news to all people, including the people that aren't used to getting good news. We used to sing a song that said “whosoever surely meaneth me, whosoever meaneth me.” I'm grateful. All people includes me and it includes you. That's good news.

For unto you... As grateful as I am that it says this good news is for all people, I'm equally grateful that it says unto you. It suddenly becomes personal. This is for you, yourself. He came to save all people, the whole world, but he also came to save only you. You see, the gospel has to become personal. It has to be received individually, personally, by faith. That passage we read from 1 Peter 1:8 says you are receiving the outcome of your faith, salvation. It is good news for the whole world, that salvation is secured for all who will believe but the truth is you still must believe and receive.

Jesus came to save you. Have you believed and received? He came to save the world, but he especially came to save you. This is personal, specific, particular. This is not just some random event. He came to save you. That is good news.

...is born. What a sacrifice. What a miracle. God in flesh appearing, born of a virgin, a little child, God of the ages. The fact that he is born reminds us again of the sacrifice involved in the incarnation, the condescension, the degree of such infinite love, that God would become man to dwell among us in order to redeem us from our sin. What a holy event – Christ is born. It is good news. He knows our struggle, he knows what it is to be tempted, he knows about our pain and suffering, he has been there. We have a high priest who understands and is touched by the feelings of our infirmities. He can relate when we cry out to him and that is good news.

...this day. I like the immediacy of that announcement. This wasn't an event way off in the future. There was no more waiting. It happened today and a decision is called for now! Action is required now! Christ is born today. What will you do about it? You see, salvation has come today, it is available today and it should not be ignored or postponed. Jesus has come that you might have life. Don't hesitate. Decide and act today.

The shepherds responded immediately, without delay. The bible says they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. They didn't delay and neither should we. A Savior has come to you. Don't delay but receive him and be saved.

...in the city of David. Jerusalem was called the city of David, but Bethlehem was where David was born so this too could be called David's city. How appropriate that the one we call The Bread of Heaven is born in Bethlehem which means "house of bread."

This phrase, that he was born in the city of David, reminds us that although he was fully God and Savior, Messiah, but he was also fully man, a descendant of David. It also reminds us

of the faithfulness of God in keeping his prophetic promises. Everything God had spoken in the Old Testament, everything promised to David came true. We can believe God even in the hard times and trust his faithfulness and that is extremely good news. (“For unto you is born this day in the city of David...”)

A Savior. Here is the heart of the message. Here is the source, the subject of the good news. A Savior is born. And not just a Savior, but our Savior and the one and only Savior. There is no other like Jesus. The bible says, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.** Only Jesus is our Savior. Only Jesus is the Savior and we all need a Savior. He alone is the redeemer and deliverer of our souls. It is good news because he is here and waiting on us today to come to him in faith. There is only one hope for this world and that is Jesus, the Savior. There is only one way to God and to eternal life and that is through Jesus, the Savior. This is the only good news we’ve got and it’s the only good news we need. Jesus is still the mighty Savior.

...which is Christ the Lord. He is Messiah, the anointed one – that’s what Christ means. It is the title that identifies him as the Jewish Messiah and he is also the Lord, the Sovereign One who is Lord of our lives and Lord and master of all that is. This baby whose birth we celebrate – understand Scripture declares him to be **“...the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together...in everything he [has] the supremacy.” Colossians 1:15-18.** He is lord of all and in control of all and that is good news for us all.

Jesus has come. Good news. He has come today and is still the Savior of all who will come to him. That is good news. Every thing else, all the financial stuff and political stuff and all the things we worry about – none of that will amount to anything two seconds into eternity. The only thing that will matter is whether you believed and received the good news the angel came to proclaim that night so long ago. A savior is born. Will you receive him as your Savior and Lord? And if you will, friends, regardless of anything else that occurs in your life, you will know what good news is truly all about. Good news, Christ is born. Good news, a Savior has come and he has come for you.

The decision is yours. A Savior is born, Christ the Lord. Is he your savior? Is he your Lord? Why not surrender your life to him today and receive the good news.

“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.”

There is good news for 2012. Christ is come. His name is Immanuel, God with us. He has been with us through all the adventures of 2011 and he will be with us through 2012. He kept his promises to us in 2011 and if he carries his return he will keep his promises to us in 2012. Good news (God news) - He is the same yesterday, today and forever!