

## The sermon

### Intro

What do we do with good news? We rejoice. We share it with others. Family. Co-workers. We pass it on. We don't keep it to ourselves. We don't forget about it.

Good news for us might be a raise, the car repair wasn't as much as you thought it would be, a good health report, a new child, grandchild, great-grandchild, we had a good gospel conversation.

This morning we learn about some shepherds who received good news and passed it on.

### READ PASSAGE

### Body

#### Passage Focus

We'll walk through the story and draw some application points after.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that a message was **given**, a message was **listened to**, a message was **pondered**, a message was **believed** (responded to), a message was **passed on** to others. **The message wasn't treated casually.**

#### Registration

A decree went out from Caesar Augustus (1<sup>st</sup> Roman Emperor). All of the peoples subject to the rule of the Roman Empire, which included Israel, were required to be registered = a census taken for taxation purposes.

#### Betrothed

The process from betrothal to marriage goes like this:

- 1) The parents arrange the marriage.
- 2) A binding contract is initiated and the groom's parents paid a bride price.
- 3) The betrothal period lasted around one year.
- 4) The couple is considered legally married and the contract could only be broken by death or divorce.
- 5) Betrothed couples did not live together or have intercourse.
- 6) Marriage was consummated on the wedding night when the bride left her parent's home to live with her husband.

#### Travel

To be registered, you had to travel to the town of your birth. So Joseph and Mary departed from Nazareth for Bethlehem which was a 70 mile trek. Heading south but up in terms of elevation.

#### Social stigma

A betrothed couple traveling together with the woman pregnant. This would be socially unacceptable. Remember, physical consummation and living together doesn't occur until the wedding night. In God's providence, the birth of his Son required the appearance of evil.

#### Birth

***"And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth"*** (2:6) = they were already situated in Bethlehem for some time before Mary gave birth.

**Swaddling cloths** = Jesus was wrapped in long strips of cloth. Jesus took on a full human nature. He had to be kept warm. The eternally existing Son of God retained his divine nature while adding a human nature. The divine nature didn't cancel out human elements like thirst, hunger, chill, exhaustion, pain.

**Manger** = a feeding trough for animals substituted for a crib. Jesus was born in a room used for animals.

**Inn** = lodging or guest room, not a hotel. The typical dwelling in those days had three rooms:

- 1) the main room where people lived, slept, cooked, and ate.
- 2) the guest room, which was attached to the main room and separated by a wall.
- 3) the animal room, or stable.

The guest room ("inn") was occupied so Mary gave birth in the animal quarters.

The point is humble origins. The Son of God came to earth without pomp and circumstance. Without a dog and pony show. Without apocalyptic signs.

But some were alerted to the significance of the event.

### **Shepherds visited**

Shepherds were going about their business: ***"keeping watch over their flock by night."*** – 2: 8

Shepherds were commoners from a lower economic class. Not the "important" people.

***And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,*** –2:9

They saw an angel and God's glory, meaning shining brightness, radiance visible for all to see.

It's an unmistakable sign saying take notice.

### **Shepherds' response**

***"and they were filled with great fear"*** – 2: 9

When angels appear, humans cower. When God is present in his glorious radiance, humans cower. There's an awe about God.

Why is God here? Have we done something wrong?

### **Divine explanation**

***"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people."*** – 2:10

The angel isn't here for judgment or harm. He's here to bring good news. What's the good news?

***For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*** – 2:11

A baby has been born who is both Savior and Lord. He's the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

***And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."*** – 2:12

The sign of the Messiah is a baby in a feeding trough.

The angelic host are moved to praise.

*"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* – 2:14

The ESV differs from the traditional *"goodwill toward men."* In case you were wondering why the ESV differs from the KJV, NKJV, A Christmas Carol, and Charlie Brown, let me explain.

- 1) I want you to be confident with your Bible.
- 2) If you have an ESV you'll see a note that says "Some manuscripts *peace, goodwill among men.*"
- 3) Our English translations are based on ancient Greek manuscripts.
- 4) The difference in Greek manuscripts here is one letter.

One letter of a Greek word dropped out in later copies. Goodwill characterizes men (ESV) or goodwill conveyed to men (KJV).

- 5) The ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV use earlier Greek manuscripts that are well accredited.
- 6) The KJV, NKJV use later manuscripts.
- 7) Since the oldest manuscripts are well accredited and written closer to the time of the originals, the ESV and newer versions opt for those manuscripts.
- 8) The difference here won't radically reshape the historic doctrines of the church.
- 9) Scholars have devoted their lives to textual criticism to ensure your Bibles are accurate to the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

The ESV is improving upon the KJV by using better Greek manuscripts.

- 10) We're not talking about conspiracies to keep out important parts of the Bible or revise the Christian faith!

As for the actual meaning, the point is God's peace comes to those on whom divine favor rests (see NIV). There's a group of people whom God favors, is kindly disposed. That's God's goodwill to certain people.

We and the shepherds should ask ourselves, "Am I one of those people? How do I become a person on whom God's favor rests?"

We become favored when we humbly turn to Jesus in trust. Not believing facts. Embracing Jesus as my Savior and Lord.

### **Eyewitness response**

The shepherds **saw** a sign. The shepherds **heard** a message. How did they **respond**?

When the angels left, the shepherds said, "**Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us**" (2:15).

The shepherds went quickly, they didn't take the news **casually** (2:16). Finding Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, they passed on the word from the angel.

*And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.* – 2:18

Likely more than Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were present. The news of the Messiah's arrival was spreading. Note that they wondered. That's amazement over the **magnitude** of what was spoken. They **listened** and were shocked.

Be shocked at the magnitude of the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ!

### **Mary's response**

*But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.* – 2:19

**Treasure** = store this information, preserve it, remember it.

**Ponder** = careful consideration, reflect, think deeply, consider, mull it over in your mind, go over it again and again.

### **Shepherds' return**

*And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. – 2:20*

What did the shepherds do with what they saw and heard? First, they **believed**. Second, they **praised**. They didn't treat these events with casual indifference. They saw the news was good and rejoiced.

### **The name Jesus**

*And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. – 2:21*

### **Jesus**

Stems from the Hebrew name Joshua. Jesus means "Yahweh saves" or "the LORD saves." Jesus' name represents what he does: "save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21).

Jesus is a first name. Christ is a title (Messiah), not a last name. Jesus' earthly last name is unknown to us.

### **Point 1: God communicates**

God is communicating to mankind! God acts. But he doesn't just act. He comments on his actions. He draws attention to the significance of his actions. He tells us how we ought to think about and respond to his actions.

How could we know why we exist? How could we know the mind of our Creator? How could we know how we ought to live? How could we know what the future holds? How could we know these things unless our Creator revealed himself to us?

The good news is God doesn't leave us in the dark. He's acted and spoken throughout history. And he's preserved his communication to us in the Bible.

**Christian**, God is still communicating through his word. Life-giving words are available in times of discouragement. Life-guiding words are available in times of confusion.

### **Point 2: Listen**

The shepherds listened to what the angel said. They didn't brush it off. They didn't forget about it immediately and get back to the sheep, the video games, the iPhone, the TV, the toys, the holiday meal.

They gave attention to the angel's words.

Matthew 13:19 speaks of people who hear God's word and fail to understand it. Then Satan takes away what they heard and it's gone. Listen! Don't let God's word fail to reach your heart.

In this account, I want to draw your attention to the fact that Jesus is both Savior and Lord.

### **Savior**

Savior of who? All who repent and believe.

That's turning from sin to God in whole-hearted trust. Following Jesus.

Sin = violating God's commands: lying, coveting, hating.

Savior from what?

Savior from sinful oppressors = Rome in Jesus' day.

Savior from sin's punishment: hell. Pictured with weeping and gnashing of teeth, torment by fire, gloomy darkness.

Savior from sin's rule. That's being given a new heart with new ability to fight sin and establish new, godly patterns in our lives. What Christians call being born again. Freedom from slavery to selfishness, greed, jealousy, deception, theft, harsh speech, violence, anger (lack of self-control), hatred, bitterness/unforgiveness, cruelty, substance addiction, foolish decision-making, disrespecting parents, laziness, pride (thinking we're wiser than God), autonomy (thinking we should be king instead of God). Sin manifests itself in many ways!

If we're real with ourselves, we recognize wrong and destructive thoughts, desires, attitudes inside us. We recognize lack too.

Savior by what means? Death on a cross. Jesus died on the cross as a substitute such that whoever believes won't be punished for their sin. Instead those who believe will receive eternal life. That's a new heart today to fight sin. And future life with God in the new heaven and new earth where sin, death, and suffering are a thing of the past. Jesus will restore broken humanity!

On the cross, God the Father treated Jesus as if he lived our life. If we believe, God extends us mercy, treating us as if we've never sinned (Jesus' life).

The implication is God is merciful despite our sin. And God rescues us from ourselves.

## **Lord**

By calling Jesus Lord the angel is declaring him God. As God the Son, Jesus is ruler of the universe. As such, he makes demands on our lives and when he returns, he'll be our judge. That's Creator rights. What Jesus says goes. He's in charge, not you. Not me.

The good news is Jesus is both Savior and Lord!

**Christian**, listen when you read your Bible. Don't rush through. When I preach. Give careful attention.

## **Point 3: Ponder**

**Why is the arrival of Jesus, the Savior and Lord, good news?**

Mary thought about the things the shepherds said.

Why were the shepherds joyful? What does this mean for me?

Think about it. While you're driving the car. While you're doing the dishes. While you're moving the snow.

**Why are Christians joyful in Jesus?**

Realities today...realities to come:

- 1) Guilt and shame covered by Jesus' death.

No fear of a final judgment. Pardoned, accepted by God. Cleansed conscience. When I sin (not defiance) God is patient with me. God knows we're in the process of transformation.

- 2) A new heart to fight sin (not only pardon!).

- 3) Guidance from Jesus in the Bible.
- 4) One day oppression, injustice, etc. will end when Jesus reigns forever.
- 5) Jesus will end death for us.

No more cancer, Alzheimer's, down syndrome.

- 6) Jesus will end sin in the new heaven and new earth.

No more being sinned against. No more fighting our sin nature.

**Christian**, think deeply about Jesus is Savior and Lord. Why is this good news when my snow blower dies? Why is this good news when money is tight? Why is this good news when my body is failing?

#### **Point 4: Believe**

The shepherds believed the angel's words. So they went looking for Jesus.

Trust God's word. Take him at his word. Let him reshape your life.

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* –

#### **Matthew 11:28-30**

Jesus says "*learn from me... and you will find rest for your souls.*"

As Lord, he issues commands. As Savior, he rescues us from ourselves and our unhealthy ways of doing life.

**Christian**, trust God when life is hard. Fight for confidence in God. Fill your heart and mind with truth.

#### **Point 5: Tell others**

The shepherds shared the angel's words. God tells us so we can tell others.

**Christian**, share your gladness in God.

#### **Conclusion**

**God communicates. Listen. Ponder. Believe. Tell others.**