

## Advent 2020 Behold Good News

Good News is our theme for Advent this year. I said last Sunday we were going to be looking at the message the angels shared with the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth. We looked at this passage last Sunday and I want to focus specifically on a couple of verses from Luke 2, beginning with verse 8 and reading from the King James Version. **“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 2:8-11**

I want to focus on the words of the angel beginning with “fear not.”

**Fear not.** I love the fact those are the first words God spoke in the New Testament. The angel Gabriel said it to Zechariah and again to Mary and to Joseph. Fear not. Jesus would speak those same words frequently to his disciples. “It is I” Jesus said, “don’t be afraid.” Fear not. We are living in fearful times. Jesus said regarding the last days that “men’s hearts will fail them for fear, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.” (Luke 21). Sounds like 2020 to me! What isn’t frightening about this year? We are even frightened by the solutions to our fears! Afraid of the virus and afraid of the vaccine. 2020 is frightening, but life in Israel in the first century wasn’t exactly a walk in the park. The truth is, the world is often a scary place, but the good news from heaven is: fear not! But how can we keep from being afraid? Look at the next word.

**Behold.** Here is the answer the angel gives. Look. Behold. This won’t surprise you, but the word behold means to hold, to keep. It means to hold your gaze on something intently and keep looking at it. **We keep from being frightened by beholding the right thing, looking in the right direction.** The writer of Hebrews says **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” Hebrews 12:2** It’s what the angels were telling the shepherds and all of us in some sense. Look to Jesus and you won’t have to be afraid. Behold him! Don’t be frightened by what you see or hear around you, instead, behold the answer, behold the glory of God, behold the giver of life and the source of hope born today in Bethlehem, behold the Savior, behold Immanuel, God who is with us here and now! Look to him. Look in the right place. Keep looking to the king. Anywhere else you look will leave you frightened or disillusioned. Look in the right direction, look to Jesus and don’t be afraid!

I think the angels word “behold” helped fix their attention. “Look!” Don’t miss what God is saying, don’t miss what God is doing in this moment, in this season of our lives. Behold! Pay attention! Take time in this Advent season to behold Jesus and his plans, his purposes even through all the craziness of 2020. Behold.

**I bring you good tidings.** Good tidings is the translation of the Greek word from which we get our word evangelize. It means to announce, to tell especially good news. The angels came to announce THE good news – a Savior is born. It’s the gospel. Jesus has come and offers life and forgiveness and salvation to all who will trust in him and believe.

**I bring you good tidings of great joy...** It’s not just good news, it’s the best news. It is news that produces joy. And not just joy, it’s exceedingly great joy. In a world reeling from the barrage of daily bad news comes the good news of the gospel, news beyond anything we’ve ever heard before. God hasn’t given up on us. He’s sent his one and only Son to be our Savior. Christ is born. There is hope after all! It’s good news producing the greatest joy.

I know people are searching for joy in this world. Let me tell you the only source. Life can bring some moments of happiness, but real joy is found in knowing God, in having a right relationship with him through faith in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of your sins. Knowing Jesus as your Savior and Lord brings life and joy. The bible says “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Romans 14:17. Joy comes from Jesus living in your heart and life. Joy comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in your life. The kind of joy he gives us is joy that lasts even in the face of hardship. Heaven’s joy remains when circumstances are against us and when life seems unfair. Heaven’s joy outlasts pandemics and politics and everything else. Heaven’s joy remains! Peter writes about Jesus and this joy he brings when he says, “**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! This is good tidings of great, unspeakable, indescribable joy. Salvation has come!

**...which shall be to all people.** This part thrills me. It’s good news for everyone! Not just for a few specially chosen people, not just for Israelis, not just for Americans, not just for the handsome or beautiful, the gifted and talented, it’s for all the people. That means you and me! If

you've lived your whole life feeling excluded, like you don't fit, you don't belong, it's not for people like you, then this is good news for you. This salvation, this Savior is for you!

**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. Imagine the shepherds that heard the angel's word. "Unto you." "Me? You're talking to me? Nothing good comes to me. No one would come to save me." But this salvation is for you, yourself, personally. This Savior came to save the whole world, but he also came to save you.

You see, the gospel has to be received individually, personally, by faith. That passage we read from 1 Peter said you are receiving the outcome of your faith, salvation. It's personal: your faith, your salvation. It is good news as you repent of your sins and put your faith and your trust in Jesus for your salvation. "For unto you..." He loved you. He came to save you. Have you asked him to save you and put your trust in him? Jesus and his gift of salvation, it's for you!

**For unto you is born...** What a sacrifice. What a miracle. Born to us. God in flesh appearing, born of a virgin, God of the ages as an infant. The fact he is born reminds us again of the sacrifice involved in the incarnation, the condescension, the degree of such infinite love, that God the Son would lay aside his power and heavenly glory to be born a helpless infant in order to dwell among us, and that, in order to redeem us from our sin. What redeeming love. What sacrifice. Because he was born to us, born as us, he understands our struggle, our sorrow, our pain. He knows what it is to be tempted, to be tired, hurting, lonely. The writer of Hebrews says we have a high priest who understands, who is touched by the feelings of our infirmities. He can relate when we cry out to him.

**For unto you is born this day...** I like the immediacy of that announcement. This wasn't an event way off in the future. This wasn't a prophecy to encourage hope that someday, somewhere, a Savior would come. Not this time. No more waiting. It happened today. Christ is born today. That's what the shepherds heard.

There is an immediacy for us as well in this announcement. Christ is born. The Savior has come. Action is required now! 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. Salvation has come today and it shouldn't be ignored. Don't postpone a decision about accepting his salvation and surrendering your life to Jesus. Ask him to forgive your sins and be Savior and Lord of your life. Today!

**For unto you is born this day in the city of David...** Bethlehem was King David's birthplace, his home town. It means "house of bread". How appropriate that the one who was called the bread of heaven is born in the "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, 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 concerning Jesus and his birth came true. We can believe God even in the hard times and trust his faithfulness that he will honor his word and his promise to his people.

**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, 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 can save us. He alone is the redeemer and deliverer. He is the only hope for us and for this world. There is only one way to God and to eternal life and to heaven 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 the Savior and he is mighty to save!

**For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.** We talked about it last week, that he is Savior and Messiah and Lord. He is the anointed one. This isn't just another baby. This isn't just a Messiah for the Jews. No, he is Savior, Messiah and He is Lord. Lord over all. He is everything. This baby whose birth we celebrate on Christmas, Holy Scripture declares, **"He is 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. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he has the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."** Colossians 1:15-20.

This is who the angels were talking about. This is who the shepherds went to see on that holy night. He is Savior, Messiah and Lord and he has come to save us from our sin.

Good news. Tidings of great joy. Christ the Savior is born! That's what we need to know. That's what we need to behold in this crazy year. He is where we need to fix our gaze. Everything else, all the political stuff and all the pandemic stuff, all the sources of conflict and division and all the opinions out there, 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 believe and receive him as your Savior and Lord? If you will, regardless of anything else that occurs in your life, you will know what good news and tidings of joy are really all about.

Good news, a Savior has come and he has come for you. The decision is yours. Will you receive him as Savior, Messiah and Lord in your life? I encourage you to open your heart to him today. 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.”** Let's pray and if Jesus is not the Savior and Lord of your life, if you haven't been serving him and living for him, let's make this a prayer of surrender and dedication to him. Ask him to save you and take the helm of your life today.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Don't forget to join us online for our Christmas Eve Communion Service!