Sunday December 25, 2022

Christmas sermon in full "A Great Light"

Most of us are comfortable with the Christmas story. The Christmas music helps us to remember that the baby who was born in Bethlehem is Jesus, the Son of God, who brings great joy today. The shepherds heard the good news about the gift of Jesus. And because they shared the good news to the world, we too can sing joy to the world! I find it very interesting that God chose the shepherds to announce the birth of his son Jesus.

Luke does not tell us much about who the shepherds were. In chapter 2, verse 8 we read “And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night *(RSV).*”  Throughout the history of Israel, shepherding was a noble profession. Abel was the first to have this job, followed by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and of course, David. God calls Himself a shepherd and we are compared to sheep, which is anything but a compliment.

Christmas is sharing. Christmas is Holy. Christmas is Caring. Christmas is about much more than just sharing warm emotions and memories. It’s all about what God gives to each one of us. Christmas is about God’s faithfulness made tangible through history. It’s about how God has touched our lives with his love. So, what is Christmas? Well, Christmas is for People Who Have Nothing, and Christmas is for People Who Need Everything.

**1. Christmas is for People Who Have Nothing:**Isaiah 9:6-7 reads, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom...*(RSV)*” God originally sent this greeting to those Jewish people who were exiled in Babylon in the sixth century B.C. The Lord also had the prophets send this greeting to the handful of people who remained behind in Jerusalem, once the proud capital of the Jewish nation.

In fact, the temple, built by the great King Solomon, had been destroyed by the armies of Babylon. There must have been pain in the hearts of the Israelites and they were praying for the restoration. The God of faithful love and mercy came to the weary and lonely people with a message of good news. “Your God reigns!” God would make it possible for those exiled in Babylon to return home.

The Babylonian exiles would return home to Jerusalem. God would establish peace. And so, messengers ran ahead from Babylon back to Jerusalem proclaiming this wonderful news, “The exile is over!” What a message for those who had nothing!  We can relate to this Christmas greeting because we are people who have nothing. As we stand before God, we see our sins are a cause for a spiritual exile. God has every reason to cast us out of his presence – to send us away from his goodness. Adam and Eve forsook the complete, wholesome, peace that was theirs in Paradise.  As a result, we lack that perfect peace. In fact, we don’t even deserve it. We don’t even deserve the small blessings God gives in our lives. We don’t deserve our homes, our families, or our livelihood. We don’t deserve this church. We don’t deserve God’s message of hope.

We may have Christmas lights and presents. We may have the things that provide temporary pleasure, and we might think that’s enough. Our sinful hearts may think it’s enough to hear Christmas carols on the radio, to see the lights in the oak trees, to taste Christmas cookies, or receive a gift from someone you did not expect. But that’s not enough. Such things cannot fill our hearts with peace. It’s at Christmas that many people feel depressed and alone. It’s at Christmas that we miss loved ones who have passed away. The glitter of the holidays just isn’t enough to keep peace in our hearts. That is not what Christmas is. For Christmas is nothing, and we have nothing, if we don’t have God’s greeting of “good tidings.”

**Christmas is for People Who Need Everything:**The God of history, our all-powerful and merciful God, intervened for us all. He has made it possible for us to have peace. He gives us everything we need. Messengers have come to us. And they were wonderful! The angel came to the shepherds on that first Christmas announcing, “Peace on earth!” And God has sent his Christmas greeting to you, as Charles Wesley wrote in his hymn “Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!” That’s what Christmas is all about. And that’s just what we need. God gives us what we need right here in his holy Word. He gives us a message of hope and love, and he gives us the ability to receive and believe it.

We’ve been given just what we need, a Savior. God has delivered us. That’s the perfect gift. The name “Jesus” means, “He saves”, or “he delivers.” Jesus Christ is what Christmas is all about, the reason for the season. He is the Son of God and Son of Mary who came to trade himself for us in life and death. The One who had every right to condemn and exile us but found a way to pardon us without violating his own perfection. Christ came to deliver us from the guilt of sin and the fear of death. He came to deliver us safely to his home in heaven.

Christmas is all about the needy people and how God has supplied all their needs. He’s provided the best gift of all, our deliverance. In fact, God even unwrapped this gift for us as we read in Isaiah 52:10 “The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God *(NIV).*”

In Bethlehem God came to assure us that he has a better life in store for us, a life forever in his presence. Christmas is more than holly, tinsel, sparkling snow, or children’s laughter. Christmas is God’s good news of peace to a world of sinners. In John 1:14 we read, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*(NIV)*.” In the same chapter, verse 16 we read “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.”

What we need more than anything is grace, God’s grace. What we need is more grace! More grace from God and more grace working through us to bless the lives of others! When people are touched by the grace of God, they become gracious people. They become an actual extension of the grace of God. They do things they would not otherwise do. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus.”

The grace of God should sanctify us. Sanctification is the act of becoming holy and godly. And this process should start when we encounter God’s grace and surrender our lives to Jesus Christ. The grace of God should motivate us to live right. It should be a controlling power in our lives. Beloved, we admit that we all sin. Do not ever be so proud as to say you do not sin. We all sin and we all struggle with sin every day. Thank God for His wonderful and amazing grace!

The grace of God can save us but only if we respond to it. The grace of God can sustain us only if we believe in it. The grace of God can sanctify us but only if we surrender to it.

Christmas is real history, but it must become your story. Luke 2:11: “Today [that means right now] in the town of David a Savior [one who forgives sins] has been born to you; [personal] he is Christ [the long-awaited Messiah] the Lord [your master and Leader]. Remember Isaiah said “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”; And Jesus is our Light!

I close with three questions: Is Jesus “Savior” to you? Is Jesus “Christ” to you? Is Jesus “Lord” to you? **Amen.**