
Good News!
Fourth Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 52:7; Luke 2:8-18

1. Good News Connects with **Common** People

2. Good News Packed with **Presence**

3. Good News Requires **Responsibility**

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West Valley Church
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There's a TV show that comes on this time of year called "The Great Christmas Light Fight." Have you seen it? There's a host who serves as a judge, and that host travels to four or five different homes around the country to see their displays and then awards \$50,000 and a trophy to the winner of that episode. It's fun to watch and to see the light displays on television, and I'm sure it's even more amazing in person. I read that in order to have the episodes ready to air in December, they begin filming in October. I just can't imagine the hundreds of dollars and hundreds of hours it takes for those homes to do that every year. But I really enjoy the lights. I like simplicity and orderliness; I think that's classy, and it is easier! But you still have to keep all the lights on the house even and straight (you can't just have them hanging there!). I'll admit that it has become an annual tradition for the boys and I to hang the lights the day after Thanksgiving. At least I like to call it a tradition; actually, I just ask *them* to go up on the roof because I'm getting too old for that! When the day comes that they aren't able to be here for Thanksgiving weekend, my light-decorating plan will become even more simplified! There are companies now that will hang your Christmas lights for you, so out of curiosity I got a free bid. Even though I don't do much, and they wouldn't even do as much as I do, it was going to be something like \$1500 bucks! I mean, if you can afford to do *that*, God bless you, but that's way more than our house payment! I'll keep mine simple and just drive around and enjoy the lights.

The first Christmas "light up" ever wasn't created by electrical cables, glitter, computerized synchronization or LED lights, but by "The Glory of the Lord that shone around them" (Luke 2:9). No television cameras were there; no cars were driving by, just a few simple shepherds out in their field. But it was those shepherds who were told the "Good News" by the angels who appeared to them.

During this Advent season, we've been spending time on our Sundays exploring the Good News. Over 2700 years ago the Prophet Isaiah said:

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7, nlt)

¹ Primary sources: Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), David A. Neale, *New Beacon Bible Commentary: Luke 1-9, a Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City: Beacon Bible Publisher, 2011), John Barry, ed., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016)

At Advent we celebrate the arrival of the Good News in the person of Jesus Christ, and for each of the Sunday messages in December; we are looking at some instances of those who brought us the message of “Good News!” Today we are going to briefly look at the delivery of Good News to the Shepherds by the angels.

Let’s look at the passage, and can I ask you to honor the Message of Good News from God by standing with me as I read it to us? Thank you. This is what the Word says:

“That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. ‘Don’t be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you *good news* that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.’ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.’ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished.” (Luke 2:8-18, nlt)

Thank you – you can have a seat. This story is actually the third of three “epiphany passages” in the narrative of Jesus’ birth from Luke – an “epiphany passage” means it describes the appearance of angels (2:10; 1:13, 30). This proclamation of Good News has some wonderful, encouraging, and life changing messages for us, and I’d like to just point out a handful of those this morning in our few brief moments.

First of all, let me ask you – what is the “Good News”? The Good News is that God’s love has come to us in the Person of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that through Christ’s death in our place on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, we can, in faith, ask for and receive forgiveness for our sin, we can be made alive spiritually, so that we can be in a relationship with the God of the Universe as our Father! That is very, very good news! I hope you have received and accepted this Good News. If not, all you have to do is have a conversation with God about it – it’s what we call prayer – and tell him you are sorry for your sin that required Christ’s death for you, but that you want to accept it and live with and for him! But whether you have yet or not, let’s see a little more about this Good News from that passage we read. You can keep track in your notes from your worship folder or in your West Valley Church App. First...

1. Good News Connects with *Common* People

The news was out, and it couldn't be contained! Shepherds were some of the lowest on the totem-pole of society's pecking order. While the Good News could not be confined to the stable that it started in, it didn't first go to the courts of Kings or to the temples of the religious rulers; no, the Good News began where it belongs; by connecting with common people. Had it first come to the rich and the rulers, we would wonder if it would have anything to do with the rest of us. Instead, it started with *us*. I look around this room, and I don't see any kings. I don't see any queens. I don't see any millionaires or corporate chiefs. I see common, ordinary people. It is to people just like each of us that the Good News connects with. God was making it clear from the get-go that his Love is for the average, every-day person. God sent his Son for YOU! The commonness of the shepherds should encourage you and me to know that the Good News is for each of us. We don't have to clean up for it; we can accept it where we are.

Another great lesson from this is that we see...

2. Good News Packed with ***Presence***

The Old Testament tells of the majestic presence of the manifestation of God as the cloud of glory (Exodus 16:10), and a consuming fire (Exodus 24:17), filling the Tabernacle, the Temple (Exodus 40:34; 2 Chronicles 7:1-2), and the whole earth (Numbers 14:21). This manifested presence of God, represented by light, surrounded the shepherds and angels as the Good News was pronounced: The Light of the World had appeared to shepherds in the darkness of night.²

The Good News still comes with the presence of God himself. This is not news that is distantly removed from the divine presence; God's Good News is that the baby is called "Immanuel – God with us"! God's loving, promised presence will be with you when you accept, and live in, his Good News.

Next, see from this passage that...

3. Good News Requires ***Responsibility***

By the time Luke writes this part of the story, he has already made something abundantly clear. You might have noticed that, as part of the angel's birth announcement, he said, "Today in the city of David a savior has been born; he is Christ the Lord." This is called a "Davidic theme," which has already been declared several times in Luke's Gospel, validating the Old Testament prophecies from Isaiah 11:1 and 2 Samuel 7:12-13 that said the Christ would come from the line of David, Israel's greatest king. That sets the stage for the very clear claim that is made that *this* baby is Christ. In fact, by this early in the story, we've already been told *five times* that Jesus is Savior, Christ, Lord, and Messiah (1:32, 35, 47, 69; 2:11). So as readers, the message has been made clear to us, and we now bear the responsibility of that knowledge. Already, just halfway through the second

² Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition for Bible Students*

chapter and seconds after Jesus' birth, we can no longer be indifferent about Jesus; we must either accept or reject the claim. You and I have an ability to respond; a responsibility. Every single one of us has the responsibility to respond to this message, or reject it.

In fact, more than a choice or an ability to respond, we have a *response-requirement*. Did you realize that? When you hear the Christmas story, whether on TV or in Church or when Santa read it to the children last week at Breakfast with Santa in our gym, you are being confronted with a choice, you now have knowledge that you must do something with. This is not a sentimental story that warms your heart. This is a life-altering, transforming message that demands a response from you. You cannot be indifferent; you must completely accept this truth and allow God to transform your life, or you must reject it outright. The Gospel leaves no room for anything less.

What have *you* done with this knowledge?

If you have accepted the responsibility that comes with the knowledge that the baby of Christmas is Christ the King, you must know that there is something else that comes along with that responsibility, and it is made clear to us in this story of the shepherds receiving the Good News. *As soon as* they knew that the message was true – they had seen Christ for themselves, they worshiped God – and they *immediately* became conduits of this Good News themselves. You see...

4. Good News Means *Messengers*

There was hardly any time that had transpired at all between their acceptance of the truth of Christ and their desire to share the Good News with others. We are told this about the shepherds:

“(When they had seen the baby,) the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds’ story expressed astonishment.” (Luke 2:17-18, tlb)

Did you realize that the first public proclamations of the advent or arrival of the Messiah King are made in these verses we read? The first public proclamation is made to the shepherds by the angels, the second is made by the shepherds to everyone they came into contact with!

The simple pattern of Christ followers is set from the very beginning; once the Good News is received, it is shared. Somewhere along the line we got the anti-biblical idea that sharing the Good News was either for preachers, pastors, or people who have been Christians for a very long time and have acquired some unspecified amount of knowledge from years of Sunday School classes. But I have known people who have been in Sunday School and Bible Studies for decades and they *still* don't tell others about the Good News. These shepherds were common people. They had received the message and *within minutes* became messengers themselves.

It has been suggested that the shepherds near Bethlehem may have been caring for the sheep that were used for the sin offerings in the Temple sacrifices. If this were true, it would make perfect sense that these shepherds would be the first to visit the Lamb of God, because now temple sacrifices were no longer going to be necessary. The name Jesus means "Savior." The common shepherds were the first to hear that salvation was personally available, and then they became the first humans to share that message with others. That message remains current and applies to each of us.³ And we ought to waste no time passing that news along to others.

What had been a common, ordinary night for the shepherds was interrupted by the very presence of God, requiring a response on the part of the shepherds. They responded and immediately began sharing the message with others. With God the ordinary became extra - ordinary. God can do the same in your life, and you can become a messenger from the mountaintops!

Pray

³ Ken Heer, *ibid.*