

God with Us: In the Manger

Luke 2:8-20

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. We're glad that you would join us this morning. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here. And it is good for us to worship, to honor our Lord, to sing praise to him, and to come to his word. This is the fourth Sunday in the season of Advent, and so in the last few weeks, Advent is the season when we celebrate and we rejoice at the Lord's coming, right? That's what Advent means. It means coming. And so, oftentimes in years past, we've looked at passages that point to the coming of our Lord Jesus, or gospel narratives of his arrival, or even looking to the future when Jesus will come again. And it's appropriate that we do this, right? Because this is an important thing. Jesus has come in the flesh. We're told that he is Emmanuel, God with us, that he took on flesh and dwelt amongst us and rose again, and he did so, so that we would have life.

And so it's right for us to celebrate, right for us to rejoice at his coming. And doing this, and preparing, and thinking about his arrivals, by looking at passages that not only speak about Jesus being with us, with us. And so we've seen God with us in the garden with Adam and Eve, and we've seen God with us on the mountain with Moses, God with us in the temple. And now this morning, we come to what all has been moving towards, what all these have been directing our attention towards, the in the manger. When Jesus took on flesh, and he dwelt amongst us. And so to do that, we're gonna look at Luke, Chapter 2. So if you, you can look, you can turn in your Bibles to Luke 2.

Luke's a New Testament gospel - Matthew, Mark, Luke. That's how the New Testament begins. Chapter 2 this morning. Now to give us some context, in chapter 1, we're told that an angel came to Mary, probably about 14 or so, and told this young girl that though she was engaged, and though before she is to be married, though she's a virgin, she's going bear a son. And this son will be named Immanuel, God with us. And so that's Mary, before she could be with her husband, she finds herself pregnant. She's a virgin, bearing a son. And nine months later, she and Joseph, her husband, have to go to the city of Bethlehem, the city of David, because Caesar has called for a census, and everyone has to go to their family lineage. And so Joseph, being of the lineage of David, goes to Bethlehem to be counted. And there, Joseph welcomed the arrival of their son, Jesus. Just as the angel said. And they wrapped him in swaddling clothes, in a manger. That's what we have in Luke chapter 1, in the beginning of Luke 2, and that's what brings us to our passage this morning. So, in verse 8.

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the

Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for you.

Thank you for your word, and ask that as we come to it now, that you would lead us. That you would guide us, that you would direct us. We need your help to see your glory, to behold your beauty, to know you deeper. And so we pray, Father, that you would open our eyes, and soften our hearts, that we would behold you. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, I don't think I've ever met a single person who enjoys being interrupted. Likes having their day interrupted, right? I mean, if we're at work, we're in the zone. We have that project, that thing that we client by the end of the day, the end of the week. And when we're in the zone, and we know in just a few minutes, a little bit more time, if I keep plugging away, I'll get it done. And then, knock on the door. And it throws us completely off. It throws us completely off. We forget our train of thought. We get off course. We get back. What should have been done, now seemingly is going to drag on and on. Or we're watching a movie at home, and the movie has been moving. The moment, the tension has been building. The big reveal is about to happen, and the doorbell rings. And the moment's ruined. Interruptions. We don't like them. I hate interruptions. Right? And so do you, right? Interruptions. They mess up our day. They ruin the moment. They turn or something that we didn't want to have to consider. They ruin our plans. Interruptions, well, they interrupt. Problem and annoyance. But sometimes, they're a blessing. Sometimes, it is beautiful. Like when you get the phone call that says that your wife is on the way to the hospital because she's in labor. Or when that knock on your office door is your boss telling you that you've gotten a raise. Those are good.

Or like the interruption that occurred ten years ago at the 42nd Street subway station in New York City. You see, on that day, like any other day, travelers were going from station to station. They were going from train to train. And if you've been to New York City, you've observed this. People are running. They are moving. They do not want to pay attention to anyone, nor do they want to be stopped, right? They've got places to go and things to interact with. They can't be late, and they have to catch their train. And so they're flying. They're rushing around. That's what's happening. And over in the corner at the station is a band playing a cover of U2's *With or Without You*. Again, nothing out of the ordinary, nothing strange, because in New York City, right? Playing music in subway stations, in corners, and in Central Park. But on this day, there's also this man who's wearing a hat, and he's got glasses. And he's trying to stop the people as they're running around. He's trying to get their attention, because he wants them to go listen to the band and throw money in the space. But no one's stopping.

They're annoyed by this nervous ball of energy of this man. They interrupted. Well, this man, you know, it's not hard for us to imagine this, if you've been in New York City. And if you have, watch this, because this day was videoed. And the reason this day was videoed was because this man with the hat and the mustache and the glasses was Jimmy Fallon, the late-night host, right? The comedian. And so in this day, he takes off his hat, he removes his mustache, and he gets everyone's attention. Jimmy Fallon! And people start to stop. And he

goes, and he says, go listen to that band. Go listen. And people start to pay attention a little more, and they listen clearly and attentively, and they realize this band playing the cover of U2's *With or Without You* is U2. And those people who were annoyed a moment ago are happy that they've stopped. Those people who were only concerned subway train or making sure they weren't late for their appointment, they are glad their day, their moment, has been interrupted. Beautiful interruption. It's a wonderful interruption. They're not concerned about being late to their appointment or whatever is next. Their plans have been interrupted. Because this unexpected, this unexpected and extraordinary announcement that the biggest band in the world was playing a free, unannounced concert just for them. Well, that's an interruption. And they did. It was a beautiful interruption.

Interrupted with an Extraordinary Announcement

And something even more beautiful, more extraordinary is happening to the shepherds. We're told in our passage that they were in the same region, the same region as Bethlehem, and they are out at night shepherding their flocks. Out of the ordinary, this is very normal. They're doing what shepherds do. They have to care for their flocks at night, because at night, predators could come, sheep, thieves could come and take some from the flock away. And so they're doing very normal, very ordinary shepherding. But this night is interrupted. Verse 9: "an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the stone around them and they were filled with great fear." And this makes sense, right? I mean, think about it. They're out in the fields at night, and they're in the dark. And it's a darkness unlike anything that we experience, right? Because in our darkest nights, there's still all the ambient light, right? We don't really see it. There's houses, there's streetlights, right? So, but that's not their experience. They're in a field far from the streetlights. There's no streetlights.

It makes me think of when my family was traveling a number of years ago through Utah. We parks in Utah, and we stopped in Moab. And Moab is where Arches and Canyonlands are. And so we stopped, and while we're we discovered that Arches is a certified dark sky park. And what that means is that under a moonless night, it's one of the darkest places in the lower 48. And so hearing this, I was like, "man, we got to go. Like at night, let's go, let's see the stars, because we will never see anything like this again." So we get in our car, we drive through the park, and the park keeps all the lights off. And we're just driving up to the spot, and we park. Get out of our car, and there are other cars, and everyone's got their lights off, right? Because we don't want to mess up the dark. And we look up, and it's overcast. Not a single star, but I remember the darkness. Because it was darkness before. It was almost weighty. Like you could almost feel the heaviness of it. And if we didn't, because we're pulling out, I would have driven off the road, because you couldn't see it. You couldn't see the road without the lights. And your eyes, no matter how you adjust them, you couldn't see through the dark. You were blind.

And I imagine that's what the darkness means. But that darkness is interrupted by the angel. And we're told, the glory of the Lord The glory of the Lord. The angel isn't emanating light from itself. It is the glory of the Lord shining around them. And so I imagine the shepherds, they're probably like, covering their eyes because it's blinding, right? And they're trying to let their eyes adjust, and they're shading their faces and the light. It is too bright. Like looking into the sun, but only brighter. The glory of the Lord shone around them. Full of fear. Rightfully so. But they hear this: "Fear not, for behold, I bring news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and

lying in a manger.” And y'all, if that wasn't amazing enough, that single angel is now joined with a multitude of the heavenly host. Now, I don't know how much is a multitude, but I do know that that language host was often used to speak of a group of military men, of brigade of army soldiers. And so what this is, is this is the angelic army appearing that is filling the sky. A multitude of the heavenly host. We don't know how many, but I have to think, I can't help but think, that probably every angel was there. Because after all, what better thing did they have to do that night? The Savior of the Lord had come.

And so I can imagine, it is not hard to imagine, and it is easy for me to believe that every one of the angelic was there. And this army turns into a choir and sings “glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace among those whom He is pleased.” What a beautiful song: “Peace with those whom He is pleased.” And we need to ask ourselves, so who is it that God is pleased with? I wonder if you were to ask your friends, you know, friends, maybe, you know, maybe but maybe at a Christmas party. I know Christmas Eve is coming up, but maybe you still have a party to go to, maybe tonight, tomorrow, or maybe you can wait till New Year's Eve. New Year's Eve party, and you can introduce yourself to, you know, someone new, someone you've never met, and just lead in, you know. “Who do you think God might be pleased with?” Starter, isn't it? I mean, come on. Right? And what would we hear, probably, if we asked our friends that question? What would they say? Well, they'd say, “well, God's rules, and the people who are buttoned up, and the people who say the right words, and do the right things, those are the people that God are, God is pleased with.”

And I understand why people would answer that way, but we know better, don't we? Because, you see, we know externally, but internally, we're a mess. I'm a mess. So are y'all. I know you. You know me. Right? And we can say all the right words, but we fumble. We say insensitive things, inappropriate things, unthoughtful things. We do the right things. We know the Sunday morning, but, but, you know, Sunday lunch comes, and Monday, and Tuesday, and so on. Wrong things. No, God isn't pleased with those people who have it all together, who keep all the laws, who keep all the rules, because, because that's none of us, y'all. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. We have all sinned against Him, again. Those whom He is pleased aren't those who keep the rules, because that's no one. See, commentators tell us that this phrase, “whom He is pleased,” has become a technical word, a technical phrase in first century Judaism, to mean the people of God. Who God was pleased with, what the original hearers would have heard, was those God is pleased with are those that have been shown His grace, favor, who have experienced His forgiveness and compassion. That those whom He's pleased with are those who know His peace. And that's what He gives.

But it's a peace unlike the peace that is offered in this world. See, God interacts with the peace of the world with true peace. On that night, the shepherds, probably, it was probably peaceful, right? Probably quiet. There's some baa..ing, I guess that's what they, right? That's the technical term. They're baa..ing. I don't know. But, you know, that's probably about it. It's peaceful until God interrupts it. And actually, the Roman Empire at this time was peaceful. They were under Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. Rome actually had brought peace, right? Peace from war and battles, but Rome brought peace through the sword. Now, you see, there is a peace that we're in need of, that God interrupts with.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus wants the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea. He is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He can't give peace from the heart, for which man yearns more than even outward peace. You see, this non-Christian Stoic

philosopher that there is a peace that every one of us longs for, that is deeper than the peace that is offered from anything in this world. It is the peace that comes only from the peace that comes from his son, who was born on that day. It is the peace that God brings when he restores us to when he restores what was lost in the garden. You remember weeks ago when we began with God with us in the garden. What was lost, it was that in our sin we turned from God and we became enemies against God, and we lost that relationship, that peace with God, and that is what God is. A peace that comes through Christ. He is the Savior Christ the Lord, or as Paul put it in Colossians 1, the assurance of pardon, that “through Jesus God reconciles us to himself, making peace by the blood of his cross.” The angels are announcing that there is a peace that is greater than the stillness of night, that is deeper than what might come.

An Announcement That Elicits a Response

a) Wonder

There is a peace that comes only through God, and that is the peace that we need. It comes only through Jesus. That's what is being announced. And y'all, that announcement elicits a response. We see that the shepherds they go to that they have heard about, and all that the angel said is right. They find Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in swaddling clothes, just as the angel had said. And then we see these responses. There's two of them. There's first wonder, we see it in verse 18. “Wondered at what the shepherds told them.” Now we might not think much about this, this wonder. I mean after all, who wouldn't wonder, right? Shepherds show up, and they're saying angels, you know, an angel appeared, and then the the entire angelic army sang a hymn about this child. Who's the Christ? Who's the Savior of the world? This child that's laying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes? Like that's who this is, of course. Now, we don't actually know who the they are. It's clearly is other than Mary and Joseph. There were other people, but they were This wondering isn't simply them trying to understand. It's more than that. Because we see this contrast between their “See it” in verse 18: “All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” Verse 19, but Mary. So we have this Mary's response in a second. But the contrast indicates the wondering isn't just trying to make sense. It's something deeper. Bach, he says this. He says “this wondering is what is the crowd hearing the announcement? It's tickling their ears, penetrating their hearts.”

It's kind of like seeing a cyber truck for the first time. Like I remember, right, the first time I saw a cyber truck, and it was like, wow, I've never seen before. This is interesting. It's intriguing. I stopped what I was doing, right? I went home and I told Kat and the kids, I said “I saw one in the wilderness.” There it was, right? Like a cyber truck. And Cole and Mead were like, “yeah, we saw that one, too.” There's only one in Roanoke, right? “I don't know, you know, maybe it's one of y'all. Sorry. I'm not making fun of you. I promise. But like we saw it and and we talked about it and an hour later we forgot about it. And now I see a cyber truck, and I don't even think anything of it. Right? It was interesting. It was intriguing. It caught my attention. And now I don't need to see it again. And that's how the people were thinking about that child.

It's interesting what the shepherd said. It's intriguing. But it never penetrates their heart. It doesn't change them. So what about you? Is he simply a man who lived thousands of years ago? He said good and interesting things. He had some intriguing teaching and because, you

know, we put up a tree and we opened some presents. We say “happy birthday, Jesus.” And we move on. Do we wonder? Or do we delight?

b) Delight

You see, that's the other response. Verses 19 and 20: “Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all as it had been told to them.” Delight is what takes root in Mary and the shepherds heart. Now listen, delight doesn't mean full. We hear that Mary pondered. This means she was mulling over. She was contemplating. She was taking it in. She doesn't really fully comprehend all the things she heard. But it's starting to fit together, right? What the angel announced to her. And now what the shepherds have declared. It's starting to piece together. But she's still pondering to understand. But in her attempts to understand, in her pondering, she's not like the people who wondered and moved on but instead pondered and mulled and treasured and delighted. Even though she couldn't fully comprehend. She delighted.

What about the shepherds? They've returned to the fields. They've returned to their sheep. They went back to their normal lives. But their lives were told that they were filled with praise and song and delight. Maybe they went to the field. But we know they sang. They're delighting in what they have seen. You know, the people at the 42nd Street subway station, those who had their day interrupted, realized who was that was singing and whose presence they were in. They started singing. There's video of them. You can see them. And some of them are dancing and all of them are delighting. Because this beautiful interruption, it changed their day. Changed their moment. So what about us? How do we respond to this interruption of God, this extraordinary event that has come?

Kent Hughes said this. He said, it is not enough to hear about Jesus. It is not enough to peek in the manger and say, what a lovely scene. It gives me such good feelings. No. This is the Savior of the world. And He comes and He brings His peace and it comes to us. It doesn't simply change our day. It doesn't simply change our moment. No, this beautiful interruption changes our lives. So that we are not the same. So that now we experience the peace of God that is unlike the peace of the world. And so friends, do not simply peek in the manger and don't reduce Jesus to a man who was born, who we think of just once a year. Don't wonder and leave and delight. Delight, because by this one who was born, by this one who would live and die and rise again, He is the Father and He gives us the peace that was lost. He is the Savior who is with us. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you have sent your Son, our Lord Jesus, the one who has taken on flesh. And we thank you that you have shown us who and what He has done. And so we pray, Father, that we would look upon Him and that we would ponder, we would mull over, we would seek to comprehend. All, Father, we would delight. Delight that the peace of Christ has come, that salvation has been made through Christ. Savior is here. And so we pray, Father, fill our hearts with joy, our lips with singing, and our minds with delight. Savior who dwells with us. And we pray all this in the name of Christ and God's people said together, Amen.