

DCF:

If Harry heard it one more time he was going to scream. Merry Christmas! Aarggh! Harry didn't think Christmas was merry at all. To Harry, Christmas meant stress. His wife thought that a new Lexus, like in the commercial, was a good idea. His children wanted a PS5, new snowboards and a trip to Mexico during Christmas vacation. His neighbors were doing all this, and so Harry felt a lot of stress to keep up with the Jones's. Every time his Mastercard made its merry trip through the cash register, Harry thought about the bill that would come due in January. Christmas was not a time of rejoicing for Harry. It was a time of great stress and anxiety.

This morning we are in the presence of the Lord of heaven and earth. This morning we remember our Lord's great love in sending a Savior to this earth. Are we like Harry this morning, or like those shepherds who heard the angels tell them the wonderful news “**REJOICE! A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN!**”

If you've got a little bit of Harry in you today, allow God to remind you that this news is meant for you and it's the greatest gift you can receive.

Part One: This news is meant for us

Someone once asked me if the angels had made a mistake when they appeared to the shepherds. After all, the shepherds weren't socially connected to their world. If the angels wanted to get this message out, shouldn't they have appeared to the inn keeper, or to the priests or the city council of Bethlehem? Best of all, they should have appeared in Jerusalem before the rulers of the land. That would have been the wisest media move, right?

God thought otherwise. He sent the angels to appear to shepherds who lived with their flock out in the fields. They didn't spend a lot of time with other people, just their sheep and a few other shepherds. They weren't constantly in contact with their neighbors. These were humble men, content to do the job that few others wanted to do.

As they sat in the fields, keeping an eye on their sheep, suddenly an angel appeared to them. Just one at first, but they were terrified when he did appear. The suddenness of his appearing was startling. But what was terrifying was his holiness. Instinctively these shepherds knew they were in the presence of God's holiness. Their sinful human natures reacted with terror, for who can stand before the holiness of heaven? And I wonder... they didn't know at first if the angel was bringing good news or bad news.

Have you ever had a policeman show up at your door? You heard the doorbell ring. You saw the uniform. You didn't know he came with good news or bad news until he told you why he came. Remember your feeling until he said why he had come? Apprehensive, perhaps a bit scared? Well, you can imagine how those shepherds felt.

Immediately the angel put them at ease. ***“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”*** They were the very first human beings, other than Mary and Joseph, who heard the most momentous news this world has ever heard. God had given His greatest gift to all people. After telling them the news, this one angel was joined by a great number of other angels. ***“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”*** Imagine the wonder in the hearts of these humble shepherds! Imagine the joy at being the first to hear this news directly from heaven's powerful messengers! Certainly they knew they were supremely special people that night! What an honor!

It warms my heart to see God give this news first of all to shepherds. You see, God chooses to bless us simply because He wants to bless us. He chooses to give this news based only on His love for individuals. God does not reveal this news only to “good” people. He does not first reveal this news to people who can make a big impact in this world. He chose the humblest - the shepherds - to reveal the greatest.

So it is even today. God has given this news to you, not because you are the best, the brightest, the smartest, the most impactful people this world has seen. He has given this news to you because He loves you and knows you need to hear about the gift He gives.

And you know what? I'm glad He doesn't reveal this gift to us today through an angel. Can you imagine an angel appearing every Christmas day announcing the news, and then being joined by more? Terrifying and thrilling at the same time.

No, our Lord has chosen to us to receive this gift by hearing the message. The Holy Spirit comes to us through the Gospel and causes us to believe what happened thousands of years ago in Bethlehem. That gift of faith in your heart is just as great a miracle as the angel's appearance so long ago.

So, what's the message? What's the gift?

Part Two: This news is God's greatest gift

Well, what gift, what message would you want God to give to you today? Some might say "I want God to tell me that my children will always be healthy and happy." Some might wish to hear that they will receive that degree they're working so hard to acquire. Others might wish to hear that their career will be a successful one.

I know God could give you this kind of news. But today, He gives us the greatest news, the greatest gift that He can. It's not the gift of good health, good finances or good relationships with our neighbors or friends. It's the gift of peace between us and our heavenly Father. Listen again to this news, this gift. ***"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."***

Our Savior Jesus is both true God and true man. He is true man, able to live the perfect life for us that God demands and able to die to pay for our sins. He is true God, so that His life and payment for sin would be limitless, able to cover the sins of absolutely everyone who has ever lived or will ever live.

He is our Savior, and that is His entire mission. ***"For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."***

The birth of Jesus Christ was the beginning of God's rescue plan for you. He came to pay for those sins that separate us from our Lord. And oh, we sure do remember those sins, don't we? The time we stayed quiet when someone spread some gossip that we knew wasn't true. The time we decided to short God in our offerings because "I need it more." The time we spoke a few words that ran down the name of our Savior. The time we cared more about our own comfort, our own ideas than our neighbor's health and well-being. The time we got irritated with God when He commanded us to be pure in thought, word and deed. The time when we didn't want God to be number one in our hearts because we wanted to be number one.

There certainly were times when we didn't want God's gift of a Savior in our lives, but He gave us one anyways. He made sure we heard and believed that all our sins have been paid for and that we are now justified in the eyes of our heavenly Father. Jesus has reconciled us, balanced our spiritual accounts in our Father's eyes. We are forgiven. We are saved. We have the gift of eternal life with Him. That's the news that our Lord has chosen to give to us this day, and we rejoice in the grace of our Lord!

This news, this gift, changes our lives. Oh, our Lord has given us some amazing gifts this past year. He has given us our lives, our families, our friends, our health, our jobs. He has given us safety and contentment. He has given us comfort, knowing that He is in charge. He's given us directions and support as we strive to live for Him.

But best of all, He has changed our lives with Him. Our loving relationship with Him has been restored. Again, not because of anything we have done, but simply because He has chosen to do it for us. As those angels said to the shepherds ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."***

Rejoice! God's favor rests on you.

AMEN