I love this time of year. We live in a world in which the dark side of the human condition is always with us, yet the promise of Jesus is also always with us: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” In the midst of all of the challenges and ups and downs of our messy lives, I find the wonder of the message and music of Christmas breathes refreshment into my spirit. Our Lord is always loving us and always leading us. His loving heart is always calling our hearts, and our hearts call back to him.

Of course, there are always amusing moments in the midst of our messy lives on days like this eve of Christmas Eve. We were at both airports on Friday, picking up children and grandchildren, and there were any number of other families there meeting loved ones. It reminds me of a fellow who drove a school bus. He said, “When I stopped the bus to pick up a little boy by the name of Chris for preschool, I noticed an older woman hugging him as he left the house. ’Is that your grandmother?’ I asked. ’Yes,’ Chris said. ’She’s come to visit us for Christmas.’ ”How nice,” I said.

"Where does she live?” "She lives at the airport,” Chris replied. "Whenever we want her, we just go out there and get her!”

Then there was the man shopping in a large mall like Tyson’s, who saw a mother with a three-year-old girl. As they passed a bakery counter, the child asked for a cookie and her mother said "No." The little girl immediately began to whine and fuss, and the mother said, "Now Jenny, we just have two more stores left to go; don't be upset. It won't be long." The same man passed the mother and daughter near a candy counter in a second store and, of course, the little girl wanted candy. When she was told she couldn't have any, she began to cry. The mother said, "There, there, Jenny, don't cry. Only one more store to go, and then we'll be going home.” The man again happened to be behind the pair at another checkout line, where the little girl immediately began to cry upon discovering there would be no treat purchased that day. The mother patiently said, "Jenny, we'll be through this cash register in five minutes, and then you can go home and have a nice nap." The same man happened to see them in the
The meeting of the shepherds and the angels is certainly one of the most wonderful stories surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of our messy lives, in a busy season and a difficult season for many, we come to this greatest of all stories, the birth of the Messiah, Jesus.

The meeting of the shepherds and the angels is certainly one of the most wonderful stories surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ. I just love that the angels appeared to shepherds. Some years ago, a group of us were visiting Jerusalem, and we decided to hike from Jerusalem toward the city of Jericho through a dry, hilly desert. Occasionally, we came upon a flock of goats (which is not nearly as romantic as coming upon a flock of sheep, I assure you) with a shepherd or two and often a few children, who fearlessly approached us looking for a handout. I remember one little shepherd boy, perhaps ten-years-old, approached me with goats swirling all around us on the hillside. "Want a picture, mister?" Pretty good English! He wanted to pose with me while a friend took a picture. He obviously wanted a dollar to do it. "No," I said, "no, no, no, no." He kept after me as I walked a hundred yards. "Picture mister, picture mister," Finally I said, "Ok, we will do a picture, but no money, no dollar, no shekel, do you understand, no dollar?" "Yes," he said. So, we stopped, we grinned, a friend snapped the photo, and immediately the boy said, "One dollar mister." Wait a minute, we agreed no dollar. "One dollar, mister." This went on for another hundred yards, with goats swirling around. I gave him a dollar. Thus, my experience with Shepherds!

Shepherding was one of the oldest and most important jobs among the ancient Hebrew people. When Samuel the prophet anointed David to be the next king over Israel, David had been out shepherding the sheep outside of Bethlehem, perhaps in the very area the shepherds were working when the angels appeared to announce the birth of David's descendant, the Messiah. The shepherds around Bethlehem were the original Palestinians, who, from that day to this one, simply lived off the land. They had a tough job. The terrain is hilly, rocky, dry, with little growing. Frankly, shepherds weren't considered the best of citizens. They weren't seen as very "spiritual," as they weren't very faithful to attend services in the synagogue or care much about the keeping of the Hebrew Law, the first five books of our Old Testament. People suspected that shepherds could not distinguish between "mine and thine," what is mine, what is yours. In fact, they were often kept from giving evidence.
Our God comes to ordinary people like us, not because we deserve Him but because He loves us.

in court, since, as a group, they were not particularly trusted. So we are left with an intriguing question. Why, of all people to whom to send a birth announcement, did God choose to send it to the shepherds? They were not in a sanctuary. They are out in the field. They were not especially religious or even especially nice. So why them? The angel could have appeared to a group of children. The angel could have appeared to the rabbi of the local synagogue. He could have appeared to some faithful believer-follower, who happened to be outside on that special night. I just love it that he appeared to just ordinary people. People, frankly, like you and me, with our messy lives, who do some things well, but, then, other things not so well. Our God comes to ordinary people like us, not because we deserve Him but because He loves us. So, the shepherds were just ordinary people minding their own business, working the night shift one evening, when, suddenly, all heaven breaks loose with brilliant light around them and angels above them and the newborn Messiah in front of them.

I do think there is another reason God appeared to shepherds. It is pretty simple to see once you realize that our God has a shepherd's heart. For example, God spoke through Jeremiah (23:4) saying, “I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.” “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want,” wrote David in the Twenty Third Psalm. “I am the good shepherd,” said Jesus. God has a shepherd’s heart. On that first Christmas Eve, we see God, the great Shepherd, calling to people of like hearts, human shepherds, and sending them to see His Son, the Good Shepherd. God’s heart calls to the like-minded, human heart.

Indeed, the entire history of God's interactions with people has been the history of heart calling to hearts, of God's great heart calling to our small, human hearts. God looks for the heart that will respond to him and love and follow him. God is calling my heart and your heart. “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:28-29a). Heart calls to heart. The heart of Jesus is calling your heart this very moment.

Many years ago, Frederick Tucker married Emma Booth and took her name, Frederick Booth Tucker. One day, he was conducting evangelistic meetings for the Salvation Army, which was founded by Emma’s parents. One night, after he had preached a sermon on the sympathy and the love of Jesus, a man came forward and asked
Mr. Tucker how he could talk about a loving, understanding, sympathetic God. "If your wife had just died, like mine has," the man said, "and your babies were crying for their mother who would never come back, you wouldn't be saying what you are saying."

A few days later, his own wife, Emma, was killed in a train wreck. After the memorial service, Frederick, in his grief, looked down on the silent face of his wife and then turned to those who were standing there. "The other day when I was here," he said, "a man told me that, if my wife had just died and my children were crying for their mother, I would not be able to say that Jesus Christ was understanding or sympathetic, or that he was sufficient for every need. If that man is here, I want to tell him that Christ is sufficient. My heart is broken, it is crushed, but it has a song, and Jesus Christ put it there. I want to tell that man that Jesus Christ speaks comfort to me today." That man was there. He came and knelt beside the casket while Booth Tucker introduced him to Jesus Christ.¹ Our Lord’s loving heart was calling that man, heart-to-heart, “Come unto me.”

God’s heart loves you, loves you dearly, loves you deeply, loves you always. His heart calls your heart, invites your heart to find help and hope in Him. God's love is an uncondi-tional courting love that has come to you, is coming to you right now, and will keep on coming to you. For our Lord has always been the great seeker, the great courter, the great wooer, who seeks you out, courts you, woos you, and invites you to him. God is looking for the heart that wants Him. What is the interest of your heart in Jesus? A young couple was out for a walk one evening when they decided to sit on a park bench and rest. After a long pause, the young woman asked, "Do you think my eyes are like the stars?" "Yeah," he replied. "And do you think my teeth are like pearls?" she continued. "Well, yeah, I suppose," he said. "And do you think my hair is like spun gold in the moonlight?"
"Sure," he repeated. "Oh Joe!" she said. "You say the most wonderful things."² Her heart called to his heart. His heart was somewhere else. The Lord who loves you more than you love your own next breath calls to your heart saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3a). He invites your small heart and mine to find joy in His great heart.

There is a remarkable phrase we find in Psalm 95 and find repeated three times in the New Testament Book of Hebrews: "Today, if you hear his voice [God's voice], do not harden

¹ Source unknown

²Wit and Wisdom, Communication Resources, Canton, OH, p. 119.
God's heart is calling the responsive heart, the open heart, and the soft heart that is interested in Him.

God’s heart is calling the responsive heart, the open heart, and the soft heart that is interested in Him. God spoke to His people long before Jesus was born and said, “Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15). God calls the person whose heart longs for God’s own heart. God’s heart is calling the heart that will hear the command to, “Go to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing” and receive the response of the shepherds: "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass which the Lord has told us about." God seeks the heart that is interested in Him.

In these days, a great many people communicate by computer with people they have never personally met. All sorts of people have met through online dating services such as eHarmony®. Of course, in the “old days,” people corresponded with letters. We have the love letters between my mother and my father when they were courting, and they are very tender, very wonderful to read. Long ago, a man and a woman, who had never met, began corresponding this way. What started their correspondence by letter we do not know, but over time they fell in love with one another though they had never met face to face. They agreed to meet at an airport. Since they had never seen each other, they

devised a plan that would help them recognize each other. She was to wear a green scarf and a green hat and have a green carnation pinned to her coat.

When the man got off his airplane, he immediately began looking for her in the terminal. Suddenly, he sees a woman with a green scarf, a green hat, and a green carnation. His heart fell. She was an ordinary woman but there was something about her face and the cast of her eyes that told him, while they could be friends, they were unlikely to ever be more than that. He even was tempted to get back on an airplane without approaching her, but because they had developed a friendship, he resolved to say hello to this person he had found of kindred spirit. He walked over to the woman, smiled, and introduced himself.

Immediately, the woman says, "What is this all about anyway? A lady paid me twenty dollars to wear these things and said to tell anyone who approached me that she would be sitting on the upper floor of the restaurant across the street from the main entrance." He crossed the street, entered the restaurant, climbed the stairs and saw a woman sitting there with a green scarf, a green hat and green carnation. He realized she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. He approached her and she explained: "All of my life men have wanted to be with
I invite you to respond to the sound of the Lord Jesus knocking on the door of your heart.

me, to be my friend because of my beauty. I want someone to love me, not just for my outward appearances but also for what I am inside.”

3 It was a simple test. She had to know, did the heart to whom she was calling truly care for her heart? You can know that God’s heart calls to you no matter what you look like, no matter what has transpired in your life, no matter anything. God’s heart is calling you, loving you, inviting you to come after His heart with your heart and love Him. This can be the Christmas of your life. God loves you and wants a relationship with you. All you have to do is open your heart to Him and tell Him, please come in.

Please be aware of the Lord Jesus Christ knocking on the door of your heart, working through the wonder of this Christmas Sunday, and through other things in your life, to draw you, lead you, love you to Himself; so that you may discover that He wants a personal relationship with you—a friendship you may receive the instant you entrust yourself to Him. “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:12). I invite you to respond to the sound of the Lord Jesus knocking on the door of your heart. There is a simple prayer you may pray. It’s on the screen. It’s in your bulletin under the sermon title. If it expresses the desire of your heart, I invite you pray with me in the silence of your heart as I pray the words aloud.

Lord Jesus, I invite you into my life. I confess that you died for my sins and extend to me the unconditional gift of forgiveness. I endeavor from this moment forward to live for you and follow you as Lord of my life. I trust that you will transform me into the person you want me to become. Fill me with your Spirit’s presence so that I may share this faith and love with other people. I offer this prayer with gratitude in Jesus’ name. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer with me, please know that the Lord who loves you is in your heart to stay. Please talk to any of the pastors and we would be happy to guide you to readings that will further encourage your relationship with Jesus.

3James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited, Tyndale, p. 326
of David's Savior, who is the Messiah, your God:

This will be a sign for you:

The Lord will find a child in David's line and will light his lamp forever.