

Luke 2: 8-20

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth 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 heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The angels appear to the shepherds, and they bring them good news of great joy, for all the people.

Good news of great joy, for all the people.

All the people is not just the Hebrew people, who had, up to this point, been seen as God’s chosen people. If the angels had meant just the Hebrew people, they would have said good news of great joy for the descendants of Abraham.

All the people includes more than that.

All the people is not just people who lived two thousand years ago. All the people is not just people who are named in the Bible.

All the people includes more than that.

All the people is not just kings and queens and rich people. All the people includes blue-collar workmen and artists and ordinary people off the street.

All the people includes more than that.

All the people is not just people who look like first-century Judean shepherders. All the people is not just people who look like the Italians whom we see in Renaissance art.

All the people includes more than that.

All the people is not just people whose lives look perfect, with the wildly successful careers and the long-term blissful perfect marriages and the two-point-five accomplished children and the picket fence and the dog.

All the people includes people whose lives have not worked out that way.

All the people includes more than that.

All the people includes people whose lives are broken in some way.

All the people even includes... us.

This good news is very simply this:

God Almighty did not have to come down here and share our life. No one and nothing has the power to make God do anything.

God did not have to extend God's grace and forgiveness to us, to people who constantly run off to get the meaning in our lives from, it seems, anything else.

God does not have to love us, even when we find it difficult to love ourselves.

God does not have to walk with us when times are hard.

But God loves the world, and each and every person in it, so much that Jesus came down here, was born, and lived a human life.¹ He cried. I'm sure that he laughed. He loved the people around him and he taught them to love God and to love their neighbors.

God does extend God's grace and forgiveness to us. Even when we don't deserve it. Which is, well, pretty much all the time. That's why they call it "Grace."

God does love us, even when we have trouble loving ourselves.

God does walk with us all the time, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

There is great joy involved in this. That is just natural. We are not getting what we deserve. We are getting so much better than anything we could deserve!

Good news that isn't for everybody, ultimately, is not good news. It is more of the same, neither good, nor news.

My brothers and sisters, this is the good news which we have received this Christmas Day. Jesus Christ was born into the world. He lived a human life. And he died, an innocent man condemned for our sins. He will return to judge the living and the dead.

In the meantime, he calls all of us to love God and to love our neighbors. Christ came and lived and died for them, too. He calls us all to be part of bringing peace and justice to the world, whether through national legislation or one neighbor at a time, one kindness at a time.

Because, when we do that, when we bring peace and justice, we bring the Kingdom of God just a little bit closer, and we get to see a glimpse of God's Kingdom.

¹ John 3:16.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN