

Text: Luke 2:1-20

Theme: The Night of Profound Messages

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Christmas Eve Holy Communion Service on 24/12/2017 at 11.00pm

One of my favourite Christmas stories is about the young boy who was given a very important role in the church Christmas play. He was to be the angel and announce the birth of Jesus. For weeks he rehearsed the line that had been given to him, "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy!"

The great night came for the Christmas pageant and everybody was in place. Visitors had come in and all the children were in costumes, complete with bathrobes for the three kings and fake wings and halos for the angels.

As the pageant started, the excitement was electric around the room. The dramatic event in the first part was the announcement of the angel, "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy." The spotlight hit this young boy and as he stood centre stage in the middle of all this excitement he got stage fright. Every grandparent, aunt, uncle, and neighbour came to the edge of their seats, wanting to say it for him. You could see them in unison, mouthing, "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy."

Still, his brain was frozen; he couldn't say it. He tried it, but it just wouldn't come. Finally, in a courageous moment he filled his lungs with breath and blurted out the words, "Have I got news for you!"

The boy got it right. Do we have great news or what? At Christmas we celebrate the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Christmas means that we don't search for God; God searches for us. Christmas means that God put skin on to show us how much he cares for us. Christmas means that God became one of us in Christ so that we would understand the depth of his love and be changed by it. And if this is not great news, I don't know what is!

Verses 8-12 That night was a night of profound messages.

The shepherds were minding their business, tending their sheep, when an angel of the Lord appeared to them with a remarkable message.

Verse 10 The character of the Message.

The angel told the shepherds that he had come from Heaven to deliver a message of good news that will produce great joy for them and for the entire world. This angel did not come with a message of judgment. He came with a message of peace.

He came to deliver a message the world had been waiting to hear for thousands of years. Ever since our first parents sinned in the garden of Eden, the world has been groaning under the curse brought about by that sin. Back on that dark day God made a promise. He promised Adam and Eve that one day a woman would bear a Son and that Son would defeat the power of sin and the serpent (**Gen. 3:15**). This angel appeared to share the good news that God's ancient promise had been fulfilled!

The character of the hearers – the shepherds.

What is it about the shepherds that is so special? At the time of Jesus, shepherds were considered the lowest rung in society. They were dirty. It was not acceptable to associate with them. Back then a common prayer was "Please, don't let my child be a shepherd." Why would God reveal his message to shepherds? Why would God choose to tell the shepherds first?

God chose to reveal the gift of Christmas first to the shepherds because they were the most receptive to the message. **They did not have anything to prove. They had no reputation to protect. They had no fear of being called crazy. More than anyone they were open to the impossible - God was being born among them!**

What can they teach us about how to be impacted by the joy and message of Christmas? One thing we notice is that the shepherds had eyes to see.

Verse 15. After they had heard from the angels, they said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what has taken place..." They got there and saw the scene. It was not spectacular. **To any other eye it was worse than ordinary, but the shepherds were amazed. They were able to see Christ.**

I imagine when the shepherds told others about what they saw there would be some who would reply, "How could you see something like that? We have never seen anything like that!" Perhaps the shepherds said, "Don't you wish you could?" If there is one thing I want for Christmas it is for every-one to see what the shepherds saw, that Christ is the Saviour of the world - the whole wide world. Not just for the UK, but for everyone - red, yellow, black, white, we are all precious in his sight. **If peace, hope, love, and joy are to come to this world, we must have the eyes to see that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the whole world.** We also notice that the shepherds had ears to hear.

The content of their message? What did the shepherds hear?

v.12 These shepherds were told that they will find the Saviour wrapped in "**swaddling clothes**" and lying in a "**manger**". "**Swaddling clothes**" were actually strips of rags that were wrapped around newborns to give them warmth. A "**manger**" was a feeding trough where animals were fed.

This special baby, God in human flesh, the Messiah, the Saviour, the King of Kings, was not born in a palace. He was born in a manger. He was not wrapped in velvet like a prince; He was wrapped in the rags of a common man.

He willingly laid aside the glories of Heaven and stepped into time in the form of a humble servant, **Phil. 2:5-8**. He made Himself poor so that we, through His poverty, might be made rich, **2 Cor. 8:9**. He knew what it was to suffer; to do without the finer things of life; to live each moment in dependence upon His Father to provide His needs, **Matt. 8:20**. He did this so that He might identify with us when we have a need, **Heb. 4:15**.

V.11

As the angel continues to deliver his message, he tells the shepherds about the birth of a baby. As he does, he gives the infant three names. **He tells us that the baby will be "Saviour", "Christ" and "Lord"**. These three names are important because they reveal the identity and the ministry of the baby born in Bethlehem.

1. **He is called Saviour** – He came to "**save His people from their sins**", **Matt. 1:21**. This baby came into this world to lay down His life so that lost sinners might be saved from their sins. He came to this world to die, **Isa. 53:4-6**.
2. **He is called Christ** – This word means "**anointed one**". This name identifies this baby as the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews. He is One Who will fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies. He is the One Who will reconcile men and women to God. He is the One to Whom all the sacrifices and types in the Old Testament have pointed.

3. **He is called Lord** – The shepherds were told about a baby in a manger, but that baby is identified as Lord. This name portrays Him as the One in control. He is the Saviour, but He is also the Sovereign. That baby was actually God in human flesh, **John 1:1; 14; Phil. 2:5-8**. The Creator had become a man! The eternally Lord of glory stepped out of eternity into time.

There has never been a message quite like this one! It is a message of hope, life and salvation to all who will believe it!

We live in a noisy world. Just stop for a moment during your day and listen to all the noise around you. We get so used to noise that we can't stand silence. There is so much noise that we don't hear very well. If we want to hear from God, we must find the silence that the shepherds found.

There was once a Native American and a native New Yorker walking the streets of New York City together. The Native American spent his whole life on the prairie. It was his first time in the city. He turned to his new friend and said, "I hear a cricket." The New Yorker replied, "What do you mean? Look at the asphalt, smell the exhaust, look at the tall buildings. How can there be a cricket here?"

The Native American led his friend across the street to the front of a store. There in front of the store was a small tree. He turned over a leaf and there was a cricket. The Native American said, "We hear what we are trained to hear. Let me show you." He took some coins out of his pocket and threw it on the street and a crowd of people stopped.

We hear what we want to hear. We see what we want to see. We respond how we choose to respond. In order for us to hear and receive the power of Christ and Christmas we must move away from our distractions and listen.

Most of all we recognize that the shepherds had the courage to commit. Later in verses 17 and 18, the shepherds went back, praised God, and told everyone what they had seen. By doing so, they believed, and they decided to proclaim at the risk of looking foolish. They decided to commit. They were so filled with joy they could not contain it. They had to share it. Christmas is just a nice concert easily forgotten unless we embrace Jesus' love for us and commit to him. Until we commit to the Christ in Christmas, life is just an endless and boring series of experiences and obligations. We will not see. We will not hear. We will not find joy until we decide to commit. We will not have the joy, hope, peace, and love that we hunger for until we commit. Ann Weems said it best: "If Christmas is not now, if Christ is not born into the everyday present, then what is all the noise about?" Indeed, if there is no commitment in us, what is all the noise about?

The shepherds on that Judean hillside enjoyed a time of personal, divine ministry that night. We can identify with God's grace in that the message was delivered to a group of people who were outcasts in their society, by virtue of their duties.

Regardless of a person's past, or of how low they may have fallen in life, there is still hope for them in Jesus. The Lord turns no one away, but invites all who will come to meet Him and be saved by the grace of God! Regardless of your station in life, there is a place for you in the love of God. Don't let some sin, or some situation stand between you and Heaven. Come to Jesus today, because He will not turn you away (John 6:37.)

What started in Bethlehem was to reach far beyond the confines of that little village. The Gospel is a message designed for all people of all ages. It is a message that deserves to be shared in this day and hour. After all, "***it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes,***" **Romans 1:16.**

If you are a believer, every person we meet is a candidate for the Gospel. Every home we enter is a place where the Gospel needs to be shared. We are to be in the business of sharing this message until Jesus calls us out of this world, **Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15.**

As they made their way back to their flock, they went rejoicing in the new life they had found. As these men headed back to the hill country and their sheep, they went with a new joy in their souls that they had not known before.

These men were filled with rejoicing because of what they had heard and had seen that night. They would never be the same because they had met Jesus! They were still shepherds. They were still outcasts from society. Religion still had no place for them, but they had met the Master and that changed everything!

v.17-20

Jesus may have been a baby when the events recorded in these verses occurred, but He was already in the life-changing business. **Several people encountered Jesus that night and everyone who encountered Him was changed.**