

Message #1080
Rev. Jack C. Longley

"JOY...TO THE WORLD!"
{Luke 2:8-14}
Trinity Presbyterian Church
December 26, 2004

INTRODUCTION

There are certain stories we never tire from hearing. The text for the morning was one of the two I selected for my message on Friday evening from Luke 2--the announcement of the angel to the shepherds concerning the birth of Jesus. Most of us have heard this as long as we can remember.

...it is nothing short of extraordinary

...we can almost visualize those shepherds

...the appearance of an angel

...the terror of the shepherds {who of us would not have been scared to death?}

I don't know what angels look like.

...Oh, I've seen Tess, Monica, and Andrew on the TV series, "Touched by an Angel"

...Maybe that's what angels look like...who knows?

The Bible says we may have entertained angels and not been aware of it--interesting thought. It really doesn't describe them. The best description we have is they are young men dressed in white {at the tomb of Jesus on the day of His resurrection}.

...never once does it indicate they have wings

...we know they are free to move about rapidly...that could suggest flying--but that's merely speculation.

...we may have an angel or two or three in worship this morning and not know it

But the angel that appeared to those shepherds uttered those now famous words...

"Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of GREAT JOY that will be for all the people.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord."

{Luke 2:10-11}

THUS, THE BIRTH OF JESUS IS ANNOUNCED--TO COMMON SHEPHERDS

It was a world in darkness...and...the world is still in darkness two millennia later.

...there was a weariness and widespread despair among the people at the time of Jesus birth

Matthew Arnold describes the world into which Jesus was born:

"On that hard, pagan world, disgust and secret loathing fell.

Deep weariness and sated lust made human life a hell!"

And, isn't it interesting that the first emotion encountered by the angelic messenger was that of FEAR!

...people were fearful at that time

...just as people are fearful today.

...there was Herod the Great on the throne--cruel and sadistic

...there were the Romans who sought to dominate as much territory as possible--who occupied

the Holy Land--who found great delight in terrorizing their subjects

Since 9/11 fear is by far the dominant mood of our nation--it is underlined nightly by the news media and our politicians.

There are other fears--

...senior citizens fear being assaulted, mugged, injured, or even killed if they step outside their dwelling...or being stripped of their lifetime savings by telemarketing scam artists

...armed agents ride airplanes, buses, trains in order to protect people from danger
...crime is such the people are afraid to walk the streets at night
...to fly nowadays one must go through tight security because of the fear of terrorism

...at the upcoming inaugural events next month tens of thousands will be screened because of fear

Hollywood productions and television programs reflect the uneasiness that is in people's hearts--they play on disasters, the occult...impending doom!

We watch as President George W. Bush puts together his cabinet for his second term wondering what will happen in the next four years to our nation. Will we be better off or even more fearful?

And, of course, in California--we await the big earthquake that's been predicted when we will all fall into the ocean.

BUT--FEAR WAS NOT THE THEME OF THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

"Do NOT be afraid. I bring you GOOD NEWS!"

No greater news has ever been proclaimed. The good news: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord!"

...a Savior was born

...a Deliverer had come

...and because of this--**THEY NEED NOT FEAR!**

We frequently draw the parallel between Jesus' birth and the coming of Jesus to the human heart--often called the second birth. It's penned so well in the third verse of that familiar carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem"--

"How silently, how silently, The wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts The Blessings of His heaven. No ear may hear His coming, But in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive Him still, The dear Christ enters in."

We need to be reminded on this day after Christmas is that it is not enough for Christ to have been born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. What REALLY counts is Christ being born in the human heart.

...your Bethlehem is when Christ came to you

...when you received Him as Savior

...declared Him as Lord

That's a remarkable parallel--Jesus can be born in us as certainly as He was born in Bethlehem.

Therefore, it is to us that the angel stands to make his welcome announcement...

"Fear not! Fear not, for unto YOU is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!"

I discovered the other day that the words "Fear not" appear exactly 365 times in the Bible! {amazing--same number of days in a year--never do we need to be afraid!}

...did you ever wonder why?

...why we are not to fear?

The answer: a Savior has been presented--the deliverer, a rescuer, one who is adequate to free us from any threat and danger in any situation!

That is why the shepherds were told not to be afraid.

...it mattered not what Herod or the Romans would do

...or what clever, manipulative minds might conceive

...there was a Savior...a deliverer among them

...one who came to change their hearts so they could face any situation

...therefore: **"Do NOT be afraid!"**

THE SUBSTITUTE FOR FEAR...JOY!

The presence of Christ in our lives should eradicate ALL fear and FILL us with JOY!

...that is what it's all about!

...we don't fear the future for we know who holds the future

Remember the JOY you experienced in your life the moment you received Him into your life?

...that was not just a momentary thing!

...that was an ongoing lifetime process!

When Paul lists the "Fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians JOY is second only to Love!

Believers filled with God's Spirit are JOYful people!

...sure, we will face dangerous situations EVERY day

...drive on any freeway...it's dangerous

...but we need NOT fear...we have the JOY of the Lord!

...we have a Savior

...a deliverer!

...and, we've been told: "Do not be afraid!"

The chief mark of the Christian ought to be the ABSENCE OF FEAR and the PRESENCE OF JOY!

"JOY TO THE WORLD...THE LORD HAS COME!"

A good description of a believer is one who is COMPLETELY FEARLESS, CONTINUALLY CHEERFUL, AND CONSTANTLY IN TROUBLE!

...that's what proves we are what we claim to be!

Paul wrote in Romans 14:17...

"The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

That ought to be the mark of EVERY CHRISTIAN!

...we have been freed by the deliverer

...we have been saved by the Savior

...therefore, we will NOT be afraid!

Friedrich Nietzsche, the atheistic German philosopher, made this surly remark to some Christians one day...

"If you want me to believe in your Redeemer, then you've got to look a lot more redeemed!"

...let's look like the company of the redeemed

...let's look like those who have been set free

...let's look like those who have JOY

CONCLUSION

Joy does NOT come through circumstances.

...we welcome HAPPY circumstances--thank God for them

...but, we may not ALWAYS be happy

...but...WE CAN ALWAYS BE JOYFUL!

Joy comes from knowing Christ...that's GOOD NEWS!

"Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of GREAT JOY that will be for all the people.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord."

{Luke 2:10-11}

That's what Christmas MUST mean to us...365 days of the year.