

A Lesson from an Angel

Luke 2:8-15

December 18, 2013 – Advent 3

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "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. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 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." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

God has made everybody different. That's not exactly an earth-shattering statement, is it? But it's something people tend to forget or ignore. People are all different. We come in different shapes and sizes. We come from different places. We speak different languages. We come in a wide variety of ages. And, we come in a kaleidoscope of colors. God made everybody different.

Yet, even though everyone is different, there are some things that transcend our differences: tears, smiles, a freshly covered grave, the McDonald Golden Arches, Coca Cola, a hug, and Christmas. Christmas is celebrated around the world. It's celebrated in different ways by different people. But it is celebrated.

That doesn't mean everyone who celebrates Christmas is worshiping our Savior. Nonetheless, there is something about Christmas that touches the hearts of all the different kinds of people. It touches people everywhere because it was designed to touch people everywhere. Listen, once again, to what the angel said: *Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people*

(Lk 2:10).

The birth of Jesus Christ was designed to have a universal effect. Tonight, we will look at the universal audience of Christmas, the diverse responses to Christmas, and what this means to us.

Christ came into this world to reach people. People like you and me, but not just people like you and me. Jesus came to reach all people. Even a quick look at the nativity story shows the diversity of people, who were touched by that one birth.

There were the religious elite – Zacharias and Elizabeth. As Jewish people go, Zacharias was no ordinary person. Zacharias was a priest.

There were the poor – Mary and Joseph. Joseph and Mary were as common as Zacharias and Elizabeth were special. Mary was just an ordinary teenager and Joseph was just an ordinary carpenter.

There were the elderly – Simeon and Anna. These two were much older than most people of their time because they were waiting for the Savior. But age didn't matter.

There were some blue collar workers – the shepherds. On a scale of 1 to 10, shepherding was a 1. These men were the bottom rung even on the blue collar worker ladder.

There was the aristocracy – the wise men – well respected, rich, and powerful. They were also of a different race.

The diversity of people, who Jesus encountered, didn't stop with his birth. Throughout his life, Jesus deliberately associated with people of different race, creed, ethnic origin, age, gender, economic standing, and social status. Jesus dealt with:

Government workers – Matthew the tax collector and there was the Roman centurion, whose servant Jesus healed.

Common laborers – the fishermen who became disciples.

Outcasts – the woman caught in adultery, lepers, demon-possessed, the sick.

Revolutionaries – one of the disciples was named Simon the Zealot.

Gentiles and Jews.

Men and women – Mary, Martha, Lazarus

Rich and poor – the rich young ruler and the widow who put the two pennies in the offering box.

You would be hard pressed to think of a group of people who are not represented in the Bible. God loves all people and Jesus came for all people. That's the big picture. Let's narrow our focus to bring this point home.

Christmas is still for everyone. Christmas 2013 is for everyone. In God's plan, no one is excluded from Christmas. So let's ask, "Who are some of the people we might overlook today when we think about the gift of Christmas?"

Those the world generally finds unacceptable – the aids infected, the aged in nursing homes, the law-breakers in prison, the social misfits all around us.

Those who feel worthless – people who have been emotionally wounded by other people – people who have made serious mistakes – people who have brought shame on themselves and others.

Those who act superior – these people often play a large role in creating those who feel worthless.

Those who are steeped in sin – the chemically addicted, those who see sin as relative and therefore don't see sin at all.

Those who don't fit in – for a variety of reasons.

Jesus, who was born in that stinky stable, wouldn't turn any of these people away. In fact, they are just the ones he came for. He came for them and he came for you. Jesus makes no distinctions. Jesus accepts everyone who acknowledges him as Savior.

Just as the first Christmas reached a wide variety of people, it also elicited a wide variety of responses. Different people reacted in very different ways.

King Herod went into a fit of jealous, murderous rage.

Joseph followed a path of faithful obedience.

Mary, Anna, Simeon, and the angels broke out in song.

The shepherds dropped what they were doing, they took time off work, to worship.

The wise men brought gifts.

Today, there is a diversity of responses to Christmas. Some people coldly ignore Christmas and everything about it. Others display an almost obsessive, compulsive disorder in their efforts to remove every trace of religious meaning from Christmas. Still others, respond to Christmas in faith. They bow their knee and surrender to the Savior. Some will cry, some will celebrate, others will sit quietly. It's not how you respond, but that you respond.

People argue over the proper way to celebrate Christmas. We can debate the benefits of opening presents on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Some argue about the correct day to have a Christmas worship service. And you can always hear discussions on which traditions are more proper than others. However, the real issue is not how we celebrate, but whom we celebrate.

Christmas is indeed a worldwide celebration. The hope, love, and joy of Christmas are for the believer and the unbeliever alike. The hope, love, and joy of Christmas are for you. The Savior,

who came, came for everyone. As the angel told the shepherds: *I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people* (Lk 2:10).

This Christmas, don't just hear the sound of the familiar Christmas carols, hear the call of the Savior. Don't just celebrate the holiday or the season, celebrate the Savior. And, as you celebrate the Savior, join the angels in proclaiming the good news of great joy that God has for all people.