

“Angels Sing”
Isaiah 52:7-10; Romans 16:25-27;
Luke 2:8-20

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It is wonderful to come to this time of year and sing the wonderful Christmas songs. One of the songs we sometimes sing is “Angels We Have Heard on High.” I was thinking about the idea that these shepherds heard the angels, heard the announcement that God was giving them, and hurried off, then, to Bethlehem.

What I wondered about was if an incredible event like that happened, why wouldn't it have been recorded and everybody would have understood what was going on? One of the interesting things is who these angels came to—these shepherds, it says, living in the fields. If these shepherds were living out in the fields, they weren't really connected with the people in the town. This was not one of those highly sought-after positions. In fact, if they were living in the fields, it's almost like they were on the edge of homelessness. They were living on the margins of their society. And it was to them that these angels came.

Now if there had been breaking news in that day and age, it probably wouldn't have been about what the shepherds saw. Maybe if the shepherds had gotten in the way of some bigwig or if in some way they had affected the folks who were really high status, that would have been in the news. But the shepherds themselves weren't the folks that many people were listening to. And yet, our story is that the angels came to these shepherds and proclaimed the wonderful thing that God was doing.

It makes me wonder how often we can hear or see that proclamation ourselves, the wonderful thing that God is doing in our midst. Are we listening to the right people? Are we paying attention when it happens among us? You know, the angels didn't come to everybody. They didn't come to Herod. They didn't come to Jerusalem. They didn't even come to the people in Bethlehem. They came to those shepherds out in the field, and they had a story to tell of what God was doing.

I think today we continue to want to hear the story that God has to tell us, but how do we hear it? Can we hear those poor shepherds, those ones living out in the field? Who are those shepherds for us today? In a sense, we hear them now as we sing the songs again, as we hear the angels speaking, but it took some time for us to accept that the story came and comes.

As we struggle with how to hear that story, I think the message they heard gives us some clues. What they heard was good news. It wasn't fake news; it was good news—*good* news of *great* joy for *all* people. So as we think about looking and listening for how God might be speaking into our lives, perhaps there's a way we might look for that good news.

I had a preaching professor in seminary who, after you were done with your sermon, said, “Well, where was the good news in what you said?” That's what Gospel means. If

we're preaching the Gospel, if we're thinking about the Gospel, it's good news. God brings us good news. And really, they add that kicker—of great joy! In our world today there's so much bad news of great lamentation. Can we hear the good news of great joy for all people? It's an amazing statement that the angel makes to those shepherds. It's good news of great joy for *all* people.

When we're wondering whether we're hearing God's proclamation, God speaking into our lives, are we listening for the *good* news of *great* joy for *all* people? That's what it feels like these angels are telling us, that as we think about the savior that comes, as we think about God's grace that comes into our lives, as we think about the way God would lead us through Jesus Christ, are we seeing the *good* news of *great* joy for *all* people?

The interesting thing is that they add a little kicker on the end. It's the initial message the angel gives: good news of great joy for all people; the savior is born. And then the whole host seem to sing "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace to all those everywhere." It says, "On those whom he favors." That's a translation that can be misinterpreted because that last word really means "it's God's will." Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace—it's God's will. God's will for all people.

So as we think about hearing God speaking into our lives, as we remember the Christmas story, as we think about what Jesus has done and who he is, and how God continues to be with us, it is good news of great joy for all people. Glory to God and peace on earth. That's God's will. And we are given the gift that enables that to happen—a savior who is Christ the Lord, who we get to follow and recognize and listen to and be taught by, and enter into his kingdom. And as we do so, we find that it is truly *good* news of *great* joy for *all* people.

The Holy Family is for us that image of God entering into the world to bring grace, to recognize and to know us, and that we might know him. It is a mystery. Indeed, Paul puts it a little differently. As we listen to the Christmas story we think about all the things that happened, we hear about all the people involved, and in the midst of it there is a mystery happening. Paul puts it this way:

"Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all people, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen."

Good news of *great* joy for *all* people because God is with us. God will guide us as we receive the child. Amen.