

Text: Luke 2:10,13-14. Christmas Eve. **December 24, 2014.**

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. Amen.

Do you watch the news, follow the news, read the news? It's usually kind of depressing, isn't it? Only bad news makes the news. And the bad news just keeps coming. Ebola was a scare and then that passed. Ferguson was out of the news, until the trial then it's back in the news. We could go on.

And we don't need bad news. We already have enough bad news in our hearts, at least if you are anything like me. There's actually a psychological phenomenon that you remember bad news more than good news. I coached my sons' basketball team last year. We won seven and lost three. Good season, right? But one of those losses was in overtime. I can tell you about every easy shot we missed, every free throw that bounced out, every coaching move I should have done differently. When you have a meeting at work, do you hear two minutes about the upward trend in sales and then two hours about the rising expenses?

On a deeper level, bad news is a constant weight on our souls. The roll of my eyes when my wife asked me to do the smallest errand. And I know she can't unsee that. The family member I dread facing because I was too self-righteous or too sinful last Christmas. The time you lost your temper with your children and you can apologize, but you can't ever undo it. We don't need more bad news.

We need good news. That's what Christmas is all about. Good news. That's what God sent his own angels to bring. Good news! Good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Good news that centers on one person: Jesus! Jesus' birth is good news! Good news that the weight of sin is lifted from my soul. Good news that all the bad news is temporary and this good news is forever. Good news I find at the cross. There, at the cross, is good news. At the cross is the good news of my forgiveness. At the cross God made the best trade ever. God traded my sins for Jesus' holiness. Stop and think about that trade. My sins for Jesus' holiness! All the bad news I want to be rid of, is gone, on Jesus! That's good news. All the perfection I need to get to heaven and stand before God without fear, is mine. That's good news! This good news is deeper than a passing feeling in my heart. This good news is in God's heart. This good news lasts longer than the fifteen minute news cycle until some more bad news comes along. This good news lasts forever, for eternity.

Because this is good news of great joy. Great joy. Joy is different from happiness. Happiness is a feeling that comes and goes with circumstances. We got a rock 'em sock 'em robots for Christmas a few years back. We were happy! After ten minutes it broke. We were sad. Joy is not like that. Joy is always. Joy is forever. Joy is a status I enjoy for all eternity. Joy is knowing that I have Jesus. Jesus doesn't change. Jesus never stops giving his greatest gifts of forgiveness, of love, of joy! I always have joy, even when the toy breaks, even when the family fights. I always have Jesus so I always have joy, great joy, good news of great joy.

That will be for all the people. The shepherds were the least likely ones to be the first to hear the good news of great joy of Jesus. They were working the graveyard shift. They were in a most despised profession. They had dirty, nasty, cold, 24/7 work that nobody else wanted. Yet to these shepherds, God's own angels came with good news, of great joy, that will be for all the people. All the people. Are you a person? Then this good news of great joy is for you! Put your hand up to your heart. Seriously. Just do it. Is your heart beating? Then this good news of great joy is for you. This good news of great joy was for the shepherds. This good news of great joy is for all the people. This good news of great joy is for you! Good news. Of great joy. That will be for all the people. That's what Christmas is all about. Good news. Of great joy. That will be for all the people. Good news. Of great joy! That will be for all the people. Good news. Of great joy. That will be for all the people! Good news. Of great joy. That will be for all the people. We can't say it enough. We can't hear it enough. We can't repeat it too many times. Good news. Of great joy. That will be for all the people.

And as if this good news of great joy from one angel were not enough. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the one angel! Can you imagine this scene? Just one angel, with God's bright glory filling the sky was enough to make the shepherds so afraid it hurt! What about a sky full of angels? A great army of angels. Jesus said he could call down twelve legions of angels, like 120,000 angels. How many would God the Father himself send to announce this good news of great joy that will be for all the people? Can you picture this? Can you see it? A great company of the heavenly hosts.

Praising God and saying. This night ain't gonna be silent no more, not with 120,000 angels praising God! First thing these angels do is praise God. That's the first reason you came here tonight. To praise God. Glory to God in the highest. Do those words sound familiar? If you have ever been here on a Sunday, they probably do. We still sing them. Every Sunday. Every Sunday we recapture a little of Christmas. We still sing the words of praise this army of angels sang. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace.

Peace. There's an elusive thing, about as elusive as good news and great joy. That's because we usually think in terms of earthly peace. The ink is barely dry on the peace treaty and the next war is being planned. Ask a historian what caused World War II and he will probably tell you, "The peace treaty from World War I." You see, earthly peace is temporary. Earthly peace is fragile. But God's peace is eternal. Really. God's peace lasts for all eternity. Jesus smashed the barriers to peace by smashing down the stone of his grave. Jesus' resurrection won eternal peace. Jesus lives to give us lasting peace. Peace is a special status that everything is ok between you and God. A special status that everything is ok between you and God. Talk about a way to put away worry. Everything is ok between me and God? That's peace. Talk about a way to put down fears and sleep well tonight. Everything is ok between me and God. I have peace.

I have God's favor. It rests on me. God poured out his favor with water and his Word when in baptism his Holy Spirit came to rest on me. God's favor rests on me not because of something I did. That would be the bad news of uncertainty. God's favor rests on me because of what God did: sent his Son, lived for me, died for me, rose for me. God's favor is freely given. God's favor is his greatest Christmas present to us. No wonder we keep singing these words. Every Sunday. They are good news. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. That's good news. Of great joy. That will be for all the people.

If you can please give me two more minutes, for one final analogy for what you can do with this good news of great joy. I had the most awesome experience to go to the holy land. I was with about twenty pastors. I had the most awesome privilege to give the devotion at the shepherds' field. There I am. Standing where these shepherds stood, right at the spot where the heavenly hosts were praising God. Sharing the good news of great joy. With twenty pastors. Man, I was shaking. I'm not good enough to do this. I wasn't. I'm still not. But God let me. Maybe you feel the same. Maybe in one hour you are going to be sitting with your family thinking, "I'm not good enough to share this good news." You aren't. But God will let you be his angel tonight. Just read it again, before you open the presents. While everyone is listening. 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. Maybe it will be a mailbox conversation with the neighbor who sighs, "All that's left from Christmas is the bills." Then you can share, "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." That's good news. Maybe it will be Monday, with everyone in a bad mood to be back at work. Your smile. Your joy can bring the good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests. That's good news. Amen.