

The Call of Christmas
Christmas Eve 2007
Luke 2:1-20

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” Luke 2:20

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1. In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3. All went to their own towns to be registered. 4. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11. to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15. When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16. So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18. and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Tonight you have heard the Christmas story once again. The apostle Luke gives us great detail describing the birth of Christ. We hear about Emperor Augustus and Governor Quirinius, Nazareth and Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph, swaddling cloths and a manger, angels and shepherds.

This past month I have been reading the Christmas story in Luke over and over again. As I read, I have come to realize three things: the Call of Christmas is personal, the Call of Christmas brings a promise, and the Call of Christmas requires a response.

THE CALL OF CHRISTMAS IS PERSONAL

The call of Christmas is personal. The angel of the Lord stood before the shepherds and said to them: *“Do not be afraid; for see --- I am bringing **YOU** good news of great joy for all people: to **YOU** is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”* Did you catch the personal message in the angel’s Call of Christmas? Good news for **YOU** because the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord is born to **YOU**. The word **YOU** is a personal pronoun that shows

possession. The word YOU is the fourth most used word in the whole Bible being used over 140,000 times, coming after the words “the” (70,933), “and” (41,295) and “to” (25, 854). What can we learn from this fact about the Bible? We can hear and see and learn that the Bible is a personal love letter written to YOU. The Call of Christmas is personal because the call has been written for YOU. Hear it right now with new ears: “To YOU is born this day your Savior, the Messiah, the Lord!”

An elementary school teacher, Jean Thompson, a fifth grade school teacher helped bring about change in one of her students named Teddy Stoddard.

Teddy didn't play well with other children, his clothes were always dirty and he constantly needed a bath. Teddy was a sad, sullen little boy.

One day Mrs. Thompson reviewed his school records and was surprised at what she found. His first-grade teacher wrote: “Teddy is a bright, inquisitive child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners; he is a joy to be around.” His second grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is an excellent student well-liked by his classmates, but is troubled because his mother has terminal illness, and life at home must be a struggle.” His third grade teacher wrote, “Teddy continues to work hard but his mother's death has been hard, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps are not taken.” Teddy's fourth-grade teacher wrote: “Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometimes sleeps in class. He is tardy and could become a problem.”

It was nearly Christmas time and children brought her presents wrapped in colorful paper, except for Teddy's, which was wrapped in heavy brown paper from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson opened his present and found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was ¼ full of cologne. The other children in the class room began to laugh but Mrs. Thompson put the bracelet on and commented how pretty it was. She also dabbed some of the perfume on her other wrist. After the party Teddy Stoddard stayed behind just long enough to say, “Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my mom.” When the children left, Mrs. Thompson cried.

From that experience, Mrs. Thompson took a new interest in teaching her children. She worked especially hard with Teddy. As she worked with him he seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him the faster he responded. By the end of the year he had become one of the smartest children in the class.

A year later she found a note under her door at school from Teddy telling her that of all the teachers she was his favorite. Six years went by and she got another note from Teddy. He wrote that he had finished high school and was third in his class and she was still his favorite teacher. Four years later she got another letter saying he had graduated from college with the highest of honors and assured Mrs. Thompson she was still his favorite teacher. Several years later she received another letter telling how much he had appreciated her as his teacher and she was still his favorite. The letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, M.D.

A year later Mrs. Thompson received a letter stating he was getting married. He explained his father had died a few years earlier and wondered if she would sit in the pew usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Mrs. Thompson attended the wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat. Mrs. Thompson was not just a teacher but a personal friend to Teddy Stoddard who helped to change his life.

Jesus was born to US to be our personal Savior and Lord. This Good News can transform our lives.

Transformations come when you believe: "With God all things are possible."

THE CALL OF CHRISTMAS BRINGS A PROMISE

Secondly, the Call of Christmas brings a promise. In verse 11 the promise given is that the child born in a manger will be our Saviour, our Messiah, and our Lord. The child will grow into a man and bring salvation to those who are slaves to sin. In Isaiah chapter nine the name of the Savior is prophesied --- Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. In Luke chapter one, the angel appears to Mary and proclaims that she will bear a son and that she will call him Jesus. The meaning of the name Jesus is "He shall save His people from their sins." Jesus was a common name meaning "Savior." Jesus would be the people's Savior— leading all of God's people into the Kingdom of Heaven. The Call of Christmas brings a promise of hope and salvation. This promise is found in the Christ child.

Sixty-six years before the birth of Christ, in an aristocratic community of Rome, a very important child was born. As soon as he arrived, a messenger raced into the Roman Senate and announced, "The next ruler of the world is born." His name was Octavius, and he was destined to become the adopted son of Julius Caesar. He grew up in the palace. He was educated by the finest teachers of literature, philosophy and government. And at the age of 33 he was the uncontested ruler of the entire Roman Empire. He gave the word and armies would march and ships would sail. He just gave the word and the world would move for him. The Senate gave him the name Emperor Augustus, meaning "the exalted one, who reigned over the golden age of the empire."

When Octavius was around 66 years old, "a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered." It was during this census that another child was born in a very unimportant village, in a very unimportant part of the empire. No Roman messengers ran to announce this birth to the Roman Senate. God's own angelic messenger announced the birth of Jesus Christ to the least of these--a small band of shepherds watching over their sheep. "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

This other child began his life in a humble manger--there was no room for him at the local inn. He was raised not in a palace, but in a common Jewish home. He was not educated in literature and philosophy but in carpentry. At age 33, he ascended, not to the reign of the Roman Empire, but to a Roman cross.

The Call of Christmas is personal. The call of Christmas brings a promise. The call of Christmas requires a response.

THE CALL OF CHRISTMAS REQUIRES A RESPONSE

Have you ever wondered why the angels showed up that starry night to shepherds and shared with them the most significant event in history? Shepherds were unable to keep the ceremonial laws of the day; they could not observe the meticulous hand-washings and the many rules and regulations. Their flocks made many demands on them; they were simple men of the fields. Shepherds were despised by the orthodox people of their day. What a wonderful thing that the announcement of Jesus' birth was made to simple shepherds. God didn't send the angels to Kings or Queens, Presidents or legislatures; God brought the GOOD NEWS to common, ordinary people. People like you and me.

In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the big news--man had flown!

The shepherds understood that the news the angels brought required a response from them. As soon as the angels had sung their Glorias and returned to heaven, the shepherds decided to go find this baby. They didn't form a committee, or a task force, or sign a bill into law, they went with haste and found the baby just like the angels had told them. And then—they went and told everyone...not just their family or friends... they told everyone about this newborn baby! The news the angels had shared with the shepherds required a response—thank God for using plain, simple, ordinary shepherds!

- ✠ The Call of Christmas is personal: the message isn't just for shepherds and wise men of long ago, the Call of Christmas is for each one of us here tonight: babies and toddlers, children and teenagers, young people and old people, too! Jesus Christ is born and He will save us from our sins!
- ✠ The Call of Christmas brings a promise: the child in the manger isn't just any baby. Tonight we celebrate a birth—not of Octavius, but of Jesus Christ--the King of Kings! The promise of Christmas is this: from cradle to the cross—Jesus saves.
- ✠ The Call of Christmas requires a response: let's not be like the editor of the paper who missed the big news of the Wright brothers but let us be like the shepherds who dared to share "Good News of Great Joy!"

Tonight you've heard Good News of Great Joy! What is our response? Will we run with haste to tell everyone the Good News?

Round Rock Presbyterian Church
Round Rock, Texas 78681
Christmas Eve 2007
December 24, 2007
Reverend David Peters

Reflections on the Christ Child

More than any other night of the year, the name of Jesus is on our lips. For a few precious moments our heavenly desires come together and we become a chorus. A mixed chorus of business people, lawyers, doctors, nurses, teachers, homemakers, retired and school bound people who are banking that Bethlehem's mystery is a reality. "Come and Behold Him" we sing, stirring even the sleepest shepherds and bringing them to the Christ Child.

For a few precious hours --- Christ is beheld --- Christ, our Savior, Messiah and Lord. The common is made Holy. A loaf of bread becomes the bread of life; a cup of water becomes living water; a star in the night becomes the guiding light; a baby born in a stable becomes our firm foundation. Tonight the common is made holy.

What if you could give a Christmas gift to the Christ Child? Would you say that you do not have anything worthy of a King? But, you have one thing that He would long to have and all of heaven would erupt in songs of praise when this gift is given. Do you know what it is? It is your heart! Christ longs to warm your heart and life.

Can we bow our heads in prayer?

Dear Gracious God: We thank you for the gift of Emmanuel this Christmas. We thank you because Emmanuel is practical, personal and forever with us. We thank you and ask that you will help us to continually respond to Emmanuel --- God with us!

In this season of heartaches, hurts and harm, warm our hearts with your heavenly joy.

In this season of insecurity, warm our hearts with your peace.

In this season of war, warm our hearts with your hope.

In the ugliness of hatred, warm our heart with your love.

Bless our homes, our families, our friends, our neighbors, our workplaces.

Bless our schools, our city, our state and our nation.

May the whole world come to know the saving grace of the Christ Child.

Help us to unwrap Your Christmas gift anew each day.

Amen.