

Christmas Eve
Sermon Text: Luke 2:1-20
Related text: Isaiah 9:2-7
Date Preached: December 24, 2009

Grace to you and peace in the name of Christ. Amen.

An angel appears in the midst of shepherds, startling them. Clearly the angel was not expected. So shaken by his sudden appearance the shepherds are deeply afraid.

The angel brings tidings to these shepherds. The word tidings is one we don't hear often in today's world. This word conveys news that would cause television stations to interrupt normal programming. On computer screens it would be in big red letter type perhaps with a picture, in this case an angel.

The tidings this angel brings are ones that evoke two deep feelings. Comfort and joy; both are held together in this one message. The message, "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

One child, born so long ago in a small town, brings comfort and joy. This isn't simply a message spoken in the past. This is a message for us tonight, as 2009 soon comes to a close. This night is filled with news of comfort and joy.

Jesus comforts troubled hearts. Some hearts are heavy with fear over how to provide for one's family in a weak economy where even to have a job is still not a certainty that one will be able to meet escalating expenses.

Jesus comforts the weak hearts, not to mention the rest of one's body that succumbs to poor health. Added to that weight is the rising cost of medicine and more frequent doctor visits.

Jesus comforts hearts weighed down in grief over the death of loved ones. Regardless of when one died, it is understandable for feelings of grief to arise at Christmas. We miss their presence at the family gatherings and the contributions they bring be it stories, gifts, or tasty morsels of food.

Jesus comforts those whose arms are empty and long for the days when they will be like Mary and Joseph, as well as other parents holding their first born child.

In the midst of these and other fears Jesus comforts us with his very presence. Peace. Be still. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe in Christ. For the Lord has come. His name is Emmanuel. He is God with us!

With his presence there is joy. Such joy moves us beyond the worries of this life. Joy does not rely on human happiness. Happiness and joy are not synonyms.

The joy we experience is in the good news of Jesus. True joy comes in the message that Jesus Christ was not only born, but died and rose from the dead, for each of us.

The joy of this good news invades the darkness of all our worries. Jesus triumphs over the darkness of our sin, saving us from the eternal darkness of death. It is not done through force, but through the weakness of the cross.

With but a flicker of light joy seems to be looked at as fleeting. Darkness is all around in our lives save for this one tiny light. Consider that later when the lights dim and all that shines are the flickers of the Christ candle. Yet from one small flicker this light continues to shine. It grows as Jesus brings us into the light. Watch tonight as the light comes to us.

Christ illumines our lives with the brightness of his life. For in this moment, comfort and joy shine brightly in this place is a powerfully vivid way. We do struggle to remember the wonder of this night.

Weeks and months into the coming New Year we in our humanness may forget the power of this light. But fear not. Reminders are sprinkled around us.

The water that drips upon us is a reminder of the joy we have in being part of God's family. Through water and the Word, God wrapped us in the good tidings of comfort and joy.

The joy of this good news comes in the small gifts of bread and wine, that in our hurriedness we might miss. Take and eat! The body of Christ is given for you. Take and drink; this is the blood of Christ shed for you.

Water, light, bread, wine, the written Word of Scripture reminds us of the wonder of our faith. Remember Christ our Savior was born to save us; for these are tidings of comfort and joy to abide with us tonight and throughout our life. AMEN.