

December 24, 2006 by Steve Brandon



Good News of Great Joy

Luke 2:10-11

1. Today
2. In the City of David
3. There has been born for you a Savior
4. Christ the Lord

We come this Christmas Eve to think about and to ponder the birth of our Lord. Our songs and prayers have focused upon this marvelous event. It's my intention this morning to simply unpack for you two verses of Scripture that detail the greatness of what took place on that night in Bethlehem, some 2,000 years ago. And so, I invite you to open your Bibles once again to Luke, chapter 2. My focus this morning is going to be on verses 10 and 11.

Luke 2:10-11

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The recipients of this angelic message were an insignificant group of men. They were shepherds. In their day, they had no great standing among the sons of men. They were typical blue-collar laborers. Many gave shepherds little or no recognition. Perhaps you remember the time when Joseph's family moved to Egypt. They were delegated to the land of Goshen which was away from many of the Egyptians because "every shepherd [was] loathsome to the Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34). Perhaps you remember the day when Samuel had come to anoint the future king of Israel. The LORD instructed Samuel to "go ... to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons" (1 Sam. 16:1). Samuel came to the house of Jesse and invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice. But David was not among them. Rather, he was out tending the sheep (1 Sam. 16:11), performing the thankless task that needed to be done.

These particular shepherds who received the angelic message were working the night shift (verse 8). Certainly, there was some type of rotation to allow some of the shepherds to sleep for a few hours as others took the watch. At some point, the watch would rotate so that others would get sufficient sleep. They would sleep upon the hard ground in tents or in the open air. The task to which they were called was not a great task. It was a dirty, thankless task. These insignificant men (we don't know the names of any of them) were on the outskirts of an insignificant little city of Bethlehem, (which was located about six miles south west of Jerusalem).

There was nothing particularly great or grand about this city of Bethlehem. Even the prophet Micah called it a city that was "too little to be among the clans of Judah" (Micah 5:2). And yet, to these insignificant group of men, on the outskirts of an insignificant little city came one of the most significant messages of all time. This is the first public proclamation to anybody in the world that the Savior of the world had come.

How like God this is. When Jesus was born, He wasn't born with great fanfare and hype and pageantry. When Jesus was born, He wasn't born in a state hospital or even in a clean room. No. When Jesus was born, the Son of God came into the flesh, He was born in a dirty barn, shared with dirty, smelly animals, because (as verse 7 says) "there was no room for them in the inn." In our text this morning, we read of the first public proclamation to anybody of His arrival upon the earth. And who is privileged to hear it for the first time but common shepherds.

When the message first came to them, we read in verse 9 that they were "terribly frightened." This is totally understandable. Picture the situation. They were outside of a small village in the countryside, overlooking a flock of sheep. And it was very dark. It was very quiet. Certainly, many of the sheep were in the pasture sleeping. Some of the fellow shepherds were sleeping. Perhaps there was the quiet whispering of the wind. Perhaps there was the trickling of a nearby stream. It was the type of situation that caused droopy eyelids. But suddenly, an angel of the Lord "stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them" (verse 9). If you know anything about the glory of the Lord, you know that it is bright. Every picture we have of heaven is of a dazzling bright throne. The contrast of the darkness all around them would make it appear to be brighter still. As they looked up to see what this light was, their eyes would have struggled against the light as they listened to the sound of a voice coming from the heavens. The strangeness of the event would easily create a heart-pounding fear! The first thing out of the angel's mouth was a message of comfort: "Do not be afraid." Easy to say, but hard to do. A bright light, in darkness, an unusual event and out came a voice. And then, the great message came, "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people."

In my message this morning, I simply want to pick up the terminology of verse 10, "Good news of great joy" and apply it to each of the phrases of verse 11. Isn't there a strong correlation between these words? Good news! Great Joy! When you receive good news, your response is great joy. Your boss gives you a Christmas bonus. You come home with a smile on your face, saying, "Good news, honey, my boss gave me a check -- a Christmas bonus! -- \$2000! That good news would give you great joy! You receive a letter in the mail that informs you of your acceptance into the college of your choice, along with a surprisingly helpful financial aid package. How do you respond? It is with great joy that you want to share with your parents. You receive a phone call from our daughter, that she has just given birth to your first granddaughter and you weep for joy! This is how good news works. It brings great joy.

I want to pick out each phrase of verse 11 and show you the good news. Having heard and understood the good news, I want to press upon you the great joy that such news contains. My aim this morning in my message is that you would leave this place with “great joy” in your hearts because you have heard and understood the “good news.” Let’s look at the first word in verse 11, ...

1. Today

Oh, what a good word this would have been to the shepherds in the field. All of Israel were anticipating this day. For years, the people were looking forward to this day. They didn’t know exactly when it would come. But, they did know that it would come. They knew of the prophecies that it would come. They knew some of the details of what would take place when it would come. But they didn’t quite know when it would come or how exactly it would take place.

Have you ever known of the blessing it is to see the day that you have been waiting for finally arrive? Perhaps it is graduation day. You have worked and worked and worked, and now, the day finally comes, when you get to walk across the platform and receive your diploma before family and friends. Perhaps it has been a birthday celebration. The party has been planned for weeks. All of your friends are coming. You are going to have your favorite food and enjoy some of your favorite activities. Perhaps it was your wedding day. On that day, you would have the opportunity to live the rest of your life with the love of your life. All of your family would be there. All of your friends would be there. And when the day arrives, it’s pure joy.

Perhaps your children know what it’s like to wait for day that’s coming in the future. Our children have an incredible anticipation for December 25th to come. (Can any of you children relate?) I can. As a child, I had difficulties sleeping that Christmas night, just waiting for the morning to break. Each year, we hang in our home a felt wall hanging that has a picture of a countryside. In the background, you can see a little village in the distance. There are also some shepherds along the rolling hills with their sheep. In the forefront of the wall hanging are two buildings. The first is an inn. The second is a barn filled with animals. Sewed into the tapestry of the wall hanging are 24 Velcro circles, which are used as resting points for Joseph and Mary, who are riding along a donkey. The idea is that each day throughout the month of December, Mary, Joseph and the donkey make their way along this Velcro path to the inn and the stable, where Jesus would eventually be born (i.e. on December 25th). It’s a way to anticipate Christmas Day in our house. Our kids are so into this wall hanging that December 1st rolled around and they tracked it down out of a box we had somewhere in the house and hung it up. The amazing thing is this: Yvonne and I don’t have to move Mary and Joseph. Somehow, they move “automatically,” as if by magic. I’ve never been able to confirm this, but I believe that it’s our children who move this each day. Rarely is a day when you can find Mary and Joseph off their appropriate Velcro sticker. All that to say this: our children are eagerly anticipating Christmas Day. When it arrives, it is pure joy for our children.

In a similar way, all of Israel were looking for that day when the Messiah would finally come. For centuries, they had heard of his coming. They knew that the prophecies told of the day when “a child will be born to us [and] a son would be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (Is. 9:6-7). They knew that there would be a day when the daughters of Zion would rejoice greatly and shout in triumph, because they were told, “Your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation.” (Zech. 9:9). They knew that Jeremiah said, “Behold, the days are coming ... when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, ‘The LORD our righteousness’” (Jer. 23:5-6).

All in Israel knew that the Messiah was coming. They knew that God would say to this Messiah some day, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet. Rule in the midst of Your enemies” (Psalm 110:1-2). They knew that the day was coming, but they didn’t have a felt calendar that they hung upon their wall to be able to ascertain the exact day. Many were hoping and anticipating for the day to come. In Luke 2:25, Simeon is described as a “righteous and devout” man who was “looking for the consolation of Israel.” In other words, he was looking for this day to arrive! In Luke 2:36-38, we read of a woman, named Anna, who spoke often with those “who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

The people of Israel were looking for their Messiah. They knew that he was coming. But, they didn’t know when. Had they fully understood the mystery, they could have traced through the Book where David figured it out. But it was somewhat hidden from them. Those in Israel were waiting for 400 years. The Old Testament canon had finished with the book of Malachi, which pronounced that the Messiah was coming. Before He came, His messenger (who we later found out was John the Baptist) would come and “clear the way before [Him]” (Mal. 3:1). But, there was 400 years of silence until the Messiah made His entrance upon the earth.

I’m sure that as they waited there was some slackness toward their anticipation as the years went on without Him coming. It’s somewhat equivalent to our watch for the second coming of Christ. We all know and have heard that Jesus Christ is returning to this to claim it as His own. In that day, those who are His will be gathered together into His kingdom, where Christ will rule and reign as king on this earth. In that day, those who are His enemies, will be judged and destroyed and thrown into the lake of fire. But as Jesus has delayed in returning, our eager longing for Him has certainly reduced. But in the back of our mind, all who love Him have this eager longing for Him to return. But, please know this: However long their wait was delayed, Jesus Christ came to earth in accordance with the perfect timing of God. He was not born a day too early, nor a day too late. All was according to plan. Galatians 4:4-5, “When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” So also will the day of His return come. Though there has been 2,000 years, Jesus Christ will return to this earth in the exact timing that God, our heavenly Father, has prescribed for Him.

Wouldn’t it be good news to hear the words, “Jesus Christ is coming back today!” Two thousand years of waiting is over! Today is the day! It would give us great reason to rejoice. Christians have been waiting 2,000 years for His return. The joy it must have been for these shepherds to see the day fulfilled must have been thrilling to their souls. The angel of the Lord described that day with great detail, which we see in the next phrase, ...

2. In the City of David

In verse 11 we read, “Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior.”

When Jesus Christ returns to the earth, He will return in such a way that every eye will see Him. There will be no need for angelic visions. Jesus said, “Just as the lightening comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:27). With the second coming of Christ, there is no reason for you to have anybody announce to you His coming, because all will see Him returning upon the clouds. As Revelation 1:7 says, “Every eye will behold Him.” Jesus even warned His followers, “If they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them.” (Matt. 24:26). When Jesus comes back, all the world will know. But this was not the case with His first coming. His first coming was to a specific place: “in the city of David” from which the Messiah would come.

Without question, “the city of David” is Bethlehem. David was born in Bethlehem. David was raised in Bethlehem. He tended his sheep in and around Bethlehem (1 Sam. 17:15). In fact, in 1 Samuel 20:6, Bethlehem is called “David’s City.” This is all made clear in verse 4, where Bethlehem is called, “the city of David.” It’s why Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth in the north to Bethlehem in the south to register, even though she was pregnant. They had to get to their home city to register for Quirinius, the governor (verse 1). Mary and Joseph were of the lineage of David, so that had to return to “his city.”

The Old Testament was clear that the Messiah would come from the line of David. In 2 Samuel 7, the “Davidic Covenant” is recorded. This was the covenant that God made with David. In it, God promised that the Messiah would sit upon his throne forever. “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:12-13). Later, in Psalm 89, we read of God’s own statement toward David. “I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to David My servant. I will establish your seed forever and build up your throne to all generations” (Psalm 89:3-4). So ingrained was this fact for the people of Israel that when Jesus asked the Pharisees, “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” (Matt. 22:42). Practically, without hesitation, they said, “The son of David” (Matt. 22:42). Everyone knew that the Messiah would be of David’s line.

Likewise, everyone knew where the Messiah would be born. He would be born in Bethlehem, David’s city. Shortly after the birth of Christ, the Magi came from the east and inquired about the Messiah. They were looking for “He who has been born King of the Jews” (Matt. 2:2). They had seen “His star in the east and [had] come to worship Him” (Matt. 2:2). “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled. ... [And so he gathered] together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, [and] inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born” (Matt. 2:4). Seemingly with little hesitation, “they said to Him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea.’” (Matt. 2:5). And then, they quoted from Micah 5:2, “As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.”

With that answer, these Magi from the east took the six mile walk over to Bethlehem. On their way, “they saw the star” that they had followed from the east. In their anticipation to see the child, Matthew 2:10 tells us that “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” They heard the great news—their travels wouldn’t be in vain! They had great joy! When they reached Bethlehem, “they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him” there in the house where they were. (Matt. 2:11).

I’m sure that the response of these shepherds was quite similar to that of the Magi. When they received the good news about this child that was born, surely they rejoiced, as they understood that it was the dawning of a new age. The Messiah had arrived! Indeed it was “Good News of Great Joy.” Bright days were in store for the Jewish people. They were to be redeemed from their oppression, which is the focus of our next phrase in verse 11.

3. There has been born for you a Savior

Perhaps this is the greatest news of all. The Savior has come. He has come to rescue us. We all know what it means to need a savior.

Nothing captures the news wires like someone in peril, who needs rescuing. A baby falls down into a well and the entire nation sits on the edge of their seats. Some coal miners are trapped in a mine after an explosion and its all we hear about for the next few days. Nearly every week, there is some type of story like this that captures the attention of our national media. This past week, three mountain climbers, were climbing up Mount Hood in Oregon, but were caught in a winter storm. A huge rescue effort was launched to help rescue them. It is in the papers. It is in the news. People are thinking about snow-caves and hypothermia. People are wondering how long you can survive in the wilderness. A few weeks ago, the big story was of a family returning home after Thanksgiving, who simply disappeared. A massive search effort ensued. Later, it was discovered that they took a wrong turn and was stuck on a closed road in the snow. Had none of these stories taken the forefront of our newspapers and newscasts, there were others that would have filled the void. A similar rescue effort has also taken place in China, where several American climbers have been missing since November. This past week, there has been some major flooding in Malaysia. Rescue workers have gone into these areas on boats and aircraft to help bring people out of the flooded regions. These are but a few examples of people needing a savior, who have hit the news, as especially dramatic stories.

There are countless others who are in need of a savior every day, who never reach the news. In our country, we have a fabulous phone system that allows us to dial three numbers when we need a savior. Millions of calls are made every year to 9-1-1, looking for help. People call this number for many different reasons. Someone’s choking, so those at the restaurant call 9-1-1, looking for a savior. Someone’s store is being robbed, and so, a worker, hidden in the back room, calls 9-1-1, looking for a savior. A house is on fire, so the owner calls 9-1-1, looking for a savior. A driver gets stuck in a winter blizzard, so the drivers call 9-1-1, looking for a savior. A baby is left alone in a bathtub, only to be found later, not breathing, so the frantic mother calls 9-1-1, looking for a savior. A man is in the woods cutting down a tree, and it falls on him and breaks his legs, so his friends call 9-1-1, looking for a savior.

These are but a few reasons why people might need a savior. And yet, would the truth be known, all of us have need of a Savior this day.

Oh, we may not be in physical danger, sitting here in our comfortable chairs, but, we are all in spiritual danger, needing to be saved from our sins. Indeed, this is our greatest need that all of us have: to be saved from our sins. And this is what God has provided for us in Jesus Christ. This is what the name “Jesus” means. When the angel came to visit Joseph to tell Him of what the Holy Spirit had done in the womb of Mary, he was told, “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Indeed, this is who Jesus is. He is our Savior.

It has been said, “If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need is forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.” [\[1\]](#)

Throughout the Scripture, Jesus is given this title of being “Savior.” Rather than listing them all, I give you two. Titus 3:4-6 uses this term, “Savior” several times. “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” At the end of 2 Peter, Peter gives his final admonition, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter. 3:18). Indeed, Jesus Christ is the “Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

How can Jesus Christ be your Savior? It's really quite easy. You don't need a phone to call 9-1-1, but you do need to recognize your perilous condition without Him. Everyone who calls 9-1-1 knows of the great need they have for help. Rather than dialing a phone, you need to cry out to Him, pleading that He would rescue you from your sins. Your cry doesn't need to be elegant. If you have ever heard tape recordings of 9-1-1 calls, you know how frantic people are. “Help, help! My husband has stopped breathing!” “Help, help! We were in an accident and my wife is stuck in the car! Please, please come quickly! Help us!” In a similar way, your cry to the Lord needs to be something like that. Oh, it may not be life and death in this moment in time, where seconds count. But, the feeling of the heart is just as desperate. “God, I see my sin. I see where I'm headed without you. Please, please come and rescue me. Be my Savior! O God, I pray that you would be merciful to me. I am sinful and need your cleansing blood to wash it away.” And this isn't something that you only need to cry once in your life. It should be an everyday cry. It's the cry of every believer in Christ: Oh, God, be merciful. Help me again today. As you do this, you will find that Christ is a mighty Savior. The cross of Christ will continue to show forth its power in your life and you are being saved every day. Paul wrote how “the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved [the cross] is the power of God! When you are rescued from your sins, there is great joy!

When you get into the automobile accident, what's your reaction when you see the policeman coming? When your child stops breathing, and what's your reaction when you hear the ambulance coming from down the street? When you are stuck in the snow drift, what's your reaction when you see the tow truck coming down the road? When your house is burning down, what's your reaction when you see the big red fire truck coming down the street? Isn't it relief and happiness and joy and hope and expectation all rolled into one! Aren't there tears of joy when you know that your deliverance is close at hand? You know that your savior is coming with all the resources that you need to get you (or your family) out of your trouble. That's the great joy that every believer in Christ ought to feel. The Savior has come and is ready to save!

When you consider the Old Testament passages that all predict the coming of the Savior, and you see this aspect of worship and praise and thankfulness flowing out of them. In Zechariah 9:9, we read, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation.” The admonition is to rejoice, because your Savior is coming to you! In Psalm 118, we see the same thing: The saving activity of God is occasion for us to rejoice in the marvelous working of God in our lives!

Psalm 118:22-25

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!

We are to rejoice and be glad in His day of salvation. It makes total sense why the angel of the Lord would announce this day to the shepherds as a day of “Good news of great joy!” Let's turn our attention now to the last phrase of verse 11, ...

4. Christ the Lord

I'm choosing to take these two titles of Jesus together. He is the Christ. He is the Lord. It makes sense to take them together, because in many ways, these titles are synonyms. The word, “Christ” signifies “the Anointed One.” The word, “Lord” signifies “the Reigning One.” The one who is anointed is the one who rules and reigns. You see this connection with David. He was the anointed one, who eventually became king (1 Sam. 16ff). The anointed one is the one who rules and reigns. You especially see this connection in Psalm 2, when the kings of the earth and the rulers of the people “take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed” (Ps. 2:2). The LORD responds by laughing at these people who think that they are so powerful, saying, “As for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain” (Psalm 2:6). The king is the Anointed One, to whom worship is due. He is the sovereign Messiah! He is Christ and Lord!

These titles speak about the special one, who has received all power, and who is worthy of all praise. This is precisely what Peter said in his famous sermon on the day of Pentecost. He said, “Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). The message that dawned the new era of the church immediately after Jesus ascended into heaven is the same message that the angels preached to these shepherds on the outskirts of Bethlehem, “Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Often, when the Old Testament predicted the coming of the anointed one, it was in the context of joy and gladness. The most famous verse comes in Isaiah 61, where Isaiah writes,

Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

When the anointed one comes, it will bring relief to those who are suffering. It will bring freedom to those in bondage. It will bring comfort to those who mourn. It will bring gladness instead of mourning. It will bring praise rather than fainting. This is joy and gladness, which is exactly where I want for us to be this morning. This is "Good News of Great Joy" that Jesus has come to dwell among us.

I want for us to close my message this morning by following what took place with the shepherds. After their angelic encounter was over, they went to Bethlehem to see these things that were made known to them. Verse 16 picks up the story, ...

Luke 2:16-20

So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

There was Christmas cheer all around the child on that first Christmas morning. Those who heard the shepherds relate their story were in awe of the things that they had been told (verse 18). Mary treasured these things in her heart (verse 19). The shepherds returned, "glorifying and praising God" for everything that they had been privileged to see and experience. There was "great joy" around the child that first Christmas morning.

It all comes down to this, How will you respond this Christmas season? Christmas day is tomorrow. Will these things be treasured in your heart? Will you find joy in the person of Jesus Christ? He came to earth at the right time (i.e. "Today"). He came to earth at the right place (i.e. "In the City of David"). He came to earth with the right purpose (i.e. "as Savior"). He came to earth as the right person (i.e. "Christ, the Lord"). Will you find your joy in these things?

Perhaps there are some of you who will find yourself on Christmas Day in a depressing situation, with a reminder of a broken family situation. Will you find your great joy in the person of Christ? Perhaps there are others of you who will find yourself on Christmas Day in a healthy situation, with a Christian family and love all around. Where will your rejoicing be? Will it be in the family? Will it be in the person of Christ? The "great joy" that is given at Christmas time is a "joy" that should penetrate all of our circumstances. Oh, may we fully realize this "good news of great joy."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 24, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Author unknown.