

## Christmas Eve 2008

Luke 2:1

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to his own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to 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. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.** 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

INTRO – This year as part of our Christmas observance our congregation collected toys for the children of Hoonah. Hoonah is a native village on an island near Juneau, and our church body has a missionary there who is the only church worker in the town. We sent 12 boxes of toys as part of an effort to provide for 145 children, and we are told that there were enough toys so that everyone got a toy and there are even some left for next year. You would think that this would be a joyful Christmas.

However, I got a newsletter from Hoonah this week from Michael and Justine Borg. They were telling of the events of the past week. Last Saturday, December 20, *Justine wrote, “Today the town is burdened with grief. Just 8 hours ago, a 15-year-old girl took her own life. Nobody expected it, and now everyone is painfully affected by it. All attempts at normalcy are now acutely transparent. Mike wastes no time in offering comfort to hurting hearts. A first responder to the 911 call this morning comes to our front door, and then unloads his concerns of, “How could this happen?” and, “I knew she was having a hard time. What could I have done differently?”*

*Unable to sleep, Mike marches to the church at 10:30 PM, opens the doors, and turns on all the lights. The light floods the dark corners and illuminates the stained-glass cross above the altar. He brews a pot of coffee and sits in the church kitchen. Over the next couple of hours, people wander in and out. They claim they are there to “talk”, but they just sit and sip coffee in silence punctuated with tears. Mike sits there with them so they are not alone,*

I. Unfortunately, even at Christmas time Life is full of pain.

A. Our country is facing difficult times.

1. Our country faces a fight against terrorism world wide, and difficult economic times.
2. Many we know are facing illness or injury
3. In our own lives we have pain and hurt that no one else knows.

B. Do you ever wish that you could get away from life’s pain, to a place like, a place like Bethlehem?

1. You know the song.
2. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie, above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
3. Do you ever wish you could stop the world and go to that quiet peaceful place/

C. Actually, Bethlehem probably wasn’t that quiet and peaceful.

- a. People had jammed the town because of the census that was demanded by the ruler from out of the country.
- b. Mary and Joseph probably weren’t the only ones without a place to stay that night.
- c. A town crowded with people who had come apart from their plans because of a government order, and people without places to stay do not make for a cozy place to get away from life’s troubles.

D. In 1991 my family and I were driving up the Alcan to come to Alaska. We had Florida plates on our vehicle and my wife had put a sign on it that read, “Alaska or bust.” We stopped in a gas station in Ft. Nelson as our muffler was being repaired and a man at the pump asked us, “You going to Alaska to visit?” “No,” I explained, “We’re moving there.” He looked at me carefully and asked me a question most pastors probably aren’t asked, “Are you running from the law, or something?”

1. We may want to run from life’s troubles, but we can’t.
2. You see, the troubles of life are caused by people, by our selfishness, by our sin.
3. We may want to get away from life’s troubles to Bethlehem, but unfortunately we bring our troubles with us.

II So please look with me at the Christmas story and what happened that first Christmas.

A. The shepherds did not go to Bethlehem to get away from life’s troubles, they went to Bethlehem because God had come to them. Did you hear the words of the angels?

1. **"Do not be afraid. I bring YOU good news of great joy that will be FOR ALL THE PEOPLE. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born TO YOU; he is Christ the Lord.**
2. You see, the shepherds did not take a vacation to get away from the stress of life.

- B. But, God came to the shepherds, and to all people, to you.
  1. In the midst of the extra people, the orders from a foreign government, people without a place to stay, Christ, the Messiah, the deliverer came.
  2. To the shepherds whose sin had helped to cause the problems they faced, God did not abandon them but, the Lord, God himself came.
  3. The shepherds didn't get away to a quiet peaceful town, but God came to them.
- C. And that coming was not to an easy life for this baby born.
  1. This baby came to people in the midst of their pain and sin to live for them, and die for them, and rise for them.
  2. A couple of years ago the Lutheran Church in Fairbanks had another ice sculpture put on their roof, it was a manger scene with a cross behind it. One of the people said, you know, that baby looks peaceful, but he came to die on that cross. Wouldn't it get the real message across to put the baby on the cross, so they changed the sculpture and put the baby on the cross. Calls started coming in, "How could you do that?" so they took the baby down and put him in the stable again. Then the Catholic priest called and said, "I really appreciated that you showed the depth of the love of God that He really sent His son, not to a life of peace, but to die for a world of sin." They put the baby back up.
  3. The Savior, Christ- the promised Messiah and deliverer, the Savior, Christ the Lord, God Himself did not leave us in the pain of this world alone, but He came to share it. He came to take the sin of this world on Himself, so that in His death and rising we might actually know peace through God's love, and through His forgiveness of our sins.

### III. The Shepherds went back to work, but their lives were never the same.

- A. They had heard God's angels and seen God's Savior.
  1. They had seen the Savior who came TO THEM.
  2. What do you think they talked about that night?
  3. How do you think they lived differently because they believed God loved them and came to them?
- B. Do you know what Justine Borg said after the death of that girl. Mike sits there with them so they are not alone, and reads from the Word. "*Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.*" Lam. 3:22 The next morning, he sees a man crying outside the church. It is a familiar face. A school teacher and friend now comes to the Church with
  1. In the midst of life's sin and pain, God is with you, his compassion never fails. He is with you in love and forgiveness in the midst of this world's trouble.
  2. God has come into your life. How will that change you as you go home, go back to work, go into the community?
  3. How will that change your actions because you have come to know that God has not left you alone, but come to you in love, in forgiveness, to save you?

CONCLUSION – One of my favorite Christmas stories I heard on the radio about 30 years ago told by the sportscaster Jack Buck. He told a story from his days in the service and said he had been serving in Germany after the war. IT was not good, for the Germans or the Americans, but that first Christmas he said he went to church with other GI's. The service was in German so they didn't understand all of it. But, at the end, the organ started playing Silent Night. The Americans knew that and started singing it in English. The Germans sang it in German. He said that song and the truth and message of the Savior brought together people who had been suffering from the horrors of war. You see, God coming in love and forgiveness made a difference that brought even enemies of war together.

Bethlehem may not have been a town of peace, but there was peace to be found there, because God came as Jesus to Bethlehem to love to forgive and to save. As you leave tonight, as you know in your struggles that the Savior has been born to You, has come to YOU, how is your life changing?

