

“IT USED TO BE A QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD”

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve 2025

In the early 90's I was living in Eighty-Four, PA and served the Emmanuel Presbyterian Church. This is a 200-year-old congregation, so when the state decided to build Highway Route 70 their old manse was in the way. As a consequence, the church received money to build a new manse closer to the church building. The manse is a pretty brick Cape Cod style house, with dormer windows, a small side porch, and a very small kitchen that was obviously engineered by a man with no cooking experience. The house was built into a hill and other than the kitchen the only other flaw was they built it on the side of the church nearest Route 70. Thus, the noise of traffic and constant need for dusting were readily apparent.

However, over time we got used to the constant traffic noise to the point where we really didn't notice it anymore. Except for one Christmas Day. The family woke up early, just like any other Christmas Day, the sun was shining on the fresh fallen snow, but there was this strange eerie silence. It was too quiet and something felt off. When we looked out the window, we realized there was no traffic moving on Route 70. All was still for the first time.

The scriptures tell us about a group of shepherds watching over their flock by night. I imagine, like normal; it was a quiet evening. Their routine sheep work was complete, dinner was eaten, and except for the sound of the crackling campfire, all was quiet. Sheep spook easily so you don't want any sudden noise. Just another ordinary evening in the life of a shepherd. However, the evening was about to get really loud, and the only ones being spooked were the shepherds.

The evening silence was suddenly broken by a messenger of God standing in the spotlight of God. The shepherds' reaction was one of terror! Who could blame

them! 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: to you is born this day in the **city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord**. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

**“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”**

I. THE BIG REVEAL

One of the events I have never been to is a gender reveal party. Apparently, this is a popular activity in some communities that typically takes place during the second trimester of pregnancy. The event reveals the baby's sex to family and friends, and sometimes even to the expectant parents themselves. They do this through a surprise activity like cutting into a cake with either pink or blue filling, popping a confetti-filled balloon, or using blue or pink smoke cannons, preferably outside.

Of course, in the time of Jesus, the big reveal didn't come until the baby did. In Luke's gospel, the angel and then the shepherds are the messengers of the newborn Jesus' big reveal. Notice, they are not revealing the gender of Jesus, nor his height, weight, eye or hair color, you know all the things we usually ask. Rather these messengers are announcing and revealing the significance of Jesus' birth.

For all intents and purposes, there was nothing noticeably special about this baby. In fact, Luke only gives us one line about the birth of Jesus. **“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 in the guest room.”** Mary goes through all the hard work of labor and that's the only line she gets. She needs a better agent. The

only unusual aspect of the birth narrative up this point was the animal food trough for a crib. The only people who knew there was something divine about Jesus were his parents. Even they didn't quite know what to make of him. Mary ponders and Joseph says nothing. To anyone else Jesus looked like any other Jewish baby born to a poor family whose only housing accommodation was an animal stall.

It was to a simple working-class couple that Jesus was born. It was to these simple men of the field that were given the task of sending out the birth announcement. **“The Savior is born and he is good news of great joy FOR ALL THE PEOPLE.”** The only reason I can come up with as to why God would choose these humble people to enter into the world is that God really meant it that Jesus is good news of great joy for **ALL people**. Christ is for the whole world, not just the educated, powerful, wealthy, or any particular class or nation. This Savior, this King, this Son of God was and is also for the homeless, the immigrant, those lacking a high school diploma, the poor, the lame, the prisoner, the mentally challenged, and well, anyone and everyone. And that news so excited the shepherds that they left their sheep on the hill and went in haste to see this wondrous child that the angels told them about.

And notice the shepherds were not quiet about it. **“When they found Jesus...they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed...”** You can just imagine the shepherds going from person to person saying, “Guess what we just saw? And we found this child just like the angels told us.” This was the most exciting event of their whole lives. How could they keep quiet about it? Their story made enough noise to be included in Luke's gospel.

And after they share their experience, they get even noisier. **“They returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.”** I am surprised they didn't get arrested for disturbing the peace,

remember it is nighttime, let alone scare all the sheep away. But they returned to the field as different men, because they encountered the living God, and life would never be the same. And isn't that the point of Christmas: to seek and encounter the living Christ in such a way that our lives are forever changed? Why else are we here this evening?

II. THE CHRISTMAS STORY

I imagine many of you have seen the **1983 film, A Christmas Story**. It follows the holiday exploits of young Ralphie Parker and the odd collection of family and friends. The movie was not a big hit when it first came to theaters, but over the years it acquired quite a cult following. There's even a *Christmas Story* museum in Cleveland, across the street from the house where the movie was filmed, stuffed with props, collectables and other sorts of on-set paraphernalia.

Jean Shepherd is the author of **A Christmas Story**. He was an American storyteller, author, humorist who had a cult following on late-night radio telling improvised stories. His style was later adopted by the likes of Garrison Keillor.

In a 1971 interview **Shepherd** said, **"You can tell a story about anything, but the only stories that have any fidelity, any feeling, are stories that either did happen to you or conceivably could have happened to you."** In other words, the best stories come out of our own experience, with the things we can relate to.

We can tell the story of Christ's birth year, after year, after year, but unless you're willing to drop what your doing, go in haste to find and see and encounter Jesus, he remains just another ordinary baby, born a long time ago. Somewhere along the line, Jesus the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord must be revealed and happen to you. He must become a part of your story, and then everything changes. Why let another Christmas go by without Jesus in your life? I promise you that life is never the same.

Not only that, but you will have something to shout about and a story to tell. This Christmas Eve may begin with a silent night, but it ends with Joy to the World! Don't be afraid to make some noise because Christ the Savior is born. **Hallelujah, Amen.**

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, December 24, 2025

Second Scripture Lesson

Luke 2:1-20

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar 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 in the guest room.

8 Now in that same 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 and 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, just as it had been told them.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.