

It's Christmas! A reading from Luke chapter two:

Luke 2:8-14

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 God favors!"

It's Christmas! It's the most wonderful time of the year! Is it?

As we experience the hustle and bustle all around us, church, please remember that the season of Christmas is not the most wonderful time of the year for everyone. How is Christmas for you?

For some, this season is wrapped in grief. A chair at the table is empty. A voice is missing in the room. For others, there are broken relationships that feel too heavy to fix, too painful to revisit. Some of you may be carrying anxiety about your health, the health of someone you love, or the slow unraveling of a body that once felt strong. And for a few, Christmas is not only about sadness—it is about exhaustion, loneliness, financial stress, disappointment, and the quiet wondering of whether God has forgotten your name.

If that is you this Christmas, hear this: you are not outside the Christmas story. You may be closer to the heart of Christmas than you realize.

Jesus didn't come into a world that was cheerful, organized, or whole. Jesus came into a world that was frightened, occupied by an empire, divided by power, and burdened by poverty. Luke tells us that the first Christmas happened not in a palace, not even in a temple, not in the homes of the successful, but in the night, in the outskirts, among the animals, among working people who were simply trying to survive.

And perhaps that is the first great truth of Christmas: God often comes in the quiet, the confusion, in the ache, and the long, sleepless nights.

The angels appear not to the powerful, but to shepherds — men who were considered unreliable and unclean, people on the edges of society. And yet, they are the first to hear the announcement that changes everything:

“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.”

Notice how precise the angel’s words are:

To you is born this day a Savior.

The One who comes to rescue, to heal, to restore, to make whole all that has been broken.

Jesus’ coming matters. We are a world in need of saving—from violence and division, from despair, from injustice, from sin, and from the deep brokenness within our own hearts.

United Methodists speak of God’s grace through prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. Christmas is woven into all three.

Before you ever thought about God this season, God was already thinking about you. God’s love goes ahead of you, looking for you, chasing after you, preparing the way even when you do not know how to pray.

The angelic choir sings, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom God favors.” Peace is the presence of God with us inside the trouble.

Emmanuel —God with us.

God with us in grief.

God with us in hospital rooms.

God with us at complicated family tables.

God with us in recovery.

God with us in doubt.

God with us in fading strength and in fragile hope.

The shepherds go to the manger and find exactly what the angel promised: presence. A baby. Vulnerable. Human. Real.

And that, too, matters.

And if you’re having a beautiful Hallmark movie Christmas, I’d like for you to consider something. Don’t say, “we are blessed.” For we know that the grieving are also blessed, the meek are blessed, all those with broken hearts are blessed. Instead, be grateful. Say, “I am so grateful. I’m going to be grateful enough to extend compassion to others. Be careful not to pull

away from the pain of others. God didn't, and God doesn't pull away. God always leans in. Join God.

God could have stood at a distance. Yet, God chose to come close enough to cry. God chose to come close enough to hunger, to ache, to love, to die. In Jesus, God knows the full weight of being human. And because of that, there is no part of life that God doesn't understand, no pain that God cannot meet, and no darkness that Christ has not entered.

The shepherds leave changed. Luke tells us they return, "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen."

And yet, they go back to their jobs.

They live under Roman rule.

They face hard days.

But something in them is different.

They now know that God is not far away.

They now know that hope has a name.

They now know that a Savior has come for them.

And that is the invitation of this Christmas for every one of us: Stop pretending life is perfect, and trust that God has stepped into it anyway.

Is your heart full or aching...

Christ is born for you.

Christ is present with you.

Christ is still bringing light into the world — and into your life — one quiet, holy night at a time.

Glory to God.

And peace to you.

Amen.