

Rev. Dan Welch Christmas Eve 12-24-21 Text- Luke 2:1-20
“The Lord Is Come”

This sermon is about two words. Two simple words. Two words that we frequently use. Both words are small. Each word has just one syllable.

The angel gives us these Gospel words in Luke 2:10, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” Did you catch them? Our two words? They are “joy” and “all.” “Joy” and “all” come in the context of what? Fear. Luke 2:9 calls it “great fear.” And why is that? Imagine just doing your job one evening and then suddenly—from out of nowhere—an angel of the Lord appears. Then the glory of the Lord shines bright, all around you. It’s little wonder that the angel said to these startled shepherds, “Fear not.”

We can relate with the shepherds who were just minding their own business “keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8). Often, though, it’s not an abrupt *angel* that shakes us up—it’s the *future*. What will the new year be like? Will my children be safe? Will I have enough money? What about my job and my investments? Will I stay healthy? How many more variants of Covid will there be? Then there are North Korea and Iran—and don’t forget China and Russia. The technical name for this is *chronophobia*—fear of the future. *Chronophobia* causes us to make bad decisions, form bad habits, and get into bad relationships.

What are our options? We can refuse to get up in the morning, but that would not be a good use of the gift of the day that God has in store for us. We can cover our windows and not go out, but that would intensify our fear of anything the outside might hold. Experts tell us that fear of the future leads to *risk-lock*. What’s *risk-lock*? *Risk-lock* is a condition, which—like *gridlock*—leaves us unable to do anything or go anywhere. But our Lord has a better option for us.

Fear is overcome by *joy*. There’s our first word. *Joy!* “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10). The angel doesn’t just announce joy. He announces *great* joy. Why? “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). The infant child is the Savior of sinners. He is the long-awaited Christ, or

Messiah, from the house and lineage of David. The angel adds a third title to Jesus. Jesus is Lord.

“Lord.” Let that sink in. Jesus, the long-awaited Savior and Messiah, is one with the Eternal God. The Nicene Creed puts it this way. Christ is “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” Jesus is Lord.

But when he arrived, Jesus looked nothing like the Lord. There was a manger, some straw, a few shepherds, Mary, and Joseph. Jesus cries, naps, sleeps, burps, and needs his mother.

Jesus came down to a manger. True. But it was so He could go further down—to a cross. There, on a God-forsaken cross, the Lord was abandoned by His countrymen. He was abandoned by His followers. Jesus was abandoned, finally, by His Father. The Savior, Christ, the Lord, did it all to conquer death and replace our fear with joy—great joy!

Please hear what I’m about to say. It’s very important. There is a huge difference between happiness and joy. They are not one and the same. Health and wealth and family and friends are blessings from God. They make us *happy*. But—and this is a big but—they are *not* essential for joy. Why is that? Happiness is determined by what’s going on *around* me. I can’t control that. Joy is determined by what’s going on *inside* of me. And *God* has taken control of that. He sent Jesus—the Lord.

Jesus didn’t have a lot of reasons for earthly happiness. He didn’t arrive as an emperor, a statesman, a general, or an investment banker. Jesus was born in an animal feeding trough to a blue-collar father and a teenage mother. As an adult, Jesus had no home and served as an itinerant preacher who washed feet. That’s never been the key to making it big. And then this: “Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:9). Death on the cross was reserved for slaves, thieves, and murders—the lowest of the low. Roman soldiers ripped His skin, burst His arteries, and severed His nerves. The pain was unimaginable.

In spite of it all, though, Jesus had joy. Poverty couldn’t take His joy away. Disappointment and rejection couldn’t take it away. Even death on a cross couldn’t take away Christ’s joy. Hebrews 12:2 says as much: “... who

for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.”

Jesus once said, “No one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22). Why is that? Remember? Happiness is determined by what’s going on **around** me. I can’t control that. Joy is determined by what’s going on **inside** of me. And God has taken control of that by sending Jesus, the Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Jesus, the Word made Flesh and Immanuel. Jesus, the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright Morning Star, the Alpha and the Omega, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords!

The joy of Jesus stems the tide of our fear and foreboding. The joy of Jesus brings confidence in the midst of confusion. Hope in the midst of uncertainty. The joy of Jesus brings calm in the midst of life’s chaotic storms.

“You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). Luke frames his gospel by referring to Christ’s clothes: beginning with the strips of cloth and concluding with His dead body wrapped in a shroud at his burial (Luke 23:53), which are discovered by Peter as a sign of the Messiah’s resurrection (Luke 24:12). Luke connects the birth with the Savior’s death and resurrection. What great joy!

Joy. That’s our first word. The second Gospel word tonight is “all.” All! Great joy isn’t just for the good people. It isn’t just for the religious people. It isn’t just for the nice people. No. This is “good news of great joy for all the people.” There’s our second wonderful word. All!

To accent this promise, Luke includes a range of stories that occur nowhere else in the other gospels. Luke’s stories announce that Jesus gives great joy to all the people. Here are some examples: The child Jesus is revered by two elderly people living at the temple in Jerusalem, named Simeon and Anna. Only in Luke does Jesus interrupt a funeral procession, because joy is also for the widow of Nain. Only in Luke does Jesus commend a good Samaritan and a Samaritan leper who returns to give thanks for healing. Joy is for Samaritans. A sinful woman, a repentant tax collector, a woman who lost a coin, and two unknown disciples on the road to Emmaus also experience God’s joy. Luke alone tells of a father

killing the fatted calf for a prodigal son because joy is even for this son. And in this gospel alone Jesus says to a criminal being crucified with him, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Yes, joy is even for a hopeless criminal on a cross.

Great joy is the gift Christ gives to all. And He gives it even and especially to you.

Christmas is so much more than a fantasy or a fairy tale. Christmas is so much more than sugar plum fairies, old St. Nick, and Jack Frost nipping at your nose. Luke captures the Christmas Gospel in two words—two words that take away all fear. These are two words that have been worth the long wait. These two words are the fulfillment of the promise made generations before, which is sealed in a covenant that remains ours today. Here they are—our two words—one more time: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great *joy* that will be for *all* the people.” Merry Christmas! Amen.