

Advent IV (Songs of the Savior)

Pastor Ed Harkey

Luke 2:8-14

TLC, Keene, NH

[OPENING SLIDE]

The Song of Angels

*"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, '**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!**'"*

Introduction

Well, we're getting closer. Christmas is right around the corner. But like our Savior's return, it is getting closer, but as of this moment it's not here yet. ☺ So that, if you came this morning hoping to hear an early Christmas Eve sermon, please don't be disappointed. As we are brought to another "Song of the Savior" – the shortest of them all – the angel's song; with heavenly chorus in full array! And wow do they have a song to sing!

[SLIDE # 2] STANZA 1 – *"Fear not ..."*

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not ..." (Luke 2:8-10)

Sort of an odd note, don't you think, to get the stable party started? Where, every time the angels are showing up in the Nativity story, folks are terrified. Mary. Joseph. The Shepherds (you'll hear about their song tonight). Isaiah before them. The disciples after them. No shortage of fear to go around!

Don't *we* know it? It's the realm that the evening news thrive on! As we are bombarded with the latest stats of how disease is depriving us – one by one – of folks we love. Or how we're headed into economic catastrophe, as individual and national debt is way beyond the ability to pay. *[Fill in your own fear here: _____.]*

What does fear do? It exposes our weakness. It points out that we don't know everything. It sends us into hiding or worse. And to a world enshrouded in darkness and sin, it points to the awful reality: "***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***" (Romans 3:23)

It's not a place we want to be ... but at times necessary, as it prepares us for:

[SLIDE # 3] STANZA 2 – God's beautiful remedy.

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not ... for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." (Luke 2:10)

Yes, into the midst of a world filled with sin and faith-crippling fear – perhaps even our own this very day – Good News. Where with the bad news we've come to expect, comes news we don't expect! Yes, into the midst of our darkness, something beautiful is stirring. And the better part is that while it is "for *all* people," it is "*for you*."

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you ... a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:11-12)

No more gift-laden words could ever be spoken – God's *final* Word – a Word that graciously descends, seeking to find a home in you today!

For what value does any gift have for you if it doesn't have your name on it? Wherein, everything that Jesus did, He did *for you*. His coming as a child ... His perfect obedience ... His innocent suffering and death ... His glorious resurrection ... down to His eventual return to receive you into His eternal kingdom. All of it is *for you* ... whoever you are, wherever you come from, whatever you have done.¹

This Good News of great joy is for those who are under-housed and under fed, for those on family assistance and those barely getting by.

¹ This and the next few paragraphs are adapted from Lehman, *CPR*, 25:1, 52

"It is for the family in which husband and wife each hold down two jobs just to make ends meet, where the children wear hand-me-downs, and grocery shopping means a trip to the food bank."

This gift of God's salvation is for you "whose hearts may be saddened or weighed down. It is for you who are chronically ill, wearied with doctor appointments and tests, overwhelmed with questions for which there seem to be no answers. *'Unto **you** is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord,'* who though He may not take away your physical pain, will most certainly give you His strength to bear it" allowing you – with St. Paul – to *"boast all the more gladly of your weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon you."* (2 Corinthians 12:9)

And if that were not amazing enough, this gift of gift is even for those who think they already have everything they need, "so that you will not *'set [your] hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy'* (1 Timothy 6:17). Things of this world do not last, but the gift of God, which is Jesus, is yours forever.

Yes, whoever you are, and whatever your circumstances in life, this gift of the Savior is 'for you.' It has your name on it. Whether you're rich or poor ... young or old, He is your true treasure. Whether you're overwhelmed by loneliness or caught up in the crowd, He is the one who is your true friend and companion." Dare we say it? Merry Christmas! Hallelujah! Amen!

Leading us to the final verse of the angel's song:

[SLIDE # 4] STANZA 3 – Faith's – that is, our – response!

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, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:13-14)

Yes, what does such Good News evoke in you this Advent? This Christmas?

For Mary it was her Magnificat. For Zechariah it was his Benedictus. For Simeon it was the Nunc Dimittis. Wherein, it seems that every time the angels are showing up in the Nativity story – *everybody's* also singing!

What shall our song be? We don't have to wait until Christmas. How about now? Where I'd like to take you back to 1539, the home of Martin Luther. It is Christmas, and the father wants to bring the Nativity story to the forefront of his family's life. So he writes a song. Hymn #358 in our hymnal.

It was a hymn where the children took the roles of the angels, sparking the church's joy-filled response to the Gospel. Which is how we will now sing it, alternating between the message of the angels (vv. 1-7 which an angel will sing), and the heartfelt response (vv. 8-14 which we will sing). The angel will sing a verse and then we will sing the verse on the slide, or in your hymnal.

Focus on the message ... but also the response. And the ways in which we might live the Gospel out. Ponder what you are singing. Take to heart the words. Run to see what awaits you in the Manger; and then, run from that place with the joy of Christ in your hearts, on your lips, and in your hands.

[SLIDES # 5 thru 12 – Stanzas 8 thru 15 of *LSB* 358] [*Sing the hymn.*]

Conclusion

[SLIDE # 13] Upon hearing the angel's song, the shepherds said, "*Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.*" (Luke 2:15) So may we: rejoicing to hear and sing the angel's song. To come to the "manger" of bread and wine, with the eyes of faith beholding our Savior and His plenteous grace. Where, forgiven, refreshed, and strengthened, we return to the places where we live, move and have our being, "glorifying and praising God until the day we join our Lord, the angels, and all the company of heaven" in singing our songs of praise for eternity. (Adapted from Quill, *CPR*, 15:1, 47)

Yes, now is the time to sing. Now, we have arrived! Hallelujah! *Amen.*

[Friday E-mail:] And so we come to it. Or it comes at us with Gospel full blast! Sunday morning 10:30 a.m. – the song of the angels. Sunday afternoon and evening at 4 & 9 p.m. – the song of the shepherds. Monday morning, 10 a.m. – Christmas Day – a rather different song of Christmas from John 1:1-14. Wherein, throughout all of the services of the upcoming season of Christmas – we rejoice to sing the Lord's song ... not just of His birth, but of our very salvation. Sing, Church sing!

Of course, I'm well aware of the reasons not to. The weight of that unholy three – our own sin, this world and Satan – are raging still ... every time we turn on the evening news! Or are bombarded with the latest statistics of how disease is picking us off one by one. Or how we're headed into catastrophe, as individual and national debt is way beyond the ability to pay. *[Fill in your own fear here: _____.]*

What does such fear or the attempt to squash God's song do? It exposes our weakness. It shows us we don't know everything. It stretches faith to the limit. It sends us into hiding or paralysis. For the sin-sick soul, it points us that awful reality: "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

It's not a comfortable place to be ... but necessary, for it prepares us for ...

God's beautiful remedy.

"[Yes] fear not (the angel said), for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you."

Did you get that? This Good News of great joy is for *you* ... for ***you***.

Such grace cannot be undone. Nor can it be expressed in any other way possible than the way God has chosen to give to us – His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ! Forgiveness is yours. Grace is yours. Life is yours. Light is yours.

Therefore, rejoice with me – in one, or all, of our upcoming services. It's a song I long to sing with you, even to eternity itself. MC! SYOS *and* Monday!