
The sermon text for today is based on the Gospel, Luke Chapter 2, verses 8 to 20.

Provided by The Lutheran Church of Australia

We can often have mixed feelings about Christmas.

On the one hand it is a very happy time when families come together to enjoy each other's company. It may even be that—perhaps for a day or an hour or even for a few minutes—people forget to be hostile with one another.

It is a day where people are extraordinarily generous in their giving to others, sometimes undeservedly so.

It is a day that should be filled with good food, good gifts, good company and great joy.

But then we can't help but think of those people who will have no joy today.

Those who have recently experienced fire, floods, or famine have little reason for joy. Those who experience the loss of loved ones, or those who are lonely, or those suffering from pain, sickness or injury will have little reason for joy.

Today there are people who will not experience joy because they are trying to survive without homes, without a country, without good health, without food, without their loved ones, or even trying to survive without hope.

Now I don't mean to upset your Christmas with depressing thoughts, but this is what Christmas is all about!

Christmas is about fear, about pain, about separation, about fighting, about jealousy, about terror, about sin and about death.

Because, if it isn't about these things, why did Jesus come as a child among us?

Didn't Jesus come to deal with these things and then bring us peace, since the angels themselves said 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!' Isn't this the reason he came?

But then there's a problem. If Jesus came to bring peace to us, why do we still have fears, pains and death? Why are there still so many people depressed, sad, grieving and anguished at Christmas time if Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace has come?

Well, this is where the Christmas message gets really interesting.

Did you notice when St Luke tells us about the birth of Jesus, it seems almost a little blasé? He simply states: 'And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.' (Lk 2:7, ESV).

There is no remarkable change in the world, no earth-shattering earthquake, no thunder and lightning, no fireworks, no trumpet fanfare, and no blinking lights on the stable, in fact, his birth seems normal, boring and unremarkable except that he was placed in an animal's feeding trough, but then again, this wouldn't be the first or last time a child is born in poverty and away from the conveniences of home or hospital.

It seems that the awesome moment of Jesus' birth almost passes without consequence. It's as if there is nothing special at all about his birth.

But then Luke brings our attention to a remarkable story of some shepherds out in the field.

Now by reputation, shepherds were scoundrels and sheep stealers. They were usually criticized, victimized and shunned by society. Because they were often watching their flocks, they typically neglected worship in the Temple. Therefore, according to society, they were nobodies and didn't deserve any favours, especially not from God.

Yet it was to shepherds, to these fringe dwellers, that angels came and broke into their dark and dreary existence. Their dark night was replaced by the blinding light of God's glory.

The shepherds' automatic reaction was tremendous fear, but the angel told them 'Don't fear, because I am announcing to you news of great joy, which is for all people, because today a Saviour has been born in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord.'

Note some of the key statements of the angel. 'Fear not. Don't be afraid.' But then why shouldn't we be afraid? We're afraid of terrorist attacks, we're afraid of theft, we're afraid of sickness and disease, and we're afraid of getting older, especially if it includes a loss of ability, a loss of health, a loss of memory, or a loss of independence. Why shouldn't we be afraid?

Because the angel announces good news. Today we have a Saviour. Today we have a Redeemer. Today we have the Christ. Today Jesus is set aside and anointed for the special task of salvation. But note, he is much more than just a special human. The angel also tells us he is the Lord.

Now when the Old Testament mentions the LORD, it refers to God himself. When we hear 'The LORD says...' it means 'God himself says...'. Therefore when the angel says the one born in the city of David is Christ the LORD, he is saying this child is the LORD GOD! God himself is our Saviour. God himself is the Christ. The eternal God who created the heavens and the earth now comes as a child among his people to bring salvation and peace.

Well, this is a remarkable statement, so how do we know this is true? How can this be confirmed, especially when we still experience pain, fear and death?

Well, the angel went on to say 'this is the sign or the confirmation that what I say is true: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

At that moment an army of angels suddenly appeared praising God saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Here is the real message of Christmas. Here among the shepherds Christmas came. Here on the fringe of society, here in the darkness, and here among undeserving scoundrels, fear and death received their curtain call.

Now, why do I say that Christmas came among the shepherds and not at the traditional nativity scene where the baby Jesus was present?

Because it was here that the gospel message of Christmas was first announced. Here the Word of God came through God's messengers to the scoundrels and undeserving. Here the good news of peace and salvation for all people has now arrived.

But is Christmas really just about this news? Is Christmas just about the Word of God? Yes! But also a Word that can be confirmed as true.

So how did the shepherds confirm this great and wonderful news? They went to check this news out. They went to Bethlehem to see if what they were told could be confirmed.

And so they went and found the baby Jesus lying in a manger, just as they were told! The words of peace and joy announced by the angels were confirmed as true!

Then notice how the conversations went after they arrived: The shepherds told Mary and Joseph about what the angels told them about Jesus. They too were amazed at the news. Now remember that Mary and Joseph had also had angels come and announce news to them. But now the good news has also come to others, even to these scoundrel shepherds. The good news was spreading!

Also note how the ones who had received the message become the messengers. The shepherds now in effect become the angels, the messengers to the world. They tell others about the Messiah, the chosen one who will save the people. They tell others that Christ is born to bring peace and salvation to our troubled and mixed up world. The Word of God, the gospel news is told to others and even today it keeps on spreading. This is Christmas – telling the gospel story, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ!

Later the shepherds returned to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. They praised God for receiving the good news and seeing that it was indeed true. It had been just as they were told.

In other words, God announced his good news that seems almost impossible to believe, but he also gave the confirmation of his word. Jesus being born for us is the confirmation we need that God's

promises are true. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He is God's promise confirmed and put into action.

Today in this world where people still experience pain, sadness, loneliness and death, they still need to hear that wonderful message of peace through Jesus Christ. This is what Christmas is all about!

Christmas doesn't remove pain, fighting, disease, sin or death, but it does bring the great message from God that even if we do experience all these things, peace and salvation comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. How are we sure of this? Because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, truly came to us in the flesh.

The reason many lose hope while they experience pain, sadness, loneliness and death is because they don't believe the message. Now of course many believe Jesus came as a baby. They won't deny that. But they will deny the message. They will deny that the birth of Jesus confirms the message of peace and hope for everyone. To them, the birth of Jesus confirms nothing.

But for us, for those who believe, we have peace and salvation. How do we know this, even if our Christmas is not what we hoped for? Because the Lord Jesus was born for us. How do we know that any promises that God makes to us are true? Because the Lord Jesus was born for us. How do we know that any of God's words are true? Because the Lord Jesus was born for us.

When doubts of God's promises crowd your minds or when fears, pains, terrors and even death threaten your faith, trust in God's Word. God's Word, God's promises have been confirmed and fulfilled through our Lord Jesus Christ!

So yes, Christmas is about fear, about pain, about separation, about fighting, about jealousy, about terror, about sin and about death.

But Christmas is also about peace and salvation through Jesus Christ. How do we know this to be true? Because the Lord Jesus Christ has been born for us, has lived for us, has suffered for us, has died for us, has risen for us, and also has ascended into heaven for us.

God's promises have come true so that...

The peace and salvation of God, which surpasses all human understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.