

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Gospel in the Carols: We share the Good News"

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

Theme Carol: Go, tell it on the mountain #133

Opening Hymn: Angels we have heard on high #147

Closing Hymn: Good Christians, all rejoice 141

Children's Hymn: All hail King Jesus #268

Choruses: See amid the winter's snow #168 (1-4), That boy-child of Mary

Rev. Steve Filyk

December 29, 2019

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas

We all like to share good news.

I visited Moe and Linda Monono the morning after  
Their child was delivered.

I asked if they had told their family.

"Of course" Moe said.

Through our amazing cell-phone technology  
He was able to stream live video to them:  
Family who had stayed up all night  
Waiting for news about the birth.

We all like to share good news.  
Sometimes we get angry  
Because we aren't the first people  
to hear about some important event or occasion.

Why the anger?

We want to hear first.

And we want to have the privilege of passing on the news to others.

We all like to share good news.

So how is it that we can be so excited

to speak about the arrival of a new baby,

Or our summer vacation plans,

Or our purchase of a new phone...

And so unenthused about share the good news of Jesus Christ.

It we went through the pews

I'm sure we could gather a few reasons.

But rather than focus on our apathy to evangelism

I thought it would be interesting to examine

What the characters in today's passage

might teach us about the topic.

I mean *they* certainly are enthusiastic.

What do the angels, the shepherds, and Mary

Have to tell us about evangelism?

Let's start with the angels.

Angels are not common biblical characters.

But they are not uncommon either.

On commentator notes that the “The Bible  
includes... twenty-six specific... encounters with angels  
after the garden of Eden:  
ten in the Old Testament  
and sixteen in the New Testament.”<sup>i</sup>

Angels are spiritual beings that serve God  
And act as God’s emissaries.

“The Greek word for angel, [ἄγγελος *angelos*]  
is often translated “messenger,” “one sent,”  
“envoy,” or “ambassador”<sup>ii</sup>

It shares that same root as the Greek word for evangelist,  
εὐαγγελιστής, (yoo-ang-ghel-is-tace')  
which means messenger of good news.

Angels are messengers.  
Evangelism is about delivering Good News.  
We observe angels acting as evangelists in today’s lesson.

What did the angel say to the shepherds?

“Don’t be afraid.  
I’m here to announce a great and joyful event  
that is meant for everybody, worldwide:

A Savior has just been born in David’s town,  
a Savior who is Messiah and Master.”<sup>iii</sup>

The angel comes to speak about a 'great and joyful event'.  
The angel comes to speak about the gift of salvation.

This is an important word that needs to be said about evangelism.  
Evangelism is about delivering a profoundly *good* message.

And yet this isn't always obvious in the evangelism  
We observe or encounter.

I remember being visited by two door-to-door evangelists  
When I was working in New Brunswick.

They had stern faces  
And brought a message of hell-fire and damnation  
Rather than words of peace.

Evangelism is about sharing *good* news.  
But this isn't the only thing the angels show us.

When the angels announce their good news,  
They don't press the shepherds for a commitment.  
Instead, they invite the shepherds to head out on an adventure  
To go and discover this Saviour for themselves.

This is also rather instructive.

Instead of arguing with the shepherds  
The angels are arousing their curiosity.

Instead of trying to prove anything to the shepherds,  
The angels are sending them off on a quest  
To discover the 'truth' for themselves.

The angels have a couple things to tell us about evangelism.  
It is truly *good* news.  
At best it is an invitation to the listener  
To move ahead on their spiritual journey.

That's the angels.  
How about the shepherds?  
What do they have to teach us about evangelism?

Before we get there  
I think it is important to understand  
a little more about these shepherds.

While the shepherd is a positive image in the literature of the Bible  
(think of King David)  
Shepherds weren't held in honor in the first century.

They were poor uneducated labourers,  
Whose trade kept them away from the Temple.<sup>iv</sup>

They were regarded as untrustworthy.  
Some say they also had trouble  
Distinguishing between mine and thine.

A modern-day equivalent might those seasonal workers  
That pick fruit in orchards or plant trees in the bush.

Shopkeepers are wary,  
When a van full of such characters  
Pulls up in front of their store.

So what can the shepherds teach us about evangelism?

They make it abundantly clear  
That you don't have to be seminary trained  
Or particularly pious to tell others about Christ.

We tend to think that you need a Master's degree in divinity  
And a red-seal in piety  
To talk to anyone about Jesus.

They clearly didn't.  
And yet they shared the news with the neighborhood:  
"they spread the word... about this child".<sup>v</sup>

But more than just showing us  
That you don't need to be able to spell eschatology  
or explain the Trinity  
To speak about Jesus,

they reveal that evangelism  
is rooted in personal experience.

It is instructive that the shepherds saw Jesus themselves,  
Before they started sharing the news about him.

We are told that when they had left him  
They were praising God for “all the things  
They had heard and seen...”<sup>vi</sup>

The shepherds teach us that you don’t need special training  
to engage in evangelism,  
but that an encounter with Jesus is essential.

So far, we have learned from the angels.  
So far, we have learned from the shepherds.

So what does Mary have to teach us about this topic?

Mary, as many of you are aware  
Was a teenager, and a new mother.

While she is young,  
Mary is no stranger to proclaiming God’s promises.

If you flip back one chapter in Luke  
You will find the Magnificat,  
a beautiful song that Mary sings  
When she encounters her cousin Elizabeth.

“My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...

He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.”<sup>vii</sup>

Mary proclaims God’s greatness  
In the presence of her cousin.

But in this story, Mary is quiet.  
We are told that in the middle of all the commotion  
Surrounding her newborn baby,  
that Mary keeps quiet.

We are told “treasured up all these things  
and pondered them in her heart.”

Now this is maybe a stretch but I think  
This also informs our understanding of evangelism.  
Mary helps us recognise that there are times to be vocal  
And there are times to be silent.

Mary demonstrates that one who is to be useful messenger of good news  
Will spend time reflecting on God’s activities and purposes.

We need thoughtful evangelists.  
We need people who are interested in proclamation,  
To be able to shut up.



Mary teaches us the value of silence.

So there you have it.

The angels, the shepherds, and Mary  
Have some valuable things to teach us about evangelism.

And you're thinking,

Pastor Steve, why didn't you preach this at the beginning of advent,  
Rather than at the end of the year?

What you should know is that the coming of Christ isn't a seasonal gift.  
It is good news for each and every day of the year.

Just consider the different messages we heard during advent:

- Jesus has conquered sin, death, and the Devil
- Jesus has provided a model for life
- God works with us to transform our character.

This is Good News for everyone, no matter what day of the year.  
So...

"Go, tell it on the mountain,  
Over the hills and ev'rywhere;  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born."<sup>viii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Dustin Benge "What Does the Bible Say about Angels?" December 19, 2018 <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/what-does-the-bible-say-about-angels/>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> Luke 21:10-11 MSG

<sup>iv</sup> See Stephen Farris "Luke 2:1-20" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 295

<sup>v</sup> Luke 2:17 NIV

<sup>vi</sup> Luke 2:20 NIV

<sup>vii</sup> Luke 2:46-47, 52-53 NIV

<sup>viii</sup> "Go, tell it on the mountain" is an African-American spiritual song, compiled by John Wesley Work Jr.