

THE GLOW

December 24, 2018 (9pm)

Christmas Eve

[Luke 2:7-20](#)

[Isaiah 62:10-12](#)

(prayer)

One of the skills that I picked up by spending most of my teen and twenties years at summer camp was the ability to make a fire.

Even today, with our fireplace at home or the fire pit in our back yard, I am able keep those skills fresh.

With most of my children spending parts of their summers at the same camp, I get opportunities to bring my alumni guitar out the odd evening and relive those fireside sing-songs.

I am always happy to be the one to make the fire.

I still got it!

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A few friends of my still like to laugh at the now 30+ year old story when a couple of young volunteers insisted on making the fire one night. We caught them holding a lighter under a round log about four inches in diameter. Apparently, they had heard that bark could be used to start a fire.

Eventually, they gave up on that technique.

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To be able to enjoy a big, roaring fire, you have to start small. Dead spruce bows or dried bark (not still attached to the log) or paper can provide the tinder-base. A single match can get the fire going. But I can't be fooled by how quickly it might light because that tinder won't last: a few minutes at most. So, small bits of kindling are needed next to carry those early flames to fresh fuel. You have to have them ready or else the tinder will be spent before you go and find some kindling. If you are too quick to put in the larger pieces of wood, the young flames will not be able to generate the consistent heat to get a lasting fire going. Patience is required if you ever want to see the glowing embers.

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A couple of hours ago I preached about how the simple verse

[Mary] gave birth to her firstborn son

and wrapped him in bands of cloth,

and laid him in a manger,

because there was no place for them in the inn.

helps ignite the Christmas story within our hearts and minds.

The steadfastness of Joseph and the heaviness of Mary lead to Jesus' first breaths.

In spite of the humble surroundings, baby Jesus has everything he needs.

At the earlier service, we focused on the first spark of the Word (of God) becoming Flesh.

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As we read on - in Luke - beyond verse seven, we witness that *spark* begin to *glow*.

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As Luke's gospel tells it, the Christmas story literally begins to glow on the hillsides outside of

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

Bethlehem.

As (NAY-əm) Nahum Tate's late 17th century lyrics remind us:

*While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,
an angel of the Lord came down,
and glory shone around.*

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You may know that Matthew and Luke are the only books of the New Testament that tell Christmas stories. And, by in large, they each share different traditions. While Matthew focuses on the reactions of the rich and powerful to the news of a child born to be King of the Jews, Luke tells us about the more humble impacts of Jesus' birth.

In Matthew, gift bearing wealthy and learn-ed foreigners follow a celestial sign and assume that they will find the young king in King Herod's palace.

In Luke, peasant shepherds had to scour the back streets of Bethlehem looking for a *newborn child wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manner.*

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In Matthew, the magi started big with the logical assumptions. But to find Jesus, they had to trust in the mystical. They let go of their control and follow their guiding star.

In Luke, the shepherds hear good news in a big surprising mystical way. But to find Jesus, they had to rely on their god-given senses.

In both biblical traditions - to experience the wonder of the christ-child, the seekers had to find the simple place where the path could start.

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The spark of the angel-song enticed the shepherds to search for the deeper glow.

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When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.'

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By the time the shepherds arrived where the manger was, the holy Word of God had already become flesh. The one who would be called the Light of the World was already breathing in this globe's oxygen and releasing CO₂ to feed the fields that would return the favour in the due course of creation.

They did not experience the spark of new life that Mary and Joseph saw a few hours earlier, but... they could bask in a light of life that had already begun to glow.

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The shepherds told their amazing tale of heavenly messengers and the songs they sang - that held a holy promise made manifest in the child lying humbly in a borrowed manger.

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The promise sang to the shepherds seemed bigger than what they found. But they trusted that the glowing embers of new life would continue to shine. The child would have time to lighten the world.

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Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

Mary, tired and sore, but peaceful and relaxed, listened to the shepherds' stories of angel-hope and greater-purpose. It was a story she knew first hand.

Nine months earlier, a messenger who called himself *The Strength of God* (Gabriel), told Mary that she would have a son who would be called *Yahweh's Salvation* (yehoshua; joshua; jesus). Gabriel promised a greater-purpose too. Mary's son was also God's son - "Jesus will be great", Gabriel said, "and will be called the Son of the Most High."

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The shepherds' story was Mary's story.

So, she *treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.*

She drifted off to sleep and dreamed of angels singing. It was the beginning of a wonder-full life.

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Their visit to the manger was the beginning for the shepherds as well.

*The shepherds returned,
glorifying and praising God
for all they had heard and seen.*

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As they re-entered their world, the shepherds fanned the flames of new faith.

They would take over for the heavenly angels and become the first human messengers of the good news that was sung to them and known by them in a humble manger.

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*Shepherds saw the wondrous sight,
Heard the angels singing;
All the plains were lit that night,
All the hills were ringing.*

...

*Son of God, of humble birth,
Beautiful the story;
Praise his name in all the earth,
Hail the King of glory!*

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Now it is our turn to tend the fire.

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offering

#48VU "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"