

Chris Murphy

December 7, 2026

Luke 2: 8-20

Sermon Title: Gifted

Luke 2:8-20

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,[a] the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,[b] praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”[c]

15 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.” 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, 19 and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Prayer...

Introduction:

I enjoy the Advent and Christmas Season. The two most well known and observed seasons in the church calendar are this season and Easter. Easter we remember the resurrection of Jesus and during Advent and Christmas we celebrate the gift of the birth of Jesus, the profound story that God became an infant and entered the world to identify with our human experience and to become one of us. God with us- Emmanuel.

Probably like a lot of you Christmas feels like a dual season of sorts. There is the story of the birth of Jesus with the other characters of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the magi. And we have our own cultural reminder of the presents around the Christmas tree and the story of Santa and his reindeer. My family celebrates it all. We actually started early and even had our tree and decorations in place before Thanksgiving. We might have splurged and watched our first Christmas movies before December. Don't tell anyone.

We made leftsa with Karen's Norwegian family in Seattle and now we are poised to make other Christmas cookies, including our annual tradition of gingerbread houses. Very soon we will be seeing Chiara dance in the upcoming Nutcracker ballet performance.

I hope you enjoy all of the Christmas festivities you can handle this year, but I hope we can pause and remember first and foremost the gift of the baby Jesus. Mary Kalesse and I met last month and decided we would team up in December and share some preaching duties. She will preach next week. Our focus is on the theme of "Gifted". The birth of Jesus offers us many gifts and today based on our passage of Scripture, we will look at the gifts of joy and peace.

I talk to a lot of people each week in our community that feel like peace and joy are in short commodity due to the current plight of the world. We are mindful that efforts for peace, such as showing kindness to all people and all nations are not always shown by our leadership. Xenophobia and other forms of prejudice persist. We

continue to show solidarity with immigrants when some would speak negatively about them. We continue to have a heart for the poor and vulnerable in our world when some would judge them.

Beyond the examples of injustice and pain in our world, we know many who carry wounds into this holiday season. The vulnerability of life touches us all and we grieve with those who are grieving.

So in the midst of a world often in turmoil and the vulnerability of our lives, maybe it feels a bit trite to pause and open ourselves to joy and peace. However, I want to remind us that the world Jesus entered some 2,000 years ago was as vulnerable if not more vulnerable than our world today. Jesus was born in a place under Roman oppression. As we heard about last Sunday, the plight of women and children were very difficult. Violence was part of the raw experience of life even more than we see today. Into this wild and unsettling world a baby was born, who yes did cry and who faced great obstacles.

The news of this baby came to the night shift workers. The shepherds had a challenging job. It is as if the angels chose the laborers rather than the royalty to first hear of the coming King, the Messiah, the Christ. The whole story of the birth of Jesus is a reminder that God is not impressed with wealth and power. God chose the vulnerable in the world to receive the gift of joy and peace.

I must pause as I always do when angels show up in the story and remind us that angels accompany us in our vulnerable world. They show up in this story with beautiful music proclaiming the good news of great joy. They speak and possibly sing the words. “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”[c] God favors the shepherds on that day and they are some of the first to meet the infant Jesus.

The life of the shepherds was not easy, but they were given a message of joy. At first they are afraid of the angel, but they are told to not be afraid. Maybe, part of our joy comes when we let go of our

fears and seek to see the world through God's eyes. Maybe, our power to work for peace and justice in our world flows first from the grace and peace offered to us in the gift of Jesus.

How might we receive the gift of joy and peace. I think it begins with getting alone with God. I took some time last Friday to reflect on the gift of Jesus and the gift of the incarnation when I spent time with God during our Friday prayer retreat. I needed to remember that my joy and peace are beyond my circumstances. Friends, God wants to meet us in our prayers and provide us with the peace and joy that transcends our circumstances. How God does it? I don't really know, but I have found that joy and peace can sometimes come to the most vulnerable.

I remember once I visited a young man in the hospital and he was suffering from guillan barre syndrome. He was struggling to move his arms and limbs and yet somehow I witnessed him look out the window and share how he was experiencing the gift of great peace.

Slowly over the next few weeks my friend regained his mobility and I still do not know how he found peace as he experienced temporary paralysis. Maybe you have witnessed a gift of peace and joy in hard circumstances as well. My hope is that our God of peace and joy will meet you in your vulnerability in this season of Advent and Christmas. Let us pray for the gifts of joy and peace to be made known in our lives.

Beyond the gift of prayer, peace and joy are also tangible through the love of others. I got a text from a retired pastor friend of mine last week. He reminded me that some local pastors were getting together for prayer at a prayer room in town. I decided to join them and found encouragement as we prayed for Newberg, each other, and our churches. I also got an email from a friend in our church who offered to bring me lunch. He asked me some good questions related to how I was doing as we enjoyed some Mexican food. This last week, I also met someone for coffee who shared some

encouraging words about how our church is helping her reconnect to her faith.

There are so many opportunities to bring joy and peace to one another. We can be the tangible hands and feet of Christ wherever we go. What is wonderful is that as we share the joy of Jesus with others our joy is increased. As we choose to be peacemakers in our world and not fall to name calling or other judgmental approaches in society, we receive the gift of peace in our hearts. Wouldn't it be nice if we as a society would greet each other with words of peace.

Interestingly in both Jewish and Muslim culture the normal greeting is one of offering peace. The Jewish greeting is Shalom Alechem- Peace be upon you in Hebrew. The Muslim greeting is As-salamu alaykum, peace be upon you in the Arabic language. And remember as Christians we say every Sunday at the end of this service- The Peace of Christ be with you.

Peace and joy begin with knowing we are deeply loved by God. God has a purpose and plan for our lives. God had a plan to bring Jesus to earth as a baby. The plan for Jesus was for him to become the Savior of the world. We also are incarnations of God's love on this earth. Jesus is the Son of God who had a special call on his life, but we all are given a purpose in our lives to bring peace and joy in the name of Jesus wherever we go. To share this peace and joy we must first receive it.

My wife Karen reminded me this week that the peace offered to us in Christ contrasts with the promises of peace we sometimes expect from nations. The Romans would use violence to create peace. They called it Pax Romana, but it was a peace born from brutality. The Peace of Christ in contrast is one of nonviolence. Our nations would do well to not assume peace is byproduct of war or military build up. Instead as Pope Leo reminds us, more efforts need to be taken

to find nonviolent ways of building peace rather than look to violence and war as a means of peace.

True peace is connected to the work Christ does in the world. God wants to have peace with us. God offers us peace. God's character is peace. God makes peace with humanity choosing to become one of us. Joy and peace are the fruit of the deep well of the Spirit. If you are in need of peace and joy in this season, come to the source.

Jesus is the source of peace and joy. Ask him to bring that to you.

The peace Jesus brings was a hard fought peace. Jesus suffered on the cross. He overcame the darkness. It is a lasting peace made through the cross.

I also encourage you this Christmas season to find peace in Christ through the image of him as a baby. I recently read from the devotion offered to us by Frontier Fellowship and it was suggested that when the shepherds visited the baby Jesus, maybe they got an opportunity to hold him. Whether that happened or not, it is cool to think of

Jesus being passed around and having a chance to hold the creator of the Universe. I hope in this season of Advent and Christmas we can all ponder the beauty of God becoming one of us as an infant. God comes to us in a gentle way as the baby Jesus. God does not want to be feared. God wants to be known in the vulnerability and beauty of a baby. May we be in awe of the Christ child and may we receive the gift of joy and peace through him.

In the Name of the Christ Child we Pray,

AMEN