

Sermon Title: **Series Characters of Christmas 4 – Shepherds, Angels, Joy, Love & Light - Advent**

Written: December 24, 2016

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Scripture Reference: **Luke 2:8-14**

Thesis: **Following the birth of Jesus, the Angels appear first to the simple shepherds to share the JOY of the Good News;**

Purpose: **Today, we will learn how we are to share in the Joy of Christmas.**

Key Word: **“Joy, Love, Light”**

I) Introduction:

Scripture Reading is: **Luke 2:8-14**

A) The Setting:

- 1) **Our Advent series this year is focusing on Characters of Christmas and we have also been going along with our Advent Wreath.**
 - (a) We began with our look at Hope with Zachariah and Elizabeth.
 - (b) Three weeks ago we covered Peace with Mary and Joseph.
 - (c) Two weeks ago we lit the Candle of Joy; but we did not get to focus on that one because of our Christmas Cantata.
 - (d) And Last week would have been the candle of Love had we not had to cancel do to the freezing rain.
- 2) **Last night on Christmas Eve we lit five candles with the center white candle representing Christ, the Lord came down to be born in the flesh.**
 - (a) This was so God the Son could live as a man and shed His blood to rescue us;
 - (b) For the Messiah, Jesus has arrived to save His people from their sins.
- 3) **So, because we are playing catch up with our Advent Wreath focus we are combining the last three candles somewhat today.**
 - (a) Today, our Characters of Christmas are the Shepherd's and Angels who share the focus of Joy.
 - (b) But also, God the Father and Jesus, God the Son who share their Love for us.
- 4) **The Temple worship in Jerusalem requires the many sacrifices of animals to cover the on-going sin of God's people.**
 - (a) And in the nearby fields that meant they needed to be a continuous supply of sheep and bulls.
 - (b) There was an entire industry dedicated to keeping the Temple sacrifices demand.
- 5) **It was a constant reminder that sin was a problem.**
 - (a) A problem that needed to be dealt with on a daily basis with a Holy God.
 - (b) It was a reminder that the wages of sin was death.
- 6) **Shepherds were not held in high regard.**
 - (a) For one thing there was the smell of being out in the wild all the time.
 - (b) And the smell of the animals they cared for.
- 7) **It may have been an honest living;**
 - (a) But it was work for those in the bottom of the Jewish society.
 - (b) Those who did the lowest paying job who could not find or do other work.
- 8) **You get the picture, we are often served by those who are doing minimum wage work;**
 - (a) And yet, if we are honest with ourselves many of us have looked down on these positions of service.
 - (b) Those who are perhaps doing what they can with an entry level position to build a resume.
 - (c) Or those who instead of begging or waiting for someone to provide for them are trying to do what they can to survive in this life maybe with two or three such jobs.
- 9) **It was not to kings, or religious leaders, or even the temple priests that God sent his angels to deliver the most important message of our history.**
 - (a) It was to those who many would look over that God sent His angels with the message that the Savior had come;

- (b) It was a message for everyone; but especially for those who knew they needed a Savior.
 - (c) It is often those who know are at the bottom of society who are the first to admit their need for help, their need for a Savior.
- 10) Let us see the story for ourselves with our scripture reading for today in **Luke 2:8-14.**

B) *Sermon Prayer*

C) (The Hook)

- 1) The Angel said they were "*bringing news of great joy.*"
- 2) **What is joy?**
 - (a) The dictionary says that Joy:
 - (i) is an intense feeling and ecstatic or exultant happiness.
 - (ii) is the expression or manifestation of such feeling; ecstasy.
 - (b) Is a source of pleasure or satisfaction.
 - (c) It is GREAT happiness.
- 3) **Joy is not just being in a state of happiness, it is great happiness involving our emotion.**
 - (a) So, if the angel was bringing news of "**GREAT JOY,**" then that was like saying GREAT, GREAT HAPPINESS.
 - (b) This is an intense feeling; one of those mountain top moments in life.
 - (c) For those of you familiar with Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs this is the top of the pinnacle in life for which we all strive in the moment of self satisfaction.
 - (d) The feeling when a great accomplishment has been achieved and you feel your are on top of the world.
- 4) **So why is it that so many people seem to be just the opposite at Christmas.**
 - (a) Instead of a JOY-Filled Christmas . . .
 - (b) They are having a blue Christmas.
- 5) **It is because as we go through life we often have things that bring us a sense of loss.**
 - (a) Perhaps they are feeling alone from loss of loved ones.
 - (b) Some have bad memories from bad things that have happened to them this time of year.
 - (c) Some are fully depressed; which is what happens when we become too focused on ourselves.
 - (d) Some may need medication and counseling to help them through this rough time in their life and there is no shame in that.
 - (e) Some are just struggling to survive in life and find it hard to be joyful with feelings of not having enough to give to others.
- 6) **However, Christmas is not about getting . . . it is about giving**
 - (a) It is not about being focused ourselves; *but on being focused on others.*
 - (b) We don't need a lot to give to others . . .
 - (c) *Perhaps the most precious gift of all is one we can all afford.*
- 7) **It is the giving of ourselves; the using our time & talent to help someone else.**
 - (a) Volunteering to help at a soup kitchen.
 - (b) Cleaning or doing something nice for someone.
 - (c) Sending a card to someone you know in need of a word of encouragement.
 - (d) Reading a story to children
 - (e) Or spending time at a nursing home reading or just being with them.
- 8) **Christmas is a time for joy; in fact I like to think that joy stands as a time for:**
 - (a) Jesus
 - (b) Others
 - (c) and You.

TS: So, what is Christmas about? . . .

II) Body: (Key Points)

A) Key Point #1: **Christmas is all about Jesus**

- 1) **Without Jesus there is no Hope.**
 - (a) There is nothing to save us from the wages of our sin; only death awaits us.
 - (b) There is no assurance we can be right with God if God did not send His Son.
- 2) **Without Jesus there is no Peace.**
 - (a) There is no chance for us achieving Peace with God.
 - (b) Or finding the Peace of God.
- 3) **Without Jesus there is no Joy.**
 - (a) There is nothing to be joy-filled about.
 - (b) There is no joy to be found in life.
- 4) **Without Jesus there is no Christmas.**
 - (a) The word Christmas came from the Catholics
 - (b) For to celebrate the birth of the Savior was known as the Christ – Mass
 - (c) Which eventually got shortened to Christmas.
 - (d) It was a celebration of the SON of God, Jesus come to earth to save people from their sins.

TS: But because of the great news of Jesus coming . . .

B) Key Point #2: **Christmas is about Joy**

- 1) **There is Joy because the Savior has come who will rescue God's people from their sins.**
 - (a) God sent His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall be saved.
 - (b) We give gifts to others because God gave us the greatest gift there was;
 - (c) that is the gift of eternal life for those who place their trust in Jesus.
 - (d) **This was because God So Loved the world He Gave . . .**
- 2) **We should have Joy because God can once again have fellowship with the people He created.**
 - (a) Our relationship with God was broken off when sin entered the picture.
 - (b) This is because God is Holy and cannot associate with SIN.
 - (c) Atonement needed to be made.
- 3) **God first gave the Ten Commandments to help His people avoid sin; but they could not keep it.**
 - (a) God gave the sacrifices to show His people the seriousness of Sin . . . **blood must be split . . .** someone or something must die.
 - (b) The world today wants to deny their sin and therefore their need for a savior.
- 4) **There is Joy because a miracle has happened and a child has been born who is both God and man.**
 - (a) God sent His Son; Jesus to die in our place.
 - (b) It was His blood on the Cross in place of ours.
 - (c) No longer is the animal sacrifice necessary.
- 5) **For the Jews who rejected that Jesus is their Savior; they still feel they need to sacrifice.**
 - (a) This is the reason they are making plans to once again build a temple in Jerusalem.
 - (b) Then when this is completed, the animal sacrifices will once again be reinstated.
 - (c) I believe that this could be one of the main reasons that the rest of the world wants to attack them at the battle of the last days described in the book Revelation.
- 6) **But there is Joy because God has kept His promise to send the Messiah.**
 - (a) God promised through His prophets hundreds of years before He sent Jesus . . . that a Messiah would come.
 - (b) God told Zachariah that his son would announce the coming of the Christ child.

- (c) God told Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would conceive a Son and his name would be Jesus.
- (d) God's Angel told Joseph in a dream that he was to take Mary to be his wife and that the son she was carrying would be named Jesus, because He would save his people from their sins.

TS: **But also . . .**

C) Key Point #3: **Christmas is About Love Come Down**

- 1) **We have discovered that Advent is about the gifts of God's Spirit:**
 - (a) It is **HOPE** - that expectant anticipation of knowing the Messiah will come.
 - (b) It is **PEACE** reminding us that Jesus came that we might have Peace with God and the Peace of God.
 - (c) It is **JOY** - the strong emotion of extreme happiness for our Savior has arrived.
 - (d) It is **LOVE** - the expression of God's caring for the world enough to send His one and only Son to restore our relationship with God.
- 2) **Our Advent Wreath has a White center Christ candle.**
 - (a) Representing Christ who has come as the light of the world.
 - (b) For Jesus is the light that shows us that which is true.
 - (c) Jesus said himself that "*I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:6)
 - (d) In the dark we cannot know the way to go; but in the light the path can be seen.
- 3) **Jesus' coming to earth was God's ultimate expression of LOVE.**
 - (a) John wrote in his first letter that "*God is Love*". (1 John 4:16)
 - (i) The very essence of God is Love;
 - (ii) Paul tells us that all that is Good comes from God.
 - (b) But John also said in that same verse "*. . . he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*"
- 4) **God has Loved us and shown us great Mercy; and so, we are to show that same kind of love towards others.**
 - (a) We may not always like what another person is doing;
 - (b) *but we can show them kindness and the Love of God.*
 - (c) Because God was merciful towards us in forgiving our Sins;
 - (d) *God wants us to forgive those who have wronged us.*

TS: **So, as we wrap up let us be reminded that . . .**

III) Conclusion (Life Application)

- A) **Joy is found in Jesus.**
 - 1) Vance Havener¹ said, "*There is something wrong with our Christianity when we have to beg most of our crowd to come to church to hear about it.*"
 - 2) Have you forgotten the joy of your salvation?
- B) **You see Sin is still a problem today even if the world denies it.**
 - 1) We are still sinners in need of a Savior.
 - 2) We cannot change ourselves; we cannot be good enough to earn our salvation;
 - 3) We cannot buy our salvation with earthly wealth.
 - 4) **The rich need Jesus just as much as the poor.**
 - (a) It is not just the shepherds of life that need a savior.
 - (b) Jesus' invitation is for all; and when we ask Jesus to come into our hearts and begin the process of making us into new creations . .
 - (c) We will experience JOY beyond belief.
 - (d) In fact the Angels said it is great joy which is an intense feeling of Joy.

C) **Neither can you or I Love as Jesus loves in our own strength;**

- 1) However we can when God's Spirit is lives in us . . .
- 2) It is not a love based on what we do . . .
- 3) *It is a love based on what God can do and on what Jesus did for us.*
- 4) **"God so love the world, that He gave His One and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life."** (John 3:16)
 - (a) Oh, what manner of love is this?
 - (b) How can we not be excited for the coming of our Lord and Savior?
 - (c) Jesus is also the light of the world who has come "*to show us the way, the truth and the life.*"
- 5) **And one day those who have asked Jesus to be thiir Lord look forward to when He will come again and take us to live at home with Him for all eternity.**
 - (a) Oh, what Hope . . .
 - (b) Oh, the Peace . . .
 - (c) Oh, the Joy . . .
 - (d) **Oh, what LOVE !**
- 6) **Thank you Jesus!**

IV) Invitation: **Let us Pray!**