

Christmas Eve, 2019 (Luke 2)

Christmas Eve is a time to celebrate beloved words from the Bible, *God's holy Word*. **God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not *perish*, but may have *everlasting life*. Indeed, God did not send his Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but in order that the whole world might be *saved* through him.**

The first verse is probably the best-known passage in the New Testament. The second verse expands its blessing: God sent his Son into the world not to *condemn* people, but to *save* them. *All* of them. All of *us*.

There are more beloved words, delivered by the Angel Gabriel: **Behold, I bring you *good news* of a great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord.**

“Gospel” means “good news.” *Good news*. If it's *really* “good news,” it should make a difference in your life. Some religions take the *good news of God in Jesus Christ* and turn it into a rule book on how to live your life in order to be “saved.” They beat people over the head with it until it's no longer *gospel*; it's no longer *good news*. There's no *joy* in it. And it's not faithful to the scriptures, which state plainly that *we can't DO anything to be saved!* We're saved only by the gift of grace and forgiveness from God.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes, on-line daily devotional writer, tells of visiting a men's prison where the inmates were mostly Hispanic. They sang Christmas carols in the gym. The visitors sang all the carols we sing at this season, so familiar from childhood, from radio and play lists.

The inmates listened quietly but few sang along. Then they got to *Feliz Navidad*—“happy Christmas”—and all the men belted it out with “gusto.” They *knew* that one, and it spoke to them *in their own language*.

The shepherds on the hillside heard the Angel Gabriel singing to them in their own language, and they went immediately to share the good news with everyone they encountered.

The *good news*, the mystery of Christmas, is that God has come—God has been *born*, to sing *our* song in *our* language. And our language isn’t perfect harmony in clear tones sung on key, in the right way and at the right time. The language of our hearts is broken, like the world we live in.

God—*Jesus*—was born into a world where people feared and hated, cheated and plotted; where they suffered from hunger and thirst, sickness and greed, jealousy, envy, prejudice and oppression. We call Jesus “Prince of Peace,” but his birth into that chaos didn’t bring an end to war and suffering.

Instead, *he* came to suffer *so that the world might find healing*. In Jesus, God himself was clothed with humanity, hidden in flesh and weakness. In this way he could experience the whole gamut of our existence: joy and laughter, celebration and love, as well as suffering, betrayal, physical pain, abandonment, and finally death.

The *good news of God in Jesus Christ* is the promise, not that we’ll never suffer because we’re Christians, but that Jesus will be with us in all our sufferings, knowing exactly how we feel.

The *good news of God in Jesus Christ* is that for every emptiness in our hearts and souls, there's a promise of healing and comfort from heaven.

The *good news of God in Jesus Christ* is that ***God was born***. God came to earth in baby Jesus, not to overwhelm us with his power, or with our sinfulness, shame, and guilt.

Jesus wasn't born to hobnob with the rich and famous. In all his dealings, he reached out to help and heal those who were outcast or on the fringes of "polite society": the last, the least, the little, the lonely, the lost. He came to meet us where we are, and to show us how to live *his* life of love, service, and faithful obedience. His life of being one with God, his Father and ours.

Because Jesus was born in a manger 2000 years ago, *your world* can be different. ***You matter*** to Someone—to God himself. You have infinite worth in the eyes and heart of God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. He values you so highly, he sent his own, his only Son into the world to turn the old order of things upside down.

Behold, I bring you good news of great joy for *all* people! For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Sadly, we *still* can hardly imagine how *very good* that good news was, and is. And not being able to imagine it makes it difficult to accept it as a fact of life—in fact, as the very *foundation* of life.

The *good news of God in Jesus Christ* is that we no longer have to fear death. When we die to *this* world, God has prepared a heavenly home for us that's *far better* than anything we've ever experienced here—more glorious than you can even begin to imagine.

The *good news of God in Jesus Christ* is that we no longer have to bear the guilt and shame of our sins. The consequences of our choices and actions are very real, but so is the complete forgiveness of every shameful thought, word, and deed.

Before we even bring our sins to God in repentance, he knows our regret and forgives all that we have done and left undone, all that we have said or failed to say. When we repent—when we stop moving in one direction and turn about to go another direction—then God wipes our sins away **as far as the east is from the west**. They're gone. We can leave them behind. And *then* imagine how much room you'll have in your heart for the enormous, eternal presence of that little baby, Jesus.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among those with whom he is well pleased.

May that peace be *yours*.