

Proclaimed
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Luke 2:4-19

Christmas will be different this year. That is the feeling and sentiment of COVID-19 refugees everywhere. It's not just a feeling it's a fact. In terms of how we normally celebrate this most wonderful season it WILL be different this year.

There was a story in the Wall Street Journal this week headlined: **'Covid Can't Steal Christmas': Americans Reinvent Holiday Traditions During Coronavirus.** One of the stories was about the small town of Poolesville, Md. 30 miles from DC. An Episcopal priest has marshaled the congregation to stage a drive-through Christmas pageant.

"Everybody in the town of 5,200 will get a map and a link to a Spotify playlist...the idea is to drive from one house to the next, progressing through the story, playing "Away in a Manger" and "We Three Kings" and ending at an outdoor, candlelit Nativity scene in front of the church...live-streamed on Facebook for the housebound (of course.)"
[Hope the winter weather didn't derail the plan.]

Christmas will be different this year! It's interesting that in most cases we crave new and different things. We have very little tolerance for the "same old same old." In general we are looking for everything to be fresh, new, and different. Christmas is the one season where we hunger for the way things have always been and crave familiar and special traditions.

Every time I am given the opportunity to teach a familiar passage like Luke chapter two, there is the tendency to fear that familiarity will breed boredom or tune-out. You know the passage so well you can hear it in your head in the voice of Linus from a Charlie Brown Christmas. A teacher has a tendency to try to find fresh material from this ancient story.

Our Lifeway lesson writers gave a great reminder to teachers: “[O]ur most profitable approach may not be to seek something new, but to be reminded of the value of this precious old story.” To that I said, AMEN!

Big Idea: This Christmas will be different, but the story of our Savior coming as a baby in a stable remains the same. More importantly, the good news that He came to bring salvation to mankind never changes or becomes outdated.

So this morning let’s not look for fresh angles on this familiar story. Instead let’s listen with fresh ears to the “*old, old, story of Jesus and his love.*” Let’s begin by reading our passage then we’ll unpack how to apply it to our hearts this week.

Luke 2:4–19 (ESV)

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds

told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

- The first seven verses report the circumstances God had orchestrated.
- Last week we quoted Micah 5:2, which stated that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Joseph a descendent of David's line would need a reason to be called to the city of his ancestors as Mary came to term.
- Joseph and the very pregnant Mary were compelled to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered for tax purposes. God used the Roman government to orchestrate specific fulfillment of prophecy.
- These verses are packed with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy:

“God had promised that the Saviour would be a human, not an angel (Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:16), and a Jew, not a Gentile (Gen. 12:1–3; Num. 24:17). He would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and the family of David (2 Sam. 7:1–17), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in Bethlehem, the city of David (Micah 5:2).”ⁱⁱ

- As God told Jeremiah: *“...I am watching over my word to perform it.”ⁱⁱⁱ*
- Verses 8-14 record the supernatural “news report” of the significance of this birth in a stable. It wasn't a proclamation to the prominent, it was good news shared first with the most humble of society: shepherds in a field.
- Why were shepherds God's choice for this first report? We can speculate.
- 2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) gives us some good insight: *“⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”*
- The Messiah came for everyone regardless of financial or social status.
- What better way to make that point than to give the first report to honest, humble shepherds? In this case, they were shocked shepherds.
- Again, an angel brought the news. This was good news and not something to fear. Good news of great joy. News of salvation!

- The angel was specific: “...born this day...a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” These titles specified the promised Messiah and emphasize to us that salvation only comes by accepting Christ as both Savior and Lord.
- This “birth announcement” identified the “heavenly paternity” of Jesus.
- Paul would later be inspired by the Holy Spirit to add more details:

Listen to the words of Colossians 1:15–22 (ESV)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

In Ephesians 1:7–10 (ESV) Paul continued:

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

- Those verses give us the full answer to the question: “What Child is this?”
- Luke 2:13: This news was so tremendous it called for MORE angels!
- “Host” means “army.” “*Here the army announces peace*” (Bengel).^{iv}

- This news was so tremendous that it called for a thousand-voice choir singing: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*
- That is the heart of the good news of this “old, old” salvation story.
- God’s salvation plan is first to glorify Him. “In the highest” did not mean He was distant; it meant He IS God over everything – Lord of All.
- This baby “Prince of Peace” (Is.9:6) came to bring “peace on earth.”
- This was a different kind of peace. This wasn’t peace between nations after a time of war. The Roman Empire had already accomplished the “Pax Romana” a 200 year time of relative peace between nations.
- The peace brought by the baby in the stable was not an absence of conflict between people, but peace between God and mankind. As Romans 5:1 (ESV) declares: ¹ *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- How do we know this isn’t just a “cease-fire” among people?
- In Matthew 10 Jesus told us: *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”*^v Following Christ can bring division even among family members.
- But we just heard that Jesus would bring peace. Is that a contradiction?
- It’s not a contradiction but a clarification. Jesus brings peace between God and mankind to those who trust Him as Savior and Lord. By His grace we are no longer in conflict with God. Also, His Holy Spirit enables us to have inner peace even in the midst of trials or persecution for serving Him.
- Sadly, the “Christmas card” version of this verse is that the Christ child brings a temporary feeling of peace and good will on Christmas Day before everyone goes back to the fighting the next day.
- The best translation of that verse is not *“goodwill to all men,”* but *“peace among those with whom he is pleased.”* Peace with God only comes to those who have pleased Him by trusting Christ as Savior and Lord.

- God came to earth as a humble baby in order to die, and then be resurrected so we can have peace with God and eternal life forever.
- That's the good news of the "old, old, story" that never grows old!
- The shepherds were obedient. They went quickly to see this baby for themselves and verse seventeen tells us: "they made known" what they had been told about this Holy Child. That's called sharing your faith!

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Christmas will be different this year; at least our celebrations will be.
- Christmas 2020 comes amid strife and despair across the world.
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was also in the midst of despair as he nursed his son Charley from his war wounds during the Civil War. While surrounded by the strife and loss of war, Longfellow wrote these words:

*And in despair I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men."*

- Those words could easily apply to Christmas of 2020.
- They are the words of a man who had almost lost hope; but then the bells of Christmas rang again and reminded him that the "old, old, story" of the baby in a stable had not changed:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men."^{iv}*

- Yes, Christmas will be different this year, but the story of Christmas never changes and the reality of what Christ did for us never grows old.

ⁱ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-cant-steal-christmas-celebrants-reinvent->

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 175). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Je 1:12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{iv} Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 270). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

^v *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mt 10:34–36). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{vi} https://hymnary.org/text/i_heard_the_bells_on_christmas_day