

## **St. Andrew's 4pm Family Christmas Service, Good News of Great Joy – We have a Savior!**

Merry Christmas! What a joy it is to be gathered together tonight—children and grandparents, friends and neighbors, people we know well and people we are just beginning to know. Christmas is one of those rare moments when we pause long enough to listen, to wonder, and maybe—even for a few minutes—to let our hearts rest.

Tonight, we are here to celebrate not just good news, but good news of great joy—the best news ever, and right on time.

Unto us is given a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. A Savior born of a woman, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a feeding trough in Bethlehem.

If you've had moments this year when things felt confusing, or scary, or overwhelming—or if you've felt joyful and grateful and amazed—or maybe a little bit of all of that at once—hear this: we have good news of great joy.

We have a Savior.

And tonight, we celebrate the astonishing fact of his birth—not with fireworks or fanfare, but with a baby, a family, and a story so simple and profound that children acted it out for us last Sunday, and adults spend a lifetime unwrapping and discovering what it means.

One of the most surprising parts of the Christmas story is *who* hears the good news first.

It is not kings or scholars or people in charge. It is shepherds.

Shepherds were ordinary people. They worked long hours. They slept outdoors. Their job was to watch sheep—making sure they didn't wander off, get lost, or hurt themselves. Shepherds didn't have fancy clothes or important titles. In fact, in Jesus' time, shepherds were often overlooked, ignored, or treated as unimportant.

And yet—this is who the angels choose. Not the people in a palace or a temple, but a field.

The angels appear to shepherds who are doing their everyday work, on an ordinary night. And suddenly, the sky fills with light, and the angels say, “Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news of great joy—for *all* the people.”

That’s an important fact of this night. The angels say this good news of great joy is not just for some people. Not just for important people. But for all people.

And the shepherds in reply *listen*. They don’t say, “is this a dream, I’m going back to sleep.” They don’t say, this sounds too strange or someone else will take care of it. Best of all, they don’t stay where they are in their fields. They go.

They leave their sheep. They walk into the dark. They ask questions. They knock on doors. They tell people what they’ve seen and heard—even though it probably sounds unbelievable.

And eventually, they arrive at a simple barn, where they find Mary and Joseph, and a baby lying in a manger.

Imagine that moment!

A group of tired shepherds. A young mother holding her newborn child. Animals shifting and breathing nearby. The peaceful sounds of a stable at rest.

And Luke tells us something very tender here. He tells us that when the shepherds share what the angels said, Mary takes comfort in their words.

Until that moment, Mary has trusted God—but she is also human. She is young. She is tired. She has just given birth under difficult circumstances. And then these strangers arrive, confirming what she had been told—that this child is holy, beloved, and sent by God.

Perhaps she thinks, *I wasn’t imagining this. I’m not alone. God really is with us. I’ve given birth to a savior.*

And what is the great joy of having a savior? It does not mean that life will suddenly be easy. The shepherds will still have to watch and protect their sheep. It does not mean that hard things won’t happen. It does not mean that we will never feel afraid, sad, or confused.

Christmas is not a promise that everything will be perfect.

What it *does* mean is this: God has chosen to be with us.

God comes into the world not as a superhero, not as a king on a throne, but as a baby who needs to be held. God comes into family life—with all its love and messiness. God comes into a world where people worry, and struggle, and try their best.

A Savior doesn't take us out of the world. A Savior walks with us *through* it.

When we are afraid, God is with us. When we feel small or overlooked, God is with us. When we are tired, or lonely, or unsure, God is with us.

That is why this news is such great joy. And, we have shepherds to thank for bringing us the news.

Shepherds were not powerful or famous, but they paid attention. They listened. They went to see. And then—they shared the story.

What if Christmas invites us to wonder: *Could we be shepherds too?*

Not shepherds of sheep—but shepherds of kindness. Shepherds making kindness loud. Shepherds of welcome. Shepherds of hope.

In modern times, perhaps being a shepherd would be noticing someone who feels left out or helping someone who is lost or struggling. A shepherd might be a kind or gentle presence when someone is scared or a shepherd is the one who bravely shows up, even when we don't have all the answers.

Shepherds don't fix everything but they stay close. They care. They keep watch.

And that is something each of us can manage. We can take care and we can do it bravely because we have a Savior who shows us how.

So tonight, hear the angel's words as if they are spoken just to you:

Do not be afraid.

You do not have to face the world alone. You do not have to have everything figured out. You do not have to carry every burden by yourself. We have a Savior.

A Savior - born in a barn. A Savior announced to shepherds. A Savior who brings light into the dark and peace into worried hearts.

May this Christmas be a moment of wonder for you. May it offer you a moment of rest. May this Christmas be a reminder that you are loved, you belong, and you are never alone.

And as you leave tonight—perhaps tired, perhaps joyful, perhaps holding many things at once—may you carry this good news with you:

Unto us is given a Savior. And that is good news of great joy—for all the people. Amen+