



Series: Advent: Season of Hope

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Text: Luke 2.8-20, Hope Changes You

Intro

Merry Christmas! If you are new to Mercy Church I just want to say welcome. It is the joy of our members here at Mercy to be a church for all people because we believe the gospel is for all people. And we are big at helping people take their next steps in following Jesus no matter where you are right now in your faith. In fact we'll kick off the new year with a really practical set of sermons all about what God has to say about pretty much every area of your life.

Today we are going to focus in on the nativity. After all its christmas! And at its core its a simple and profound scene - and with it comes Good news of great joy. So we are going to focus on the nativity. How many of you have seen the nativity meme's going around this year?

There is one in particular that is killing me. It's the one where its just **the silhouette of mary & joseph & the manger (PIC 1 SEE BENCH)** and the question is posed....Is this Mary & Joseph praying over their son in the manger....or two dinosaurs about to eat a table saw? And once you see that you really will never be able to look at it again.

Now at my house we've had a toy nativity for 15 years. Ever since our oldest son Zeke was born. A little one with plastic people called "little people." Know what I'm talking about? Well anyway, when Zeke was about 3 he was big into the movie CARS. You know with lightning mcqueen and mater and Doc Hudson. Well Doc Hudson for one reason or another had his heart. His true favorite even though McQueen was the main character. He had a little toy car of Doc Hudson that went everywhere with him. And little did we know this toy would prove to be the greatest sermon illustration of all time.

Because at Christmas, **Doc started showing up in the nativity.(PIC 2 SEE BENCH)** It was like you had all the animals and Mary & Joseph & Baby Jesus....and then Doc Hudson parked up in 1st century Bethlehem checking out what was going on. And we thought awww this is sweet. He's bringing his buddy Doc to see Jesus. He's a little evangelist...

But not really. In actuality Zeke was bringing the thing he loved most INTO the focal point of Christmas. And what began

as just bringing Doc Hudson into the picture, didn't stay that way. Eventually young Zeke, the brilliant & honest child that he was, would put Doc Hudson in the scene where he was in his heart.

See a couple of days later here is what we discovered. (PIC 3 SEE BENCH)

Doc Hudson was now in between Mary & Joseph. ON THE THRONE OF CHRISTMAS. And Baby Jesus was kicked out in the cold.

Now here's why it's the greatest illustration ever. Because we all do this. Zeke just had the innocence to depict it and the brilliance to depict it very clearly. Btw - since I've thrown my first born out into the cold on this illustration let me do him justice real quick - Zeke loves Jesus and is growing into a man of God I respect greatly.

As we join a bunch of shepherds looking at the nativity today I'm going to propose a simple response. The manger is Jesus' first earthly throne. But it also represents the throne of your life & mine. And so the response is for all of us & it's simple -

Put Jesus on the throne. Maybe for Christians it's to put him BACK & maybe for you who are new it's to consider why you should put him on the throne at all.

Now watch - **the shepherds hear the good news announced, then they go meet Jesus, then they go tell everybody.** And listen their path through Christmas is ours. Let's go into it.

First look at what the angel says to the shepherds: Some guys hanging out on 3rd shift. And then an angel appears? Of course they get scared. You get scared when your heat turns on in the middle of the night. Imagine an angel appearing to you. Angels are mighty warriors of light. So you'd be scared at first too. But look at what he says...

10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people:

He says don't be afraid but instead LOOK. the angels literal words: *Do not be fearing, be perceiving, for I am telling you the gospel.*

I'm here with the exact opposite kind of news. Good news of great joy! Hear it clearly.

because, this good news, will create great joy in those who *perceive* it, who understand it. all news evokes emotional responses right? And the more weighty the news, the more emotional the response. Like the panthers beat the falcons the other day - little happy dance. Hey! We finally got one! But what about news that the

scans come back all clear after years of fighting cancer? TEARS of JOY. Bigger the news, the greater the response.

Here is the greatest news of all, the gospel, the angel dropped on these fellas out in the pasture:

[11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

So this is our first response to christmas. To do what the angel says.

Hear the true gospel: Jesus came to save sinners he loves.

Just hear it. Before you can believe it you gotta hear it. I say the true gospel because the bible belt AND Christmas can all give you fuzzy unclear versions of the gospel. The news can get distorted or pieces left out in an attempt to present a message that feels like chicken soup for the soul instead of a critical news announcement your whole eternity depends on.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about. Listen to verse 14. Where the multitude of heavenly hosts praise God & think for a second if it ends how you expect:

14 Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!

There is an older version that became mainstream because it's a little easier to swallow. It says "peace on earth good will to men." And it made its way into charlie brown's christmas movie & so you remember it. That's a pretty clunky translation from 1611. The one we have here is more accurate to the original language and gets at the heart of the gospel.

The gospel is not the announcement of general peace on earth Like the absence of warfare. No it's about sinners finding peace with the God they've rebelled against. The gospel announcement the angels are saying is God's savior son is here to save you from the penalty of your sin. In fact God made a bunch of promises in the Old Testament that he would send a savior to save sinners and he would send him in exactly this way. The God who keeps all those promises does it because of his great love for you!

Sin, in its simplest form, is choosing your way over God's way. We all do it. Which is why the world feels broken. It's why relationships are messed up. It's why fear and pain and suffering are such a real part of life. If we lived the life God calls us to live, man we would flourish. And if we all did, all of us would flourish. Some of you need to hear there is a better life available for you on this earth. The good life of living God's way. I encourage you to come in January and discover what that life looks like.

But we all sin don't we. We do what we aren't supposed to? We think thoughts we shouldn't.

And the GOOD NEWS is that instead of YOU dying and spending eternity apart from God...God sent a savior! His own son! The angels are saying HE'S HERE! It's JESUS! You needed a savior, God promised he would send one. And christmas is the annual celebration of the church that the deepest longing of every heart has been met by God. He sent Jesus.

So the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem.

16 They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger.

Listen here's the second response to Christmas. It's seeing the nativity. This holy humble moment. For what it really is. The throne room of heaven come humbly to earth. The king of heaven in the humble form of a child in a humble manger. Lord of all, accessible to all. King of Kings available to shepherds.

And I believe this scene reflects the human heart. Remember the little car in the toy nativity set? See as you look in with the shepherds you have the opportunity here to do what they and the wise men from the east and mary & joseph & eventually the disciples all do - To put Jesus on the throne of your life.

Are you willing to admit that whatever is currently on the throne - that means what you think about, what you take everywhere with you, what you clutch really tightly...that's what's on the throne. And whatever that is may not be a bad thing. May be a good thing in the wrong spot. Which turns it into a bad thing. Like a spouse or the desire for a spouse - good thing. But when it begins to consume your life - he or she will never live up to the expectations you are setting. That's the spot made for Jesus. The call of Christmas is to move it out of the manger and put Christ there. And if you will, you'll find he will actually satisfy the deep longing of your soul. And you'll find the other things in your life, when serving him & his glory instead of you and yours, will function better as well. You need a savior to save you from sin & from yourself & your propensity to keep putting the wrong things on the throne. His

name is Jesus and he's come for you. Maybe Christian...the response for you is to put him back on the throne. Maybe he was there a long time ago or maybe you've unknowingly put him off to the side. He's still around but something else is on the throne. **Listen, kings only sit on thrones.** Put him on the throne he belongs in.

Now the last thing the shepherds do is celebrate. Watch this. 17 After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

Here is our last response to Christmas: **Go and Tell the good news to others**

They'd met God's savior. Announced to them. God, the savior, has come! So with joy...with praise on their lips...they returned. They went back to work. But totally changed. And when you understand the gospel...it changes you in such a way that you want to tell everyone. Who do you need to tell? Maybe you are that person who needs to hear. & Your friend brought you today on Christmas eve to hear. Or maybe there's a friend you need to go and tell. Christian, if you aren't telling...maybe you haven't looked enough into the manger. Maybe the good news isn't that good to us. If it was, I think it would be hard to contain. Maybe that's 2024 for us. Going &

Telling the great news of the gospel to people around us.
Inviting others to receive the savior of the world, we celebrate
at Christmas.

Prayer - I'm going to lead us in a time of prayer. As I do, our
worship teams at each campus are going to get in place and
after I close and say AMEN they are going to lead us in a
christmas hymn called "Angels we have heard on high." That
song is a way for us to sing the shepherds anthem. And our
team has chosen a version I really appreciate because what
you'll see in the lyrics is we'll sing the latin Gloria & In excelsis
deo...but then the english. GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!
Anyway they will come and lead us into that wonderful
celebration. In anticipation of that will you stand as I pray over
you?

PRAY - RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL.

Pic 1 -



Pic 2 -



Pic 3 -

