

Advent Lutheran Church
Newsflash: A Savior is Born!
December 24, 2024
Isaiah 9:2-7 and Luke 2:1-20

Greetings on this special evening when we gather to hear and respond to a birth announcement.

To begin, I wonder more generally about your experiences with birth announcements.

After all, I imagine that everyone here has – at least on one occasion – received an announcement that a baby has been born to someone who is dear to you. And many of us have received this kind of good news dozens of times.

Now that we live in the era of instant everything, we expect to receive this kind of good news quickly. And, we sometimes forget that there are people here this evening who were born in a prior century and some of those in a very different time – the time I call BI. That’s right, BI – Before Internet.

In the world before the internet people expected news to arrive via postal mail or to be printed in the newspaper. Personal news – like the birth of a baby to someone far away – might take weeks or even months to reach everyone.

Ordinary babies received this ordinary treatment. Could you imagine how special a baby born in the 1950s or 1960s would have needed to be for their birth to result in a newsflash? At most there were a handful of families famous enough that the birth of their child was news worthy of interrupt regularly scheduled television programming.

Tonight, we gather to celebrate the most memorable, and for many of us, the most important, birth announcement ever issued. It was issued in the time of Ceasar August and Quirinius – a time long before the internet.

In Luke's birth narrative he shifts quickly, telling us in one verse about Jesus being born before shifting in the next to deliver a birth announcement. And this is where the angels and shepherds appear.¹

Let's travel there now. Allow yourself to be transported back in time across the centuries to a place called Bethlehem. Join me in entering into the story as if we were there – present but lurking at a comfortable distance from it all. Imagine us gathered in a field not far from a bunch of smelly sheep and some shepherds.

We are stepping in to observe a mind-boggling moment. So, let's try to make sense of this one-of-a-kind birth announcement.

The shepherds were busy shepherding. These ordinary working-class folks were working. They were tending their sheep. They were minding their own business when a bunch of angels showed up out of nowhere.

And these angels did what angels do throughout Scripture when they appear to deliver a newsflash; they reassured the shepherds and anyone who may have been close enough to overhear – and, by this, I mean us.

The angels spoke from the bright light that surrounded them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."²

Hold on folks! The angels have arrived to interrupt all regularly scheduled shepherding activities. Whatever was happening has to wait. Life as we know it is paused until further notice.

And with that the angels continue their announcement: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."³

¹ Luke 2:7 to Luke 2:8.

² Luke 2:10b.

³ Luke 2:11.

It's happening! The world as we knew it has been forever changed. The angel just uttered words that are new to us and words that appear together nowhere else in Scripture. The first sentence of their birth announcement labels a newborn baby as Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

To say this is no ordinary baby is an understatement. In fact, my mind races to what this might mean and to other titles, especially a group of older titles found in the book of Isaiah. Titles that others will soon connect to the one who has just been born. He is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁴

In the moment there is no way we as onlookers or the shepherds as the intended recipients could have fully grasped the message the angels were delivering. While the first sentence was overwhelming, the entire message was life changing.

The angels continued, "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."⁵

Hold on! The angels are telling the shepherds that not only has this special baby been born, but that they are being invited to go and see for themselves? The shepherds? We all know they are hardly credible characters and their eye witness testimony isn't even admissible in court.

I'm sorry but this is just too much. And yet it there is more.

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."⁶

Finally, the first century version of a newsflash was over. The angel choir withdrew into heaven and things were oddly calm and quiet.

⁴ Isaiah 9:6.

⁵ Luke 2:11-12.

⁶ Luke 2:13-14.

But the shepherds were just getting started. They hurried to Bethlehem, moving at record-breaking speed. And there they found Mary and Joseph with baby Jesus lying in a manger.

The incredible words of the angel were confirmed. Or, in the words of one contemporary paraphrase of this passage, “seeing was believing.”⁷

The shepherds went from that place forever changed. They told everyone they met what the angels had said and shared what they themselves had seen.

The shepherds had gone from being the ones who received the birth announcement to the ones proclaiming it. God was doing what God has always done – using ordinary people to tell of God's extraordinary love.

Hold on! Our observation is ending and its time for us to travel back to the present, across the ages and into our pews and homes.

Once you are fully present in the here and now, look around. Yes, it's okay. This preacher is really telling you to turn around and see what's going on behind you and to look to your right and left and take it all in.

You are not alone:
Everyone heard what you heard. Everyone saw what you saw.

It's true: a Savior has been born for you.

Merry Christmas.

Amen.

⁷ Luke 2:17a, The Message.