

“Christmas Eve”
Luke 2:8-20
December 24, 2010

As I prepared for this night I found myself pondering the question raised by one familiar Christmas song “Do you hear what I hear?” And I know that the simple answer is ‘no’. Of course we do not hear the same things. Each of our lives are tainted by all of the individual issues that shape our lives ... All of the life experiences that are so very unique to one person alone. It is really incredible to think that every person here tonight is so unique. Everything, our thoughts, our feelings, how our brain translates what we see, smell, touch and hear All of this is unique to you. No two people, even the closest of identical twins have exactly the same experiences, thoughts or dreams. No, we do not hear the same things.

So I find myself wondering what you hear tonight. We have all heard the sounds of people gathering and happily greeting one another with ‘Merry Christmas’. We have all heard the same beautiful music and powerful words of scripture. But in it all, I wonder, what did you hear?

The music is so familiar and soothing. The familiar carols we can sing by heart and with great feeling. Some of you might well be able to quote much of the Gospel text from memory. The story is told and retold - the scripture concerning a decree that goes up from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be ‘enrolled’ strikes a familiar cord with many and there is a peacefulness simply in hearing it read again. But what did you hear? Did you hear what I heard?

I wish I knew exactly what God wants each of you to hear tonight. I would love to take the time to share the exact words with each of you that God wants you to hear. Unfortunately I do not know what that word is that God would speak to you. And yet God does want you to hear His word tonight.

The word to Mary was Do not be afraid God has chosen you as the instrument through who salvations will come.

To Joseph, God said, ‘do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

To Zachariah God said, do not be afraid ... Your wife will bear a son who will prepare the way for Jesus.

To shepherds in the fields God said, Do not be afraid, there is news of great joy Get up and go to Bethlehem and see.

The word is very individual There is of course, a unifying common theme. “Do not be afraid!” Do you hear that word of encouragement tonight?

No, I can not tell you exactly what it is that God want you to hear tonight. But like the shepherds we have been bid to come and see that word that God wants us to hear. Get up and go to Bethlehem and see the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger.

I have often wondered why God would choose to come as a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes. I have often wondered why this night is so important in telling the story of salvation. I have often wondered what God wants us to hear as we see this story played out around the world each Christmas Eve.

I found myself just thinking about the baby. Frankly, I have a hard time imagining anything more powerful than a helpless infant. {If there is a baby in the congregation lift it up before the people}. I really don’t know anything that has the power of a baby. Just bring your face close to one and virtually any face will be changed. No matter where you are in life, the

presence of a baby touches you so deeply that you simply have no choice but to smile. A baby, even if it cries, seems to be pure innocence. A baby is a proclamation of life ... And love ... And hopefulness.

I tried to really picture those Bethlehem shepherds Perhaps a little bundled up against the chill of the night air in Israel No doubt that they were dirty and smelled of sweat and sheep. I suspect that they were not all in good humor having pulled the night shift when they would have much preferred to be home with family and getting ready to get into their own bed for the night. It is likely that at least some of them were facing difficulties that were very personal - things that one shepherd just did not share with another tough old manly shepherd A fight with the wife, issues with the kids, financial stresses, too many projects to do at home. But there they all were Sitting around the night fire Or standing alone with their thoughts as they halfheartedly watched the flock. Certainly an angelic host praise God would get their attention. It would shake them awake from their own internal thoughts. Clearly they were left dazed and filled with wonder. But a baby melted their hearts.

I really suspect that when it is a baby, you don't really need other words. Look, Touch, Smell. 'The Word became flesh as a baby, full of grace and truth and we behold His glory.

What is God's Word for you this night in the birth of a baby? It is life hope peace joy love These are the Words of God delivered to you in a baby. "Do not be afraid!"

AMEN