

Dec. 11.11 Advent 3 Luke 2:8-18

LET'S GO SEE

“Come on down” comes the voice of the announcer on the game show ‘The Price is Right.’ “Come on down” as he yells out the name of the next contestant. Bob Barker had a grand time with that game and the audience. People whose name were called were hysterical with glee as they raised their hands, almost crushed people trying to get out of their seats as others screamed as they made their way to the front to make their bid on the next item or two. By the time they got to the front, they were almost out of breath. So much excitement. People thrilled to be called to “come on down.” What thrills you this morning? What fills your life with such joy?

Our choir continues to lead us on our journey of faith to “come on down” as well. But our names aren’t called so that we can be a contestant in a game show, but to come on down to Bethlehem and see what the shepherds saw on that first Christmas eve so that we can worship our Lord and Savior and give him thanks for coming to live among us. When the angels spoke of the birth of the Savior our choir sang, “O shepherds let’s go down, let’s go down, come on down. O shepherd’s let’s go down, down to Bethlehem.”

It’s with that kind of excitement that we enter this third week of Advent. We are getting closer to Christmas. We are getting closer to ending our shopping and seeing those gifts wrapped and placed under

the tree. Two weeks left. For those who procrastinate times running out. For careful planners who buy throughout the year, you can relax. One friend we have has all her shopping done by the end of June or July, no later than August, except maybe a last minute gift. Two weeks left. Two weeks to get those gifts bought and wrapped. Two weeks to get the tree up and whatever decorations you plan. And there is two weeks left in our journey of faith coming to Bethlehem to see the excitement that was created over 2,000 years ago. Two weeks left to prepare our hearts to receive the greatest gift that was ever given, God's Son for salvation. Yes, two weeks left to prepare to celebrate the birth of the King of kings, Lord of lords.

A few weeks ago many people went to downtown Springfield to see the Christmas parade and kids kept looking for their favorite person, Santa. I'm sure when they saw him there was excitement in their hearts as they waved to him, blew kisses, and hoped he would remember them this Christmas. Don't we sometimes wish we were kids again? Sometimes wouldn't it be nice to have the mystery of Christmas come alive on Christmas morning not knowing what is under the tree, or how much we have spent? Christmas through the eyes of a child, what a great thing.

Each year the church returns to Bethlehem for the Christmas story. We may not be as excited about it as we once were when we were kids, but the excitement of Christmas should be there... we should be excited knowing God loved us so much he gave us the gift of his son whose

birth we will soon celebrate. “Come on down” the announcer yells. “Let’s go down” the shepherds said, “Come on down to Bethlehem” our choir sang this morning. God invites, “Come on down and receive my son, my gift of love. Come on down and see the little baby lying in the manger. Come and worship, come and worship.”

Listen to the story as if it were the first time. Get excited about what happened in a field one day outside the city of Bethlehem. Be still and hear God’s voice...

Many years ago in a field outside of Bethlehem there were shepherds who finally got their flocks fed, watered and bedded down for the night. Some sat by the fire taking their turn watching over the flock making sure one didn’t wander off. Since it was a clear night they decided to rest underneath the open sky. Some chattered for awhile, others just looked at the wonderful sky looking at the stars God provided for them. Maybe some tried to count the stars, or find the Little Dipper, the Big Dipper or other star formations. The stars seemed brighter than they ever had before. It was a nice quiet night.

Then out of the dark starry sky came a light. That light became brighter and almost blinded them. Music seemed to be playing, voices could be heard singing. The shepherds sat up, cleared their eyes, looked at one another thinking what was happening. They were afraid at this moment as they got to their feet to check to make sure their herd had not been spooked. Then a loud voice came to them from above, “Fear not!”

The shepherds grabbed their weapons and became ready to defend each other and their flocks. Again the voice sounds out this time adding more words. ***“Fear not! For I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. You will find him in cloths lying in a manger.”***

It was hard not to be afraid. They had been trained not to fear in shepherds school. They learned David’s Psalm and memorized it for times like this when danger approached. *“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will not fear, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,”* they began to pray. But that voice seemed to bring words of assurance, not fear. “Fear not!” they were told. It wasn’t those words that grabbed their heart strings. It was the next ones. ***“For unto you this day is born a Savior, your Savior in the city of Bethlehem.”***

Then the shepherds heard the angelic choir sing words of worship, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”* The shepherds fell to their knees in the presence of the angels and their hearts felt strangely warmed. The light began to dim and the stars began to shine again. They looked at each other and the voices were gone, so was the light. Had they been dreaming? Was this for real? Did they see what they thought they saw? Could it be? One star remained shining ever so brightly that looked like a cross stretching from east to west, from heaven to the earth. The point toward the earth

seemed to be pointed to one place and one place only. It seemed to beckon them. They got up and looked around and one asked the other, “Did you see what I saw?” They all nodded. “Could it be true? Could it be the time? Could this be what we have heard about for years?” “Let’s go down to Bethlehem and see for ourselves.”

They were excited! They moved quickly through the night. They forgot about their flocks, but entrusted them to God’s care. They weren’t afraid anymore. They were compelled by the angels’ words to go see what just happened. Those words “Fear not!” rang in their heads as they followed the star to the city of Bethlehem. “Fear not! For your Savior has been born” they repeated over and over again. When they arrived there were no lights anywhere in any inn. When they got to the last inn on the outskirts of the town, from behind the inn they saw some light and could hear a woman singing a lullaby, “Away in a manger no crib for a bed the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.” The light was so bright surrounding the stable you could not miss it. Someone was moving about.. a man was sweeping the hay and trying to clean the stall the best he could. He had fixed a bed for their baby and the woman finished nursing and laid the child down to rest as the shepherds approached quietly. Their presence kind of startled Mary and Joseph. But the shepherds told their story of hearing the good news that a Savior had been born and for them to go and see. “Is this the baby?” they asked. Mary and Joseph smiled and said yes. Mary listened to every word and took them into her heart. The shepherds reached out to touch the crib in

which the baby lay, and a smile seemed to come from the baby, a smile that seemed to say to them, *'Yes, I'm God's son sent to set you and the whole world free.'* *They paused a little while to worship the baby and heard a voice deep within their hearts that said, "This is my beloved son. Listen to him, for he has come to bring salvation to all who believe. Go and tell the good news, that unto you a child has been born who is Christ the King."*

The shepherds returned to their flocks and perhaps throughout the city yelled the good news, *"Wake up! Wake up! God has sent us his son. Wake up! Wake up!"* they shouted as they knocked on the doors of the houses and inns. *"Come and see! Come and see the Christ. Come and see the Son of God, our Savior who has been born today."*

In the opening remarks of our cantata a few weeks ago the question was asked, "Have we lost the joy and excitement of the story?" Have we grown indifferent to its promise of life, love and peace?" I wonder! I wonder if the world has lost the excitement of the story. I wonder if Christians have lost the joy and excitement of it as well? Have we forgotten? Has the world forgotten the Good News?

One of our Christmas hymns tells us of that good news. *"Good Christian friends rejoice with heart and soul and voice, give ye heed to what we say; News, news! Jesus Christ is born today! Ox and ass before him bow, and he is in the manger now. Christ is born today. Christ is born today. Good Christian friends rejoice with heart and soul and*

voice; now ye need not fear the grave; News, news! Jesus Christ was born to save! Calls you one and calls you all to gain his everlasting hall. Christ was born to save, Christ was born to save.”

Don't you think we need to get excited about some good news these days? Aren't you tired of hearing how bad the economy is? Aren't you tired of reading how there are no jobs out there? Aren't we tired of hearing how other countries like Iran are developing weapons to destroy us? Aren't we tired of the news about murders, muggings, stealing, break-ins, rapes, sex scandals? "Fear not!" the angel said to the shepherds. "Don't be afraid for your Savior has been born. The one who will set you free and bring peace on earth." Isn't that the good news of the Bible? Of the Gospels? Jesus was born and lives among us. He was born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph, grew up to be a carpenter's son, began his ministry and preached, healed, died on a cross and rose again and lives in heaven with his Father and gave us the Holy Spirit to remind us he is always with us. "Fear not!" people. "Fear not!" God is with us. He has heard our cries. He knows our fears. He knows our anxieties. That's why he sent us his son.

Hear ye! Hear ye! the good news: 'Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see.' Hear ye more good news! 'When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou has taught me say, it is well, it is well, with my soul.'

This year's Advent music and sermons are focused on reminding us about the joy of that first Christmas. Christmas isn't about all the gifts that will be given on this day. It's about receiving the one gift of life. Christmas isn't about all the lights that shine for a week or two on each house with all the many decorations that can be mustered up, but about the Light that came into the world of darkness to bring salvation and hope.

The world needs to get excited about this. We should be excited about the fact that God loved us so much that he would not let us go on the way we were going but gave us the one that can transform our lives, bring us true joy, guide us in our thoughts, our times of struggles, and in our sadness'.

We sing hymns of joy at this time of year to help us remember these things. Even most Christmas TV shows, or movies lead us to a happy ending of peace and joy. One hymn we sing about his coming states, "O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the son of God appears. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee of Israel!"

Here is the good news for Israel and the rest of the world. **He has come! He has been born!** We rejoice for unto us a child has been given. Unto us a child was born who is Christ the Lord, Savior of the world.

So come on down. Come on down to Bethlehem to see the baby born just for you. Be as excited as those shepherds and go and tell others

you have found the real reason for the season, for you have found the Christ.

Yes, join the shepherds to come on down to Bethlehem. The choir sang, “when we saw the baby boy, we were filled with Heaven’s joy. When we went out, we joined to shout. “All glory to God in heaven, peace on earth, good will to men. Come, now to worship him, down to Bethlehem.”

Yes, come down to Bethlehem and kneel before Him who gives us grace upon grace not only for Christmas, but every day. God’s gift is the only one that you will never ever have to return. God’s love and salvation is forever and ever.

Hear ye the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart.