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IN A MESSAGE FOR ALL PEOPLE  
Isaiah 40:1-5 and Luke 2:10-11  
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I am sure all of you have noticed what I have noticed over the past few months. We have been getting a lot of bad news messages, especially about the economy. We keep getting warned that there will be more of them to come. We read about major companies laying off thousands of employees. We hear of the auto industry predicting doom and gloom. We might think it is all out there. Then we come to choir practice and one of our members has us praying for 12 employees just let go by his company. These are tough times with good news messages few and far between.

We cannot ignore what is happening to so many people throughout the world this morning. But neither can we ignore the fact that God keeps sending us good news messages even in the tough times. Heaven keeps touching earth. I wonder how many of you have received a good news message in the past few months? Maybe you have received one of these messages recently.

- You get a call. "The baby has been born!"
- Your stockbroker calls and says, "Guess what! Your portfolio just went up!" (Well, maybe not.)
- You get the call you have been waiting for for months. "You are hired!"
- You get a letter from the college you have applied to. "You have been accepted."
- The doctor's office leaves a message on your machine. All your tests came back negative. "Your tumor is benign."
- Someone you care about says, "I forgive you."
- Someone for the first time says, "I love you."
- The waiting room is hot and crowded. People sneezing all over the place. "The doctor will see you now."
- "The ruling on the field is confirmed. Touchdown!"
- "Mommy, I made up my bed all by myself."

What wonderful messages that I believe come from God! God has been at it a long time. Look at the incredible message in Isaiah 40. The people of Israel have been in captivity for many years in Babylon. Finally, the prophet Isaiah announces that their time of suffering has come to an end. "Comfort, O comfort my people," says the Lord. Imagine hearing after 70 years that you can now go home again.

In so many ways, heaven has always touched and keeps touching earth. That's what the angel does in Luke 2 when he says to the Shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night: "I am bringing you good news of great joy." This morning, I want us to look at two things that stand out for me in this message.

**First, the angel says it is a good news message “for all the people”.** In simplest terms, no one is excluded. No one is left out. Skin color, language, style of dress make no difference to God. What you have done. Where you have been. How you feel about your own worthiness. These make no difference to God. God has a good news message for you. It is a message that will rock your world.

I don't know if the shepherds realized the impact of these words. For them, “for all the people” meant “for all the Jews”. But these words also meant for all the Romans who were occupiers of their land. This message cuts across every line that separates and divides us. It is international in scope. It is super-national in scope. In these few words, the angel announces (warns) that the coming of Jesus is going to undo, knock down the barriers that we keep erecting among ourselves. If the shepherds had thought about it, they would have been startled by the implications. I don't know for sure, but I believe it would have been next to impossible for them to believe that God was interested in their enemies. It would have been hard for them to conceive that God's love could be so universal.

And yet, this is one of the revolutionary meanings of the birth of Jesus. Fifty years after his birth, the Apostle Paul summed it up this way. He writes in Galatians 3:28 that *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* And Christ is for everyone.

Let me tell you what this means for those who claim to be followers of Jesus. It means they live by a new standard. They refuse to judge people based on their looks. They welcome every stranger who comes along. They are never satisfied with the status quo. They love the diversity of people. They are always looking outward. They never tire of creating ways to reach the world with the good news message God has for all people.

It also means that followers of this baby born in a manger are missional by nature. This universality of God's love is what drove the Apostle Paul to travel throughout the Roman empire at great risk to himself to share this good news message. It is what drives us as a congregation to be missional in our thinking and planning. To be outwardly focused. To go where people are longing for some good news. We understand that following Jesus is not simply about sitting in worship. It is about growing and going in service. Discipleship begins with deciding to follow Jesus, and always leads to missions. Knowing the truth is not enough. Doing the truth is the only proof that Christ lives in us and we in him.

The angel's message is for all the people. **Secondly, going a little deeper, the angel announces the good news message. A savior has been born.**

Think about that for a moment. What could that possibly mean to the Shepherds? More than likely, they thought in terms of a messiah who was supposed to come and save all of Israel from their enemies, especially the hated Roman invaders.

They didn't get that kind of savior, a political-military leader. But notice something that comes closer to home for us. *This savior was not born simply to start a new religion*, and I am afraid that is what he has become to many who call themselves Christians. Many Christ-followers have turned into nothing much more than church-goers. As if the purpose in the birth of this savior was to start an institution alongside all the other institutions that exist. For some, keeping the institution going has become the measure of loyalty and commitment. Never mind that their lives have not changed. Never mind that they still have the same attitudes and behaviors they have always had.

The message was for all the people, *but it was also for the good of all the people*. And that could only mean that this savior came to save us from ourselves and for the good of God's creation.

What the shepherds could not have known, and maybe we forget sometimes, is that this baby-savior came to turn us into new beings for our own good. To do the spiritual heart-work we need. He came to turn the world into a different place.

One thing he does is to pack our lives with the possibility of new meaning, gives us a purpose bigger than me, myself, and I.

I think that is something all of us grow up wishing for. Even in our childhood play, we acted out greatness. Being a sheriff who cleans up the town. Being a movie star who wows the masses. Being a ballerina or a doctor or a teacher. Being something that makes a difference. Then too often we settle for something less. The vision of making a worthwhile impact gives way to stuff that trivializes our day to day walk. We get sucked in and under by the undertow of small issues and empty days. Where do our dreams go? How do we escape the feelings of wasted life and wasted time?

Long ago, God came to earth to show us the way. God lived in the flesh so that we might see and follow. God sent His Son Jesus for one purpose - to pump our hearts full of passion for what is possible. To free us from self-absorption and shortsightedness. To help us see ourselves and every person we meet as a potential world-changer. A life-giver. A joy-maker. To engage us in an adventure whose end is the peace, purpose, and promise of Jesus Christ, whose end is heaven on earth.

Get ready, you shepherds who are just doing your job watching over your sheep by night. God has a plan for the good of all the people, and you

are a part of His plan. My prayer for all of us is that this Christmas we will gain new vision for what God wants to do through our lives.

Let me suggest two questions for your meditation throughout this season.

What does Jesus need to save you from in yourself?  
Where does he want you to go with the message of good news?

If we come away with those questions considered and answered, it will be like heaven touching earth. And all the angels of heaven will sing with joy at your new birth.