

Christmas Eve Message 2022

It was a time of anxiety and restlessness among the people. They no longer enjoyed many of the freedoms they once had. The once proud nation in which they lived was a mere shadow of its former glory. Time seemed to just go by, and nothing ever got better. God had promised things would get better – but they didn't. And what's more, God hadn't been heard from in a very long time, or so it seemed.

But even during uncertain times there is always a bright story somewhere if you look for it. Isn't there? I believe there is. Let me tell you about a hope-filled, bright story. There was a couple whom it seemed had everything to look forward to in life. They were planning their wedding. They were well respected. They were happy and in love. But then it happened. One day the bride came to tell her fiancé that she was pregnant, and because he knew they were saving themselves for marriage, he knew the baby wasn't his. Their families were going to be disgraced. They would have to endure the public shame of it all.

Suddenly, in a moment, everything changed for them... their plans, hopes, their dreams were all gone. Or were they? They talked and prayed and prayed and talked. They felt God assuring them that He had a plan for them; They kept hearing God say, "it was going to be alright." They only needed to trust Him, and do exactly as He told them, no matter what people thought. What mattered was that they surrendered themselves completely to the God's will.

That couple, I'm sure you've guessed, was Mary and Joseph. And that was 2000 years ago. But it's not completely unlike many stories unfolding today.

You see, everything Mary and Joseph thought they knew about life, about God, about the world, it was all being challenged. Yet, there was the Angel of the Lord telling them it would be okay. Just hang on and listen to what I tell you.

In the last few years, just about everything we thought we knew about life and our world has been challenged and turned upside down. Everywhere you turn the nightly news is filling the world with stories of despair. The threat of war hangs in the air like a suspended bomb that could go off at any time.

For much of the last two years most of us were forced into an kind of isolation from family, friends, and work, even from church. We just woke up one day and the whole world changed, stricken with pandemic fear. Fear of touching things, of breathing out in the open air, of being in the company of others.

Just about everything we have been taught over the last few years of pandemic seemed to run counter to what we believed in our faith. A faith that taught us not to fear. A faith that taught us live in community with others, that no matter what we were not alone in this world. Yet, somehow, we ended up alone, shut in, not going to work or school, not even church.

Suddenly things seemed hopeless. Where was God in all of this, and why were we going through it? He seemed silent. Many are still trying to make some sense of all that's happened these last two years.

Throughout the course of history, there have been many times when humanity thought that God was silent, that He didn't care. In fact, generations have lived and died and never saw any change in their circumstances. They just tried to hang on to their faith, a faith that taught them there was a better world coming.

Tonight, as we gather on this holiest of nights, we hear the story of Christmas and we realize that all the things we've been afraid of, living in a world that feels lonely and where God seems distant and quiet, not knowing what the future holds; we realize that it was actually in an uncertain time, and **on a night like this** that Jesus was born. That hope was born into the world. God did bring his promise of salvation to the world in the fulness of His time, though generations had lived and died since first hearing those promises and never saw them fulfilled.

Amid their own lives being turned upside down, Mary and Joseph heard from God and believed His word. They chose to believe in God's plan for them, of God's promise to them. The Shepherds heard from God and believed His word. Wisemen from far away heard from God and believed His word.

On a night like this, I wonder if we are hearing God's word to us; what God is saying to us? His Word is true, His promises are sure. He cares that our world is hurting, that we are hurting, just as He has for every generation who have observed the birth of Jesus, as they celebrate the miracle of Christmas. And His word to us tonight is the same as it was to all generations before us: ***"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."***

...All people. The good news of Jesus was for all people, of all times, and in all places; that's you and me, right here... tonight!

I believe God wants to say to us, as He did to Mary and Joseph, "Don't fear. It's going to be alright. Just trust me and do as I tell you. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world. The rest of the world may not understand you, but know that I have a plan, a plan for you, and you can trust me I'm always at work in ways you cannot see."

My brothers and sisters, **on a night like this** God sent his only son into the world, that whosoever would believe in him, would not perish, but have eternal life... even though it may appear that everything is going wrong. Do you believe this? Jesus is still speaking to all who will hear. As we celebrate tonight and retell His story, He is speaking to our hearts. In a little while we will go home and forget about all the stress and anxiety that seems to permeate our world these days. We will give each other gifts as a sign of our love for one another, just as God gave to us the greatest gift, He could give on that first Christmas morn. The gift of His only son, born as the great hymn writer Charles Wesley wrote, "... that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth." So tonight, Let us believe His word, and let us, along with the angels, sing glory to the newborn king.