



# Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

## Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Eve

December 24, 2017

### So What Does it Mean to Believe in Jesus Christ?

Luke 2:1-21

In the name of Jesus Christ, the One who is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Amen!

I love every Sunday Church School Christmas Program I have ever seen. And I have seen a whole lot of them in these past years.

In years now long past, they were usually 'plays' created by church publishing houses. Little dramas that tied in the story of Jesus' birth.

A few years ago, we shifted to just letting the kids act out the story. I have seen many a small wise boy or shepherd girl upgrade to be Mary or Joseph. (I even recall one year when a shepherd girl graduated a year later to be one of the Wise-Girls!)

But, somehow, year after year, it's the angels that mark the power of the news that God really believes in us, cares for us, and powers us to believe and to live in Jesus Christ. As I like to say, "As if there were only one of us."

The story is simply powerful: Rome had a plan for taxation. Everyone needed to file; a carpenter from Nazareth and a young woman with a child due soon and he was soon delivered, a boy.

But, here is where the story moves beyond the expected pattern: back to the birth announcement... out of this world social media!

Angel of the Lord, glory of the Lord---light unimaginable. But, the message bore promise: "Don't be afraid, good news, all, ALL people!"

The child is God's reaching out to befriend all...a Savior, Messiah, Lord. But wait, a child. A child?! A mystery to be sure.

Cue the heavenly host..."God give the glory, the highest heaven one, who brings peace." And the shepherds turn into witnesses to draw others into the plan, but after they see for themselves.

And in a moment they saw the dynamic, earth renewing presence to bring God's reign to the world. Terrified late night keepers of sheep became the megaphone of the news that this God befriends ALL! And ALL who heard were amazed. A little like an upgrade anew as stinky shepherds proclaim the message of the angels.

Mary, Joseph, and the little boy were the launching pad of what brings us and the world into a time of worship and praise for the gift given.

And this year I ask, "What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ?" Or, "Who do you say that He is for you, for us today?"

We are a church gathered together. The setting where we are in mission as witnesses to the truth that God believes in us, sends us the One who is the loving presence of God, and calls us to Spirit empowered witness that this news means to change the course of our lives, our community and our world. All things, we hear, made new, brand new.

We live to share, with a sense of centered heart, mind, spirit and voice what it means that I know that God is the pathway to renewal---there are five touchstones:

1. The grace of God dawns for everyone.
2. That grace gives us living room (salvation) which is space to grow discipleFit to serve with humble lives filled with love, serene and convinced, and godly. (Remember Jesus' adult words? "I am with you always to the end of the earth!")
3. Hope rooted in our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Antidote to fear, anxiety, doubt, deficit thinking like "If we only had...." And centered because we know that IF GOD IS FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?
4. Here is the big deal. This God cares so much, loves so deeply and eternally, that the child born, full of grace and truth is our way into the truth that IS LIFE ~ FREED US FROM SIN, FROM THE POWER TO BE ONLY OUT FOR OURSELVES. IN GROWN DRAWN IN AND EGO DRIVEN TO THE CORE! Redeemed and made clear and clean.
5. A holy people...who confess the name and walk with each other day by day, in every way. That would be you and that would be me...sins forgiven, powered into forgiveness and love. Passionate people!

Here is the symbol, the trademark, key piece of "logo wear" for those who know that God secures the link to the forgiven life. THE CROSS OF CHRIST!

Your bulletin covers means to be your re-recruitment into the "Good Shepherd's Uber Sending Team. A manger, woodworked to hold the son of a carpenter, the star of light that is calling and guiding for all wise men, women, and children.

But, it is beneath the Cross of Jesus that we take our stand and our confession of faith is clear, we know our lives are future driven, mission forward without looking back. We are not a corporation, one more 501c3, social work center, we are the Body of Christ. Each of us, stewards of the gifts God has given to share.

I am often asked, especially in Advent days of giving, how is that the faith community you serve is so vibrant, passionate and caring? I usually just begin by saying, "Jesus." It is about His life, love, and presence until He comes again.

Our mission, in this present age, to re-gift the gift we have been given from the LOVE THAT WILL NEVER LET US GO!

If asked tomorrow, "What did you do last night? Where did you go? Who did you see?" What will you say?

May we be bold to say "I was with Jesus and those who are loved by God and who love one another?" Then, Might we become as John the Baptist, point the way to Jesus and invite them to "Come and See."

For that may become just what the world needs to set a path to the justice the world cries out for in our day. God bless and keep, Merry Christ-mas, happy HOLY-DAY, keep on be-living! Amen.