

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE - 2023

Intro

Mary

Power

Shepherds

Angels

Close

Theme: The Messiah is here – GOOD NEWS FOR EVERYONE – Jesus is worthy of praise!

Bonus: try to weave in personal reflection and story

Reminder: Greet the live stream in first service

Introduction (Brent) (2 min)(SLIDE of Bethlehem) WELCOME! Merry Christmas Eve to each and every one. Whether this is your first time here or you have been here for quite a while, or visiting with family or friends - **welcome home**. All are welcome here and it is our sincere hope you will feel at home here and consider us as your church family.

Your pastoral staff is very humbled to present the Christmas Eve message to you TODAY! My name is Brent Sinclair, Associate Pastor and joining me on stage is Rachel Garcia, Kids and Youth Pastor, Jill McDaniel, Media Minister and Serena Sinclair, Associate Pastor.

Gospel of Luke presents the birth of Jesus as the GOOD NEWS for everyone. That Good News is worthy of praise. Many people appearing in Luke's Gospel would be viewed as outcasts, outsiders or just plain folk. The story is set in a small insignificant place called Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) (*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf*). People are waiting expectantly for the coming of a Messiah. Today, each of us will present different perspectives on that seemingly silent night.

Mary (Rachel)(8min)

In this story of the birth of Jesus, I can't help but think about Mary and what she was experiencing.

She was heavily pregnant and having to travel many miles, up and down hills, most likely on a donkey.

When I was pregnant I had a hard time getting up and down from the couch, let alone traveling across the country on a donkey.

There's also something that happens at the end of pregnancy that's called Nesting.

This is when you are overcome with the desire to clean and prepare your home for your new baby.

This is often when moms are setting up the nursery and hanging up the tiny clothes and making sure the blankets are folded just right. They want to everything to be prepared.

For me this meant coming home from work and vacuuming the entire house every single day! And I have to admit it was a little obsessive because I also had to have the “vacuum lines” just right. It’s amazing what expecting a baby does to our minds!

Knowing this about myself got me thinking about Mary. She didn’t have the opportunity to prepare a nursery or get all of the necessary items packed up and ready for her precious baby.

She was travelling, probably in pain, and there was not even a room at the inn for her.

She had to Nest in the dark and dingy stable full of animals and instead of a bassinet, she had to lay her baby in a feeding trough.

Here’s the thing though, when you are giving birth to a baby, there comes a moment where your surroundings disappear.

It doesn’t matter where you are or who is with you, you just want to see your baby.

I imagine that when Jesus was born all Mary wanted was to hold Him in her arms.

We read in verse 7 that she wrapped Him snugly in strips of cloth, just as her fellow Israelites had probably done with their own babies.

A tradition that had been passed down through generations.

I wonder if at this moment of seeing the face of Jesus, the Son of God, that she thought back to the song of praise that she sang before He was conceived.

Luke 1:46-55

46“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

47How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

48For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,

and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

49For the Mighty One is holy,

and he has done great things for me.

50He shows mercy from generation to generation

to all who fear him.

51His mighty arm has done tremendous things!

He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

52He has brought down princes from their thrones

and exalted the humble.

53He has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away with empty hands.

54He has helped his servant Israel

and remembered to be merciful.

55For he made this promise to our ancestors,

to Abraham and his children forever.”

There is good reason for Mary to praise! Her son is the Messiah – the Savior of the World.

In these scriptures there is also no record of any complaints from Mary about her situation. She continually and obediently followed God and His Will for her life.

When we face discomfort or inconvenience we may think we are misreading God’s Will,
but when we follow Him we are not guaranteed comfortable lives.

What we are promised . . . is that even our discomfort and inconvenience have meaning in God’s plan.

And so, we can still do just as Mary and so many others have done, continue to put our faith and trust in God who sent His Son here for us.

The Influential (magi, ruling class) (Jill)(8min)

The Spirit of God is alive and moving! I don’t think we always do the best job of recognizing how He is moving – in us or in circumstances and situations around us.

(We do find things to complain about. Blame games to play.)

When it comes to making a difference or creating change, we look to people with power – politicians, people with lots of money, whoever has the most followers – *those* are the movers and shakers! Those are the people making changes in the world! Right? We're too little, or too busy, or don't have enough influence... We're not making the big differences in the world. But **God** levels our playing field and uses ordinary people doing ordinary things to change the world. **His** perspective is the one we need to live by. (Sometimes it takes looking back in order to see how He is leading us to what is ahead.)

Let's look at the beginning of Luke, chapter 2:

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. 2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. 4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. 5 He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

When we go through the Christmas story each year, we *marvel* that the Messiah would:

- Come as a baby
- Be born in some middle-of-nowhere town
- Be born in (maybe) a stable, among animals, placed in a feeding trough

The very fact that we are still marveling over how lowly this is over 2000 years later is an indicator that we still haven't caught on. Ordinary? Nothing special? Ordinary people doing ordinary things? We're still so caught up in cultural trappings that the whole concept of how God planned for things to be seems like a reach! We don't picture a ruler this way. We call Jesus our King, but who has the most pull in our lives? For those living in these early days of the Roman Empire, the real people of power would have been who we open with: Emperor Augustus! In the other gospels we read about King Herod, and the Magi – here they are! The power people! Even the innkeepers who turned away an expectant mother had more power than Mary and Joseph did. Who would we equate that to now? Today, we still have governors, and we also have CEOs, managers, presidents (company or country). These are the people in control, right? These are the people who "have the power."

So who had the real power in the Nativity story? 400 years prior, Micah prophesied that the salvation of Israel would come from Bethlehem – we would assume that would mean Bethlehem was **the** place to be, and that would be where the angel first came to Mary... but it wasn't. So how do we get there? Zoom out – the Spirit of God was working on a bigger scale in the lives of the leaders to accomplish His plan! Augustus is the first person we read about in Luke's account of the birth of Jesus, but he would never interact with or probably even hear the name of Jesus. He didn't meet the shepherds on their way in to meet the baby after receiving an angelic notification. He ruled over Jewish people in addition to many others. As with any leader, there were probably plenty of people who didn't care for his decisions. I like road trips. I actually enjoy driving. I would not appreciate being told I *had* to take a road trip, especially for tax purposes. I'm pretty sure most of us wouldn't, and I think we can assume there would have been a lot of grumbling about this census. In our day, if someone (like a job) mandates travel, we have

expectations when it comes to them arranging travel, lodging, food, etc. I would probably request an exception if I were pregnant. Bethlehem was about a 4-day walk from Nazareth, and Mary was far enough along that travel would not have been recommended by modern doctors. Joseph and Mary did not have those options.

Augustus would not have been a follower of YHWH. The magi probably weren't either. Any perspective they might have claimed on the coming of the Jewish Messiah would have been "too far removed." An emperor can only see so much. Yet his decisions were pivotal to accomplishing God's plan! In calling for this census, something he would have considered "just part of his job," he moves the story to the prophesied location. In God's story, the emperor was on a lower level than any human would have put him on. But God sees us all – from the highest levels of government or influence, to the lowest. He does not abide by earthly hierarchies. He sees the big picture and the tiny details. Following God and allowing His Spirit to work in and through us means that we get to be part of making Kingdom differences! Jesus invites us on a journey with Him. Will you follow and let the Holy Spirit be your guide? Be a part of sharing the Good News.

The Shepherds (Serena)(8min)

On a starlit night, rough and rowdy crew of shepherds gather round their fire

- Humble job, with status of a tax collector
- Dreaming, hoping, wondering
 - More herds, more pasture, water rights, less taxes
 - Ordinary men
 - Laughter, teasing, coarse humor
- Suddenly an Angel of the Lord appears before them: I bring you tidings of great joy for all people, for today in the city of David a Savior has been born, Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you, you will find him in a manger wrapped in swaddling cloth
- Angelic chorus lighting up the heavens singing: Glory to God in the highest and peace among those upon whom God's favor rests -- God's favor resting upon them?
- Brings us hope; God appears to ordinary people, in an ordinary place
- They waste no time. It's a foot race to Bethlehem -- they find baby Jesus lying in the manger.
- Enter the place where God's glory dwells -- kneel
- Gaze upon this tiny King remembering the prophecy of Isaiah: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is 9:6)
- This is the Messiah, the One they have prayed for, waited for: Counselor, Defender, Mediator, their Comforter.
- Shepherds filled with ecstatic joy -- rush out into the city to share the "Good News," a Savior has been born; He is Christ the LORD!
- God incarnate, wrapped in flesh, appearing to ordinary people in an ordinary place

That's what Jesus does:

- He shows up in ordinary places to ordinary people
- Where are you expecting to Jesus to show up? Single people, grandparents, parents
- God shows up everyday to ordinary people in ordinary places with “Good News.”

The Angel’s song (Brent)(8min)(SLIDE of Heavenly Host)

Remember what it is like to receive good news - really great news? Remember what that felt like? How did you release that happiness? How did you share it with those around you? I can recall the birth of our two daughters and with the first – unable to communicate – literally hyperventilating.

The gospel writer Luke records Mary’s song (the magnificent), Zacharias’ song and even Elizabeth’s song. All receiving great news and expressing it **in praise to God** in the form of a song. Now in Luke 2:8-14 we have the angels song.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 32 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 33 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 34 And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 35 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 “**Gloria in excelsis deo” glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill towards everyone.**

God’s heavenly host have a special part making big announcements. The Angel Gabriel broke over 400 years of silence from the Prophet Malachi until his visitation with Zachariah the priest and declare he would have a son named John to usher in the Messiah; It was the Angel Gabriel who proclaimed to Mary that she would bear a son, conceived of the Holy Spirit and his name would be **Jesus**.

So, imagine this, Almighty God calls a special staff meeting of All the Heavenly Host. The time has come for a big announcement - Make it BIG; make it Bright!! Light up the whole hemisphere – No, we are going to scale it down a bit. The BIG event will come in the future. Not Judea, not in the big city, not in the temple BUT just outside the City of David – to a bunch of shepherds.

So, you make the proclamation, then the rest of you join in and sing that song!

From the angel's perspective, not sure this made perfect sense. You see since the time God created his heavenly host, they have been wondering, waiting anticipating when the son of God would make an appearance on earth. Many recorded angel appearances in the Bible, all significant events (Gen 16, 19, 21, 31,32. Duet 33:2, Psalm 68:17, 1 Kings 19, Daniel 3, 6).

(Praise is what the angels do and they do this continually according to Scripture in a variety of circumstances (Job 38:7, Psalm 103:20, Luke 15:10). When angels are present in Scripture, often they are worshipping and praising God.

Now the wait is over and the anticipation that's been building for centuries is coming to pass. It was one of those clear nights with the stars beaming down- and then a great and magnificent party of epic proportions breaks out - proclaiming "glory to God and peace on earth"! Praise to the new born King! What a scene on this silent night- a party in the heavenly host. **Meanwhile** the rest of the town sleeps.

Where would you be in this story? Like the shepherds who dropped what they were doing to see and praise the new born King; **OR** and perhaps you are a villager, an innkeeper, a fellow traveler, merchant all caught up with the spectacle of the busy season - all pretty much oblivious to the story unfolding in the universe...out on the back lot. The news eventually got out - Would you have believed and joined the praise – or missed the great event?

This story continues. Will you get caught up in the business of this season, this day and miss the **opportunity to give our praise the new born King. The only proper response** to good news. On the eve of celebrating the birth of our Savior; how will you celebrate this time, what is the song of your heart? **What is your praise level today?**

Personal reflection slide on screenwith background keys and guitar continuing playing

You see -(SLIDE) Good news is worthy of praise. Jesus is GOOD NEWS and worthy of praise. Where is your praise today? As we reflect on this...

Invite up the rest of Worship Team on stage and build crescendo.

Tell the person next to you "JESUS IS GOOD NEWS AND WORTHY OF PRAISE" ...and the person on the other side of you...

You see this is THE STORY of the incarnation – "**God with us**" (**Emmanuel**) about a baby born in a manger. But baby Jesus will grow into a man who will lead us down a **way** to a wooden cross.

The **GOOD NEWS** is **the King of Heaven came down** to bear our sin on this old wooden rugged cross.

Hail to the **Prince of Peace** who has come down so that we may have second birth.

This is the Good NEWS - God and sinner reconciled!

The **GOOD NEWS** is God invites you, me – everyone into this reconciliation that only the Prince of Peace can offer. Believe this **GOOD NEWS** and surrender your life, your heart, all that is within you to the **KING** so you too will receive **HIS** Peace.

Jesus is the GOOD News and worthy of praise.

And now Let us stand and sing and give glory and praise to the King!

Benediction – Brent(1min)

In the gospel of John chapter 8 verse 12 Jesus said I am the light of the world. He that follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Then in Matt 5:14 He told his disciples that they were the light of the world. Now, now I know we are all getting ready to blow the flame of this candle out BUT let this sacred occasion remind us to let this flame continue to burn bright in our hearts as we go out from this place and be a light for our families, our friends our community.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit