

Hope: An Advent/Christmas Journey

Next Steps 12-13-20

New Life in Christ

Welcome Icebreaker - [What is the best news you've ever heard or shared with someone?](#)

Introduction

Amazon packages are all over the neighborhood. It feels like everyone's receiving gifts right now, yet none of them contain the ultimate gift. We are getting ready for the gift of Jesus; the gift that brings Good News, eternal life and ultimate joy.

Discussion

Shepherds were considered unwelcomed in ancient Israel. They lived in the fields, surrounded by sheep, so they were unpleasant to be around. They were also considered to be thieves because of their transient lifestyle. But it was to this group of people that the angels make the first proclamation of Jesus' birth. From the world's perspective, shepherds had no reason to be joyful.

1. [How would this outcast group of people receive the Good News of Great Joy?](#)
2. [What does the announcement of Jesus' birth to this group signal about the Savior who is to be born?](#)

Fear. Not. Throughout Scripture, when an angel appears, their first words are usually, 'Fear not!' While fear is a God-given emotion that keeps us alive in dangerous situations, fear is often paralyzing. I would say that the shepherds were paralyzed in the moment that the angels appeared with Good News. Their fears are certainly understandable. While the angels had Good News, the shepherds had no way of conceiving this miracle that they beheld. We all have doubts about responding to Good News, especially when it places us in a fearful situation. But this is where we must be willing to step out boldly and trust that when God speaks, God provides.

"But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid."

(Luke 2:10)

3. [2020 has certainly given each of us moments of fear. How has your trust in God grown when you've taken a step in faith?](#)
4. [Fears are contextual. What causes one person to be afraid may not bring fear to another person. How does seeing a faithful response in another person strengthen you to overcome a fear in your life?](#)

Angel visitations are often the catalyst for action. After the angels departed from the shepherds, they went to see the newborn Savior. Upon seeing Jesus, the shepherds 'spread the word.' After Mary's visitation with the angel who announced her role in bringing salvation to the world, Mary immediately traveled to her cousin Elizabeth's house. Mary and Elizabeth both played significant roles in bringing God's news of salvation. They chose to act upon the news they received.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

5. [When you receive Good News, what is your initial response? Do you spring into action? Do you seek to get the facts and discern the steps? \(There is not a right or wrong answer.\)](#)
6. [When others confirm the Good News that we are acting upon, what does their response do to you?](#)

Fear often blinds us to the blessings that are occurring in front of us. This could have certainly been true in the uncharted territory of 2020. Fear has a way of making us question each step, even after we've taken them. For Zechariah, his questions may have caused him to miss the blessing right in front of him. And at times, it is easy for us to miss the blessing in front of us because of fear and questions.

"Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.

Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth."

(Luke 1:13-14)

7. [How do our fears keep us from experiencing the blessings of the moment? Can you name a blessing that you nearly missed because you were looking at something else?](#)

8. The birth of Zechariah and Elizabeth's son, John, would signal the Good News of salvation for the world. We often fail to see our small miracle as a part of God's larger plan. How can we see our act of faith as a part of the 'big picture?'

The birth of Jesus brings Good News for all people. The shepherds were the least likely to be the first to hear the Good News, but the fact they did reminds all of us that Jesus came for everyone. The joy that Jesus brought to the shepherds is the same joy that we can experience today. Our lives are transformed by the new life that comes by faith in Jesus Christ. Like the shepherds, we are able to announce the joyous Good News to those we meet each day.

*Good news that will cause great joy for all the people.
(Luke 2:10)*

9. How does the Good News of Jesus' birth bring joy to those who are often considered outcasts in our world?
10. How will you take a step of faith to share the Good News with those who need joy?

Prayer Journal Entry

- Each day write one experience of joy. Was it a surprise? Who shared the joy with you? How does this experience of joy cause you to share the Good News of Jesus with others?

Soul-Check/Transformation Question

- During the last several months, finding a reason to rejoice has often been difficult. How did the moments of joy you did experience provide hope for better days ahead?