

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Christmas Eve
December 24, 2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, I come before you tonight.

I come before you tonight through your computer screen why? So that I might share with you some good news.

Yes, I bring you good news this evening, Friends.

News that we have needed to hear.

News that we have been longing to hear.

News that has been promised from long ago.

News that will bolster our faith. News that will uplift our spirits. News that will gladden our hearts.

PAUSE

Now, some of you are wondering, “What is this good news of which you speak, Pastor?”

What is this good news you have for us?

Is it the good news that you have doses of a vaccine to distribute? That we can drive up to the door of the Church tomorrow and get our shot?

Oh, how I wish it were the case. But, no, that is not the good news I bring.

Well then, what is it, Pastor?

What is this good news you bring?

Is it the good news that you are handing out stimulus checks, that our society is rebounding economically, that people are beginning to get back to work?

Is that your good news?

No, I am afraid not. Neither is that the good news I bring.

Then what, Pastor? What is this good news?

Oh, is it the good news that after this year of racial reckoning, you can finally announce to us the end of racial inequality and of bigotry?

No, neither is that the good news I bring.

Well then, what, Pastor? What is this good news you want to share?

Please tell us, because we could all use a little good news right about now.

PAUSE

Here then is the good news I bring to you... Dear Friends, TO YOU a Savior has been born, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Yes, TO YOU a Savior has been born, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Let me say it again, TO YOU a Savior has been born, and his name is Jesus.

This is the good news I share.

This is why I come before you tonight.

And it is this good news that has been repeated over and over again down through the ages ever since the angel of the Lord came from heaven above and appeared to the shepherds who were watching their flocks by night.

Yes, long ago, God had set in motion certain events.

A census was to be taken.

And all the families of the Roman Empire were to register in their home town.

And a young couple, Mary and Joseph, returned to Joseph's ancestral home of Bethlehem.

And because there were many people who had travelled to Bethlehem as well, there was no place for Mary and Joseph in the inn.

And so they made themselves comfortable in a stable among animals.

And Mary, who was pregnant with child, delivered her son in that stable.

And it was then that an angel of the Lord appeared to some shepherds in the field and said, "Do not be afraid, for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: TO YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord."

The angel of God was the first to bring this good news.

And this is the good news I bring to you again tonight.

PAUSE

Now, you might be saying to yourself, “So what?”

You might be whispering under your breath, “Big deal.”

You might be sitting there at home thinking, “I’d rather have a dose of vaccine, or word of an economic recovery, or an end to racial inequality.”

That would be good news.

But the news of a Savior born 2000 years ago.

What difference could that possibly make in light of the challenges our world is facing right now?

PAUSE

If these are the thoughts that are going through your head, you are not alone this Christmas Eve.

I, too, had been wondering this myself.

I had been wondering what is really the good news of Christmas this year.

After all our world has been experiencing great suffering.

After all, people have lost loved ones, people have lost their jobs, people have lost hope.

And even our usual celebration of Christmas is anything but usual this year.

I am here leading worship in all but empty sanctuary.

And you are sitting there in your home watching this service.

We can’t get together in person like we would like to sing our favorite beloved carols on Christmas Eve.

We can’t get together in person to light candles and experience that powerful sense of peace in that moment.

And our gatherings tomorrow may be anything but normal.

Many of us may just be staying put, as opposed to getting together with loved ones.

To be sure, the song “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” has new meaning this year.

Yes, I'll Be Home for Christmas and New Year's, and Valentine's Day, and may be even Memorial Day, for all I know.

What is then the good news of Christmas this year?

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, I am not ashamed to tell you.

Yes I am not ashamed to tell you that I had struggled mightily with this question this year.

And I had prayed to God to provide some insight regarding the answer to that question.

What really is the good news of Christmas this year?

PAUSE

But that is when I returned to the simple message from the angel of the Lord.

TO YOU a Savior has been born, who the Messiah, the Lord.

And, I want to tell you the great revelation I had this year about that good news from the angel.

I want to tell you about the lightbulb that went on in my head about the good news, to which I said, "Yes, that's it. That's the good news."

Yes, I need to tell you of the breakthrough I had, which came to me when I was thinking about those little gift tags we put on our Christmas gifts.

We know the ones. "To: Such-and-Such, From: Such-and Such."

To: Billy, From: Santa. To: Sally, From: Santa.

To: Cindy, From: Mom and Dad. To: Johnny, From: Mom and Dad.

To: Kenny, From: Aunt Henrietta. To: Lilly, From: Uncle Elmer.

Those little gift tags are the key to understanding the good news of Christmas this year, and every year.

You see, Friends, the angel tells the shepherds and really tells us, too, "TO YOU is born a Savior."

It is as if the angel attached one of those gift tags to a big box of Jesus, and on that gift tag were the words, "To: The World, From: God. TO THE WORLD, FROM GOD."

TO YOU is born the Savior. TO YOU is born the Savior. TO YOU is born the Savior.

To put it another way, Friends, Christmas is a strong reminder that God is for us.

God is for us. TO YOU is born a Savior.

God is for us and has always been for us.

God made this world because God is for us.

God provides food and drink from the bounty of the earth because God is for us.

God gives us people in our lives to love, and who love us, because God is for us.

God makes the day, the sun to shine, the clouds to rain, and the seasons to change, because God is for us.

God gives scientists brains to create a vaccine, because God is for us.

God gives economists the know-how to restore the economy, because God is for us.

God provides passion in people to heal the racial divide, because God is for us.

God is in our corner. God is on our side. God is in our camp.

God is for us, for you and for me, and for all people. And so, TO YOU is born a Savior.

Christmas is a reminder that in many and in various ways God is always for us. But the gift of the Christ child is the most powerful image of all that God is for us, because at Christmas God comes to be among us, and ultimately to die for us that we may have hope.

God is for us, but not just for us, but for those who are in the most desperate of need.

God is for those mourning the loss of loved ones from COVID.

And God is for those struggling financially because of the pandemic.

And God is for those who experience racial injustice, and for those who experience injustice of any kind.

And God is for the homeless individual.

And God is for the abused spouse.

And God is for the addict.

And God is for the destitute, the lonely, the scared, and the forlorn.

God is for them, and God is for us.

And if God is for all of us, who, WHO can be against us.

Yes, when you are unwrapping presents tomorrow, and you look at those little gifts tags and read off “To Such-and-Such From Such-and-Such,” remember that everything you are enjoying on Christmas Day—the presents, food, loved ones, your health, your home, so on and so forth—remember that those blessings and all of life’s blessings are God’s gift to you, the result of God being for you.

It is all for you, from our good and gracious God.

God is for us, and so we indeed have tremendous hope.

Yes, God is always for us, Christmas just brings that truth into sharp focus, with the words, “TO YOU is born a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.”

“To you...from God.”

PAUSE

But if indeed God is for us, we may be prone to wondering, “Why are there people who suffer in the world, especially during these times of pandemic, and economic hardship, and racial injustice, and well, you name it...”

If indeed God is for us, why do people suffer...

Why isn’t God doing something about it?

To which, God says to us, “I did do something. I made everyone of you.”

PAUSE

You see, Friends, if God is truly for all people, well then, God even made us for the other, for our neighbor, for the person in need.

If God is truly for all people, well then, the gift tag attached to our person reads, ‘To: My Neighbor, From: God.’”

If God is truly for all people, well then, we can’t just wonder why some people suffer while we are blessed.

If God truly is for all people, well then, we are for all people.

If God is truly for all people, we are the good news for one another.

Yes, by the grace of God in his Son Jesus Christ, we ourselves are also part of the good news of Christmas in this most difficult and challenging of years.

We ourselves are part of that good news that God is for us.

So, Friends, that is the good news I bring to you this evening.

And this is the good news God brought to the world long ago.

God has given us a Savior, and God has given the human family the blessing then of understanding what we are to be for each other, through the example of Jesus.

And if we as human beings can come to truly live for each other, as God has lived for us in Jesus, well then Christmas will not just be a holiday we celebrate, but it will be the very way the world conducts itself, for one another.

Merry Christmas, Friends. TO YOU, a Savior is born, who is the Messiah, the Lord.