

#1 – THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS' BIRTH (Matt Davis)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday's message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Luke 2:8-12 [but read all of vv.1-24] (NIVUK)

... there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news** that will cause **great joy** for **all the people**. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

- 1. Good News.** We constantly hear bad news, sad news, and fake news; news to amaze, amuse, and anger us, once it was to keep us buying papers, but now, driven by algorithms designed to maximise outrage and keep us clicking on social media. But Good News brings joy – and this is what the angel announces¹ to the shepherds: ⁶ ... 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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end (Isaiah 96-7).

After 400 hundred 'silent years' the time of the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel has come. Good news: Messiah is here! *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).*

 - What is the worst news you can remember hearing? How did it make you feel?
 - What is the best news you have ever heard? How did it change your life?
- 2. Great Joy.** Although the text never mentions this, it is widely believed that the Bethlehem shepherds were caring for sheep destined for Temple sacrifice. "When a lamb was born, the temple shepherds would carefully examine him to see if he had any blemishes. If that lamb was without spot, they would wrap him in cloth strips... and lay Him in a stone manger, filled with straw. Suddenly, heaven announces that the new-born Messiah would be found 'wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' Imagine what that said to them. The new-born Messiah was, in a sense, a lamb. A spotless lamb. To be sacrificed."² Thirty years later, John the Baptist would introduce Jesus by saying, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29). The message to these shepherds-on-the-night-shift, was 'God hasn't forgotten you. You may not feel valued and important, but here is a sign... a sign that will speak to specifically to you, more than to anyone else, to let you know that God is here for you!' They were terrified, but terror turned to joy! *'the kingdom of God is... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Romans 14:17).*

 - Have you ever started out being terrified by something which turned out better than you could have ever imagined?
 - Have you ever had a sense that you had been forgotten? Ignored by someone you wanted to notice? Ignored by God? How does that make you feel?
 - Who do we not notice? Who have we forgotten?
- 3. For All People.** This is a message for all people, but the first to hear were ordinary working men, oppressed by a political system that afforded them no advantages. The Messianic kingdom would turn everything around, just as Mary had prophesied: *'He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.'* (Luke 1:52-53)

 - Who are 'all the people' to whom we could tell good news this Advent season?

¹ The Greek text uses the word *euangelizomai*, meaning 'I announce good news to you', or, quite literally, 'I evangelize you'! Since the same root word is also translated, 'gospel'. It isn't great English, but one might even translate it as, 'I gospel you great joy'!

² <https://hutchcraft.com/blogs/ron-hutchcrafts-blogs/worth/what-linus-and-i-missed-in-the-manger>