

"The Foggy Fringe"

Christmas Eve - December 24, 2017

Scripture: Luke 2: 1-20

¹ In those days, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

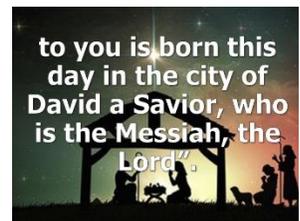
⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



Tonight, we gather to celebrate the culmination of the Christmas story as we welcome the birth of Jesus. Over the four Sundays of Advent, we have been walking with John the Baptist, Elizabeth, and Mary as we continued to draw ever nearer to this night. These familiar characters converge tonight on this one scene as we gather to pay honor to the Christ child. We saw how each of these people experienced God in a powerful and wonderful way. Our journey tonight begins with Mary and Joseph, as they take a long trip to be counted in the census that has been ordered by the Emperor. A very pregnant Mary and her husband Joseph trek the 107 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Joseph walked the 36-hour trip while Mary rode on a donkey. Moms in the crowd – can you imagine riding a donkey for 36 hours over the course of three days in the ninth month of your pregnancy? Welcome to Mary’s world. But Mary and Joseph are not the only characters in our story traveling. I invite you to mentally join us tonight as we travel to the manger, to the birthplace of the Savior of the world. Let us pray.

God often calls us to journey with Him, to step out for our faith. In our passage from Luke, this is precisely what we see happening. Mary and Joseph are the first to travel, but soon the angels and shepherds are also on the move. Luke tells us that the shepherds were out in the fields, doing what shepherds do – watching their flock. Then suddenly the angel appears and tells these frightened shepherds, *"Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord"*. The angel comes and brings good news. Today the Savior has been born in Bethlehem! To reinforce the message of Gabriel, a host of angels appears and praises God, singing, *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors"*! It is quite the scene and it prompts these shepherds to travel as well. The shepherds decide to leave their flocks out in the field and to travel to Bethlehem to see what has taken place.

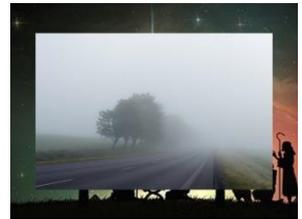


Our passage does not talk about this, but it is important for us to note how the shepherds were stepping out in faith. They were with the sheep out in the fields for a reason. Sheep need to be watched and sheep need to be protected during the night. It was their job to stay with the sheep and to perform these roles. But these shepherds allowed God to speak into their hearts and they choose to respond to this good news by going to see the Savior. It is a step of faith. It is leaving the comfortable and familiar and safe of the field to see where God might lead them. It is stepping out onto the fringes to see where God might take them.

These shepherds hear the message from God's angel and they head for the manger. They are risking all to encounter what God has done. If we were in their place, would you and I do the same thing? Think about it. It's Thursday, December 28th and you are back at work. Mid-afternoon you suddenly have a visit from the angel Gabriel. He tells you that something amazing is happening in Clearfield. Dozens and dozens and dozens of other angels appear and sing, "*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors*"! It appears that God is at work again. Would you walk right off the job and travel out to Clearfield to see just what God is up to? Would you? This is what the shepherds did that night.

The shepherds see the baby Jesus and they share with Mary and Joseph what the angel had said about the child and what the heavenly host proclaimed. Mary and Joseph were both amazed. The shepherds return to their fields, glorifying and praising God for what they had seen. Mary and Joseph and the angels and shepherds are not the only ones who will travel as a part of the story. Soon enough the wise men will see the star and will begin their long journey to a distant and unknown land to discover what God is trying to reveal to them. These wise men also step out in faith, leaving home behind to go to an unknown and unexpected place, eventually to find the Messiah. They too will praise and worship and leave the scene glorifying God for what He has done.

All of our characters in the Christmas story leave the familiar and logical to travel to the far away and unknown. Last August, some of our middle school youth went with me to Denver on a mission trip. That was a step of faith for those young ladies who ventured where God was leading. As we headed home, it was sunny and bright and we were just cruising along 44. It was a perfectly normal summer afternoon. We were driving along, chatting about the experiences we had on the trip. It was just beautiful outside. But suddenly we came up over a hill and there was this thick fog covering the landscape. Just west of Winner, we encountered some really thick fog. Perhaps some of you encountered this fog as well. The beautiful, bright sunny day suddenly became dreary and cool and our way forward was unclear. The fog was quite thick, covering and wrapping itself around everything and everyone. At that point, we could have stopped and waited for the fog to lift. Or we could have turned around and traveled a different route from Mission to Winner. Or we could move forward. As we slowed to a crawl and crept along the highway, soon enough we began to wonder when the fog would lift, when we could return to what we had known just moments before. After what seemed like a long time, we came upon the fringe of the fog and could again see the bright and sunny day that lay just ahead. And just like that, we suddenly had a whole new view.



The Christmas story invites us to travel to the fringes, to leave the comfortable, to consider the possibilities, to maybe see in a whole new way. A very pregnant couple ventured north,

leaving the comforts of home, trusting in God to see them through. The frightened shepherds heard the proclamation of good news from the angel and stepped away from the routine and into the unknown to experience what God had in store for them. The wise men sensed that God was at work and followed a star to a distant land to encounter the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus left the confines of heaven and came to earth as a baby, born of very human parents into a world with plenty of brokenness and pain, but also healthy doses of love and compassion. Jesus never shied away from the unfamiliar or the uncomfortable – He welcomed one and all and sought to be a humble servant to everyone He encountered. He met each person right where they were at and ministered to their needs right then and there. But Jesus did not meet the outcast or the lost or the broken in the temple. He met them out there in the world, often finding them out there on the fringes of society. Jesus trusted fully in God and went wherever God led Him. Jesus invites us to join Him on this journey as well, taking our faith out there, into the world. In the characters in the Christmas story and in the example set by Jesus himself, we see what faith looks like when one steps out to the edges, into the unfamiliar, into the foggy fringes of life.

When we are willing to do this, to step out of the comfortable and into the places where we must trust God, then we will too will experience the power and presence of God at work in our lives and through our lives.

Like the angels, we too will then proclaim, *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors"*! May we all choose to be active participants in the



continuing story of God's unfolding plan to redeem our world. May we each choose to live a life of faith that is out there, amongst the brokenness and hurting in our world, declaring God's glory with all we do and say so that all may come to know His love, peace, joy, and hope. May it be so for you and for me. Let us pray.