

Salvation from the Margins

JC

December 24, 2018

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.

Video: "That He Gave" (1:16)

Merry Christmas!! As we gather together on this sacred night, we celebrate the birth of the Savior of the world, of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Yet even as we celebrate the birth, there is something that we also cling to as Christians. Yes, we rejoice in the birth that brings us Christmas, but we also anticipate the return of Christ. I chose the video that we began with tonight because it reminds us that the birth had a bigger purpose. The birth gave way to a life and eventually to Jesus' ministry – a ministry that exemplified what it looked like to be fully obedient to God, loving God and others far more than self. For the month of December, I have been speaking of the "in between" time that we live in during the season of Advent. We live in between Jesus' first and second coming. Advent is a season of both anticipation and expectation. This is where we find ourselves tonight as we gather for worship on Christmas Eve. Let us pray...

The Christmas season is such a familiar time. Although much about Christmas is the same every year, I still look forward to it all a great deal. There are the familiar Christmas carols that we sing every year. There is the gathering of family around the table and then around the tree. There are the familiar movies

that play every year during December. And then there are the Christmas movies. I would bet we each have a favorite. My two favorite movies feature these two characters. Do you recognize them? Do you know the story lines?



Both stories pull at our hearts as the selfish, reclusive lead characters live lives that are unhappy and lonely. As the movies unfold and we get to know these two, our hearts begin to pull for their redemption. As both movies begin, these two are living on the margins of society and they tell themselves that they are happy to be there. Scrooge exists in his cold, dark, dingy accounting firm and the Grinch passes the time in his mountaintop lair. Over the years these two have become hardened, callous to the masses living below them. They have allowed their hearts to grow hard. As this has happened, they have failed to see that their hearts have shrunk, that their ability to love is barely alive. Both think only of themselves. Scrooge thinks only about becoming richer at the expense of others – including his employee Bob Cratchit. The Grinch schemes to steal all the presents, lights, wreaths, and even the Christmas trees from Whoville, leaving the townspeople sad and as miserable as he is. They are unhappy, but they cannot think of leaving the margins.

Today, this is where many people live. We all know people who will do or say about anything to make an extra dollar, to get that promotion, to be noticed by others. The selfishness can be rampant this time of year – the want for the best presents, the biggest spread at the holiday table, the wildest party in the neighborhood. It is all about appearance and getting ahead. Yet it is all so

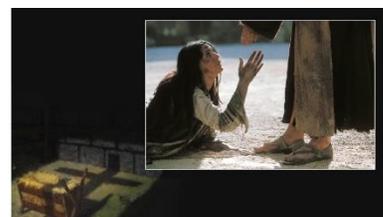
shallow. In general, many people in our world are seeking meaning and purpose in their lives. Because they cannot find these things, they question their own worth and their relationships with others. Feelings of fear and doubt run high while the sense of love and belonging seem to have disappeared. Inside they feel much like Scrooge and the Grinch felt early in their respective movies. Like these two, these people live on the margins of society today, aware of a need for connection but unaware of what to do to become connected.



Salvation from the Margins

Our passage for tonight begins with Mary and Joseph leaving Nazareth, heading towards Bethlehem. In verses 1 through 7, that we read earlier in worship, we learn that the emperor has decreed that a census be taken. A very pregnant Mary and her young fiancé Joseph make the trek to his traditional home town to be registered or counted in the census. As the story goes, lots of other people have also gone to Bethlehem to be counted. The extended family of David is apparently quite large, so Mary and Joseph cannot find lodging. Verse 6 tells us, *"the time came for her to deliver her child"*. The young couple found a safe place in the stable and Mary gave birth to Jesus and *"laid him in a manger"*. Jesus is born in obscurity and anonymously, on the margins - even of that day.

As Jesus grows, He lives on the margins and He works the margins. Once He enters into public ministry, Jesus has no home; He has minimal possessions. And Jesus' ministry begins, he comes to focus in on those on the margins of society – the lame, the deaf, the mute, the prostitute, the lepers, the outcast, tax



collectors, the widows, the orphans. Even in death, Jesus finds Himself on the margins. He is crucified outside the city gates, between two thieves, right beside the local garbage dump. To the world, Jesus dies like a common criminal, looked down upon by all the upright and religious folks.



Salvation from the Margins

As we move on to verse 8, we meet the shepherds.

They are living out in the fields, keeping watch over the sheep. Shepherds themselves are people on the

margins. Society looked down on the job of shepherd. They were the bottom rung. Just as Jesus would do in His public ministry, God went to the margins to announce the birth of His Son. God did not go to the temple to round up all the priests and Levites to come to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus. God went to the very edges of society as the angels called the shepherds. As the angel appears, the shepherds are filled with fear. But the angel said, *"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"*.

Do not be afraid. They hear good news of great joy. In

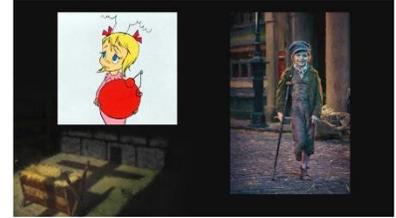
Bethlehem, a Savior is born. The Messiah has come! Mirroring verse 7, the angel tells the shepherds that they will find the babe wrapped in clothes, lying in a manger. Yes, it is a pretty sketchy place for the King of the world to be born.

"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".

- Luke 2: 10-11

Both Scrooge and the Grinch, if you will remember, do not stay lonely, hard of heart, and on the margins. While stealing all the presents, the Grinch meets this little cutie, who I think begins to soften his heart.

Scrooge is a bit tougher – it takes visits from three ghosts to begin to warm his crusty old heart. The Grinch awakens on Christmas morning expecting to hear



tears and sobbing coming from Whoville. But, instead, he hears the sound of singing. If you'll remember, it was that singing, those sounds of love that made the Grinch's heart grow that day. Remember his heart? It grew three sizes that day. And remember Scrooge? He wakes up, happy to just be alive, and he buys the biggest turkey for Tiny Tim's family. Scrooge and the Grinch leave the margins and enter back into community, entering back into relationships. For both Scrooge and the Grinch, they were reborn into new life. It was rediscovering love for the other that warmed their hearts and brought meaning and purpose back to their lives. They once again found connection.

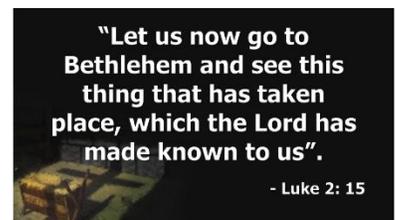


For the people we know who live on the margins, it is sometimes hard to leave the margins. From our own experiences when we have been the one living on the margins, we know it is a place we can get stuck. It was such a place for Scrooge and the Grinch. It became safe to stay there. It can become that for us and for those we know. On the margins, we pretend that we are not on the outside. On the margins, we do not have to be vulnerable, we can stay distant. On the margins we can pretend to be strong because no one really knows how we are doing. On the margins, no one can see beyond or beneath our masks. It is hard to admit that we are lonely, that we feel disconnected. It is difficult to admit

that we need love and relationships and community. It if were only so easy as to have a ghost visit us in the night. If only it was as easy as hearing some people singing.

Just as the Whoville love burst into the Grinch's heart and just as the ghosts of Christmas past rattled Scrooge back into reality, so too does Jesus come into our lives. He comes often uninvited. Sometimes we are powerless to resist. He comes into the dark places, into the brokenness of our lives, naming our failures, identifying our weaknesses, offering us a better way. At other times, Jesus invites us to walk with Him. Jesus comes alongside us, offering companionship and fellowship, encouragement and support. When we look at Jesus as He ministered to those in Judea and Galilee, we see that Jesus invited those on the outside to come in, to find a place of belonging and love. Jesus sought out the rejected, the marginalized, the discredited, the denied, the ostracized. Christ went to the margins and invited those He found there to come into His presence, to experience His love, to be a part of His fellowship and community.

The shepherds left their fields and headed for Bethlehem, saying, *"Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us"*. They heard the call of the angels and they responded in faith. Like the shepherds, we too have heard the call – but it is the call of Jesus. It begins with the gentle cry of the babe in the manger. Tonight, we celebrate His birth. But soon enough Jesus' voice grows louder as His ministry begins and it gains credence as He lives a life of full obedience to God the Father. Jesus



becomes God's love lived out loud in the world. In the end, Jesus gives himself up for us. But His story does not end there. Jesus defeats the grave and rises to new life. He brings salvation from the margins. From the edges of death, Jesus brings life. This movement from heaven to birth to ministry among us to death and then He rose to life eternal. This was what we saw in the video that we saw just a few minutes ago.



The shepherds heard the good news and they responded. We too have heard the good news. We too have heard that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. We too have heard that faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior leads to the salvation of our souls, to eternal life. Tonight, I leave you with one of two questions: Are you on the margins, needing love and connection and a sense of belonging and purpose in your life? If so, a personal relationship with Jesus offers all of this and more. If you are longing for a relationship with Jesus, I invite you to join us each Sunday starting in January as we explore a new sermon series, "A Light for the Nations". In this sermon series we will look at how Jesus is a light to you, to me, and to all people everywhere.

Or... are you already in a saving relationship with Jesus? If so, the question for you is this: who do you know that lives on the margins? And more importantly, how are you going to help them to step away from the margins and to begin to know Jesus this week. How are you going to help them move closer to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ? To one and all, Jesus offers salvation from the margins. We have heard the good news. How will you respond? Let us pray...