

“The Sounds of a Baby”

Polo First United Methodist Church
Polo, IL

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:1-20

December 24, 2011 (Christmas Eve)

Prayer: O Christ who comes, not only as a little baby in a manger, but also as our Savior Messiah, open our eyes and ears that we may see the wonders of your Word. Fill us with grace and peace in order that we might follow you in faithfulness. Amen.

It had been an ordinary day for this rather ordinary person. The day had been long. He was tired. But that was normal. His job required long, exhausting days.

Maybe the reason this day seemed especially long was because the sheep that this shepherd was watching hadn't done anything really. Today they just stood around, chewing the grass, baa-ing every so often. Not one sheep had wandered away from the flock that day. Usually there were at least one or two who managed to lose track of the group. Or a wolf would stalk onto the scene, adding a little life to the day. But not today. This day was so ordinary it was boring.

This particular shepherd had a splitting headache. All he wanted was to go home, flip off his sandals, change out of his dirty clothes, and lay down. Unfortunately, he guessed he still had another hour until quitting time, though. He wished the clock would just skip forward, just this once (not that it ever had before, but he could still hope, right?). Or at least let something exciting happen, for goodness sake!

Well, I'm sorry to say that nothing happened that night. The other shepherds eventually came, he went home, tossed and turned for a while, and before he knew it the sun was coming up in the east. And he did it all over again.

Isn't that the way life is sometimes? It's just ordinary. Not that there is anything wrong with ordinary, some people would give anything for life to simply be ordinary. But sometimes you just want something to shoot a little bit of life into you, get your adrenaline pumping, have something happen that's not so routine.

Because so often you just wake up, eat breakfast, take a shower, go to work . . . eventually you're back home reading the mail, paying the bills, catching up on that show you love, and then you fall asleep on the couch. You wake up with a crick in your neck when the alarm sounds, you brew the coffee, and do it all over again. Ordinary.

Well that was life for this shepherd. Every day waking up, hoping that things would be different.

Well one day was exactly like that. The second shift of shepherds was expected to come any minute now. In fact, he thought he could hear them coming over the hill now. So he started walking in that general direction. Sure enough, just over the rise in the field he saw the two guys coming to relieve him.

Just when our boy had made it over the hill to the other shepherds, they all heard a noise. It was the sound that a sheep makes when it gets scared. Kind of like a startled cry, but it's hard to explain it. All they knew was it was bad. The shepherds immediately assumed that a wolf had attacked the flock, so they sprinted off towards the noise.

And as they ran, they noticed something else besides the noise. It was a figure and light. This was no wolf. It was something else completely. A person . . . but not really. Something extraordinary.

It's first words were, "Do not be afraid." Well that was easy for it to say. Our shepherd's heart was beating faster than it ever had before, and it wasn't because of the run. He could feel his face had gone white. He was going to be sick to his stomach. Like he would collapse.

Have you ever had a moment like that? When everything was normal, and then suddenly your stomach drops out from underneath you. When everything is ordinary and suddenly one little noise, one little sound sets you on edge. Your heart starts beating. Your hands start sweating. Your knees start knocking. And you're not sure why, but you know something has just happened. You see things differently now, maybe even clearer. Everything simultaneously makes sense, but yet still doesn't. You're not sure how you should feel, or what you should do.

That must have been this moment for the shepherd. And then this figure in light spoke again, "I'm here to tell you something," it said. "It's good news of great joy for all people! A Savior has been born, a Savior who is King and Lord."

The shepherd stood there for a moment not taking in the words. Wait, what? Good news? Great joy? A Savior? Born for me? Come for all people? What does that mean? Are you serious?

Why am I the one hearing this news? I'm not important. You'll find nothing special here. If all this is true, a savior, a king, the Lord. . . Why are you telling me? Why not go tell someone else? I'm just an ordinary person, with an ordinary job, and an ordinary life.

And now you're here to tell me that a Savior has been born *for me*? What's this Savior going to do? I mean really? Is he going to save me from this dead-end job? Can he heal me from this pain I've been carrying around in my heart? Are things going to be different, or is it just going to be business as usual? Is my life still going to be ordinary? Because if it is . . . then . . . well . . . Don't get my hopes up. I don't think I can live with the disappointment.

But if what you're telling me is true. If it's not a prank. Or a dream. Or a crazy hallucination. Then this is huge! This is earth-changing news! My life will never be the same again.

So that shepherd ran. Maybe it was curiosity that made him go. Surely he had nothing to lose, except maybe his job. Maybe he was crazy. Maybe everyone else was going, so he figured he had nothing else to do. Maybe he had been living his ordinary life just waiting and hoping for something or anything to happen that when it finally came he just had to go and see. Or maybe he believed every single word the angel had said, either out of true trust or utter gullibility.

Whatever the case, that shepherd ran to see the child in the feed trough. He heard the cries of the baby. Saw the makeshift blankets and diapers. Met the ordinary parents named Mary and Joseph. Sensed the exhaustion on their faces, but also saw the raw and unbelievable joy that only comes with new life.

And when he saw it all for himself, it made a profound impact. That scene, those sounds, those sights took up residence deep within him. They found a place in his heart. They were permanently etched in his mind's eye. He didn't understand it all yet. He probably still had doubts. But for some reason he believed it all. And he told everyone he could meet about his encounter with the baby, the Savior.

What about you? Why are you here? You've come to hear the story, you've come to see the scene. Why? Is it curiosity? Are you searching for something? Is the rest of your family here so you just came along? Is it something you just do this time of the year out of routine? Maybe you used to believe the story, but for some reason you don't anymore. Maybe something happened that shook your faith, but you thought you'd come back and give it another chance. Or maybe you've been living this ordinary life just waiting and hoping for something like this to come along? For a Savior. For the Lord. For good news of great joy.

Whatever the reason you're here, I'm glad. You didn't have to be here. But you came. Maybe you didn't run here like the shepherd. Maybe you aren't happy to be here. Maybe this time of the year is more sad than joyful and it was all you could do to get out of bed in the morning, but you're here. Maybe you've been waiting weeks for this day in eager anticipation.

Whatever the reason you're here, I think if you really listen and if you really look, that something huge is happening tonight. Something amazing. Something transformative. Maybe you can feel it. Maybe you can't. Maybe you believe it. Maybe you don't. But I think something has broken into the ordinary day-to-day routine of our lives that can make a difference in your life. It's hope. It's joy. It's peace. It's love. It's a baby, a Savior, a Lord, who came for each one of you.

That feeling, that curiosity, that search, that joy, that you have . . . it doesn't have to just be tonight. I want to personally invite every single one of you to come along for a journey of discovering who this Jesus is more fully and more deeply.

Because I'm convinced that He can transform your life, like He did for that shepherd and like He has for so many others, even some of you who are sitting here in these pews tonight. On January 8th in this church we will begin a new sermon series looking at others who were profoundly impacted by Jesus, ordinary people, like you and me, who saw this baby, saw this man and were forever changed. I hope you'll join us.

Amen