

Sandra Brown
For All the People
Luke 2:1-14, 15-20
Christmas Eve 2017

One of the privileges of being a pastor is that I get to hear a lot of interesting stories. I'll never forget the story of a member at my previous congregation—we'll call her Linda—who told me about the time she learned she was pregnant, and went to the doctor to have her an ultrasound. Linda went in, and the technician started doing the ultrasound, and then the technician got VERY quiet and said, "Hmmm. I'm seeing two heads." And she immediately got up and left the room, leaving Linda there on the table. Linda's eyes began to fill with tears and her pulse began to race. She wished her husband was there, or her mom, someone to hold her as she cried and comfort her, but she was all alone. She'd been so excited to learn she was expecting. To hear that the baby might have two heads was absolutely devastating.

After a while, the technician came back into the room, and the doctor was with her. By now, Linda was visibly upset. The doctor said, "Linda, it's OK," and Linda choked out the words, "But she saw two heads." Whereupon the technician quickly replied, "Yes, but there are also two bodies," and that's how Linda learned she was going to be the mother of twins. In that moment, after all the scary feelings she'd been having during the past five minutes, it was the best news she'd ever had in her life.

In the Christmas story according to the Gospel of Luke, an angel of the Lord appears to some shepherds working the night shift out in the fields, and tells them: "I'm bringing you good news of great joy for all the people."

What good news do you long to hear today? A clean bill of health? Getting that job . . . having a baby . . . passing the test . . . winning the lottery . . . getting accepted to the school of

your dreams . . . she loves you, too, just the way you love her . . . he forgives you . . . they are safe, and coming home soon?

We need good news, because some of us have had some really tough news this year. For some of us this is the very first Christmas without the family member who was always there, and always made this time of year so special. Others received a diagnosis that rocked their world and nothing will ever be the same again. Some of us have watched a loved one decline so rapidly that they are simply not the person they used to be, and we are exhausted from taking care of them. Or maybe, a goal we worked so hard to achieve eluded us yet again, and the success we hoped we would be celebrating today has passed us by. If we didn't personally receive news like this, we know someone who did. We ache for them, and for the great pain and suffering we see in so much of the world today.

Much of the news we hear is good for some people, but not others. We're trained to see the world in terms of winners and losers. My team won; therefore, another team lost. His child got in—hers did not. When we win an argument, a court case, an election, or a battle—someone else has lost. If someone makes it to the top, there's somebody else at the bottom.

So an angel of the Lord shows up one night and has something to say to this group of scraggly shepherds who are very familiar with life at the bottom. "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." ALL the people. Not just some—ALL. Good news for the people who didn't get in, who lost the game, who missed the mark, or fell off the wagon; for people who've been kicked out and locked up; people who work three jobs, and people with no job; people at the end of their rope; people who don't have their act together, and people who don't know how to act. For all of us who try really hard and somehow it's never quite enough, and for those of us who quit trying a long time ago.

“ALL the people,” says the angel of the Lord, and if you can’t trust an angel of the Lord, who can you trust? All the people—no qualifiers. Whether you are a person of devout faith or an honest skeptic full of doubt, the good news is for YOU. Mother of the Year? Broken all ten commandments? The good news is for you.

Good news of great joy doesn’t mean life suddenly becomes easy, safe, or convenient. Eventually the shepherds had to go back to the fields and keep an eye on the sheep. Mary and Joseph had to deliver a baby far from the comforts of home. They never made any money off of being Jesus’ parents, and Mary was not spared from watching her child suffer an agonizing death.

Good news means we are chosen and we are loved, and we are part of something that is much bigger than we know. For God so loved the WORLD that he came to us as a human being—a vulnerable, dependent baby--so that we might get a glimpse of what God is really like. And whoever opens their heart to him will never waste away at the bottom, but have eternal life. Eternal life where there is no more top and bottom, no more left and right, but all stand together. Eternal meaning that this life, while good and important and worth our very best efforts, is not the final word.

We are so much more than our successes and our mistakes and the things we say we believe—we are children of God, and we have a value which nothing and no one can diminish. What great joy to hear this news . . . and even greater joy to share this news with people who feel worthless and hopeless. Good news of great joy today and every day. . . Glory to God in the Highest!!!