

Christmas Eve Devotion: #DoNotBeAfraid

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Date: 24 December 2022

Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 0 0] Good friends and Merry Christmas to all of you. Welcome to our worship time here at Pendleton Center United Methodist Church. My name is Scott. I'm one of the pastors here and this may not have been our plan for this evening.

It is a thrill to see so many of you join us online here. And it is a thrill that we have the opportunity to gather given the challenges we are dealing with in our area.

This is, of course, a special night for all of us, as well as for all Christians in the world. For this night, God has invited us all to new birth and that makes us all the same.

Every human is on the path yearning for the message of God, bringing more hope, more joy, more love, more peace to our lives.

Let this be of everyone acknowledging that these can be yours in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate today. Over these last four weeks, I've heard the stories of angel appearances in our church.

[1 : 2 0] They all lead to the incredible news of the birth of our Savior. They didn't come to king, rulers, or the most important people in society.

They came to an old and childless couple, to a young girl who was barely a woman, and a simple and humble man betrothed to that woman.

And then to some shepherds who are taking care of their sheep on a hill at night. They came to people like us.

God worked for ordinary people and did extraordinary things. And so it is that God works the time we, too, share these messages of hope, peace, joy, love with the world that needs it.

So tonight we are going to hear some new things and we're going to worship our God together in this way and in this space. Pray that we are all united by the Holy Spirit, even though we are far apart in space and time.

[2 : 3 6] And even if we are feeling somewhat disconnected, know that we are not alone. So open with a time of song, and hopefully all of you are willing to sing along wherever you find yourself.

One of our worship leaders, Tom Cosby, is going to lead us in singing Angels We Have Heard. Sing along.

Angels we have heard on high, sweet peace singing o'er the plains. And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strings.

Gloria in excelsis deo.

Gloria in excelsis deo.

[3 : 5 8] Sondis deo. Shepherd's wireless contrubuir, choir joyous strings program.

Say what made her tidings bring, which inspire your heavenly song. Oh, in excelsis Deo.

Oh, in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and sing. Hear whose birth the angels sing. Come on your unbended knee.

Christ the Lord, the newborn King. Oh, in excelsis Deo.

[5 : 16] Oh, in excelsis Deo.

See Him in a manger bay. Jesus Christ the devil and the Lord.

Mary, Joseph, and Jerry. With us sing our Savior's birth. Oh, in excelsis Deo.

Oh, in excelsis Deo.

If we close our eyes and imagine the scene of tonight, we can see the beauty and wonder of the angels proclaiming good news to all.

[6 : 33] We can see the shepherds first terrified, but then overcome with joy as they hear the good news. And if we try even harder, we can imagine the world where God's peace reigns, where there's no war or hunger.

And if we can imagine it, we can do it with God's help. Let us pray to God who came among us tonight in the birth of Jesus. Gracious God, as a star rose and drew people from great distances to Bethlehem, that they may meet and greet the Christ child.

Draw us, your church, and all of your people to you, that we might be the church and the people who you call us to be. Although we're separated tonight, may we feel that connection as we watch from afar.

As you gave Mary your Holy Spirit, filling her with the delight of your presence. Fill us with your Spirit and renew our lives. As Gentiles streamed to Jesus' light and kings to the brightness of his rising, draw our nation, our president, and all those in positions of leadership to your brightness.

As angels sang glorious to you and proclaimed peace on earth and goodwill among all people. Bring us your peace and bring an end to hate and terror and strife.

[7 : 55] As shepherds were drawn away from their flocks by night, draw those who don't know yet the knowledge and love of you. As Jesus was born in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.

Be especially present for those who have nowhere to lay their head. Those who are vulnerable, those who are hungry, and those who are stuck in the storm and have no heat or power.

As the Holy Family gathered together in Bethlehem and traveled together to far off lands. Bless all families, especially the families of our congregation. And protect those who can travel when travel is possible.

As your Son came to proclaim the forgiveness of sins and the gift of life eternal. Give to the departed eternal rest and let light shine on them.

Help their families and loved ones find comfort in you. Let us pray for our own needs and those of others. God our Creator, you know the prayers that rest in our hearts.

[9 : 00] And although we are unable to worship together in person tonight, let our focus remain on the awesome gift that you've given to us. For those who are sick, for those who are serving in our armed forces, and those stuck far away from home.

For our first responders, our hospital staff, and emergency personnel who are out working in this treacherous weather. We pray for those who have joined the church triumphant and those people feeling a sense of loss this holiday season.

Lord our God, may the light and hope of this night and this season and of your Son's incarnation reassure our hearts that you are among us.

That you hear our prayer and that you will be with us always, even to the end of the age. We praise your holy name. Amen. So friends, I would invite you to a time of hearing scripture again.

We are of course going to the scripture that is so familiar on this night. We're going to be reading from the of Luke chapter 2 verses 1 through 20.

[10 : 19] That's the gospel of Luke chapter 2 verses 1 through 20. Hear this familiar story in all of your power once again.

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire world.

This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was on Syria. And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

He went there to register with Mary, who was supposed to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the baby came for the baby to be born.

[11 : 22] And she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger. Because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living in fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. And the Lord appeared to them.

And the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were tired. But the angel said to them, do not be afraid. And the Lord was able to bring you good news of great joy.

That will be for all the people. Today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you. He is Christ, Lord. This will be a sign to you.

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host with the angel and praised God and saying, glory to God the highest.

[12 : 30] And on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has thought.

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spoke concerning what had been told them about this child.

And all who heard it pleased to what the shepherd said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying in God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had looked. And this is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Pray with me, please. Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks for this night. We give you the ability to connect in this way.

[13 : 41] And Lord, now, as we share this moment over in space, be with us and unite us by your Holy Spirit. In Jesus, most holy we may ask. Amen.

Amen. So as we said during our greeting time that we've been talking a lot about angels over these past few weeks.

And we've talked about angelic visitations to different people. What does it mean? When we think about an visit, I wonder what comes to mind for you.

If you've ever thought about what it would be like to actually have an angel show up in your life, maybe you could drop a message in the chat about that. I think you would respond.

You know, there's this phrase we use. Someone may have the voice of an angel. I wonder what those voices sound like to those who heard them in our stories of Jesus' birth.

[14 : 45] You know, in my, I imagine that they're beautiful, right? That they're rich and resonant. That they're soothing and that they would give us a sense of peace and comfort.

You know, the thing about that, though, is still, even if that's how we end it, we also know that the reality angel breaking into your everyday life would probably be exactly what we think.

Which leads the angels to say what we're used to hearing them say. Do not be afraid. If you can imagine just going about your everyday business like Mary was.

And to have an angelic visitor show up and not only show up, but to bring this news. If you can imagine the fear.

If you're Zechariah in that sacred space or trying to honor God with what you are doing and yet to have someone visit you in that space.

[16 : 00] From heaven. From heaven. From heaven. And understand why the first thing that needs to be said is do not be afraid. And if you're Joseph. And you've been completely confused by recent events in your life.

You think that you've been betrayed. You think that you may have to break a marriage contract and divorce this woman that you were looking forward to spending time with.

And yet in your dream. And yet in your dream. An angel comes to you. And has to remind you to not be afraid. And so on this one hand.

It's something we would reach out for something hope for something that would hopefully give us some confirmation, some affirmation of moving in our world in a way we have yet to see.

And yet. The presence of God. The unquestioned, unshakable and presence of a heavenly visitor.

[17 : 09] Would undoubtedly probably spark some fear in us. And the reason why we want to talk about that is that fear not only comes from the moment. Right. But it also come angels do.

Because I think we have these moments. Right. We're kind of. We've used in the past. We've talked about Clarence Oddbody from It's a Wonderful Life.

Where, you know, he's kind of comical. Right. He kind of brings us laugh. A little oddball. Or maybe you grew up watching a TV show called Touchback.

And you have images of Roma Downey or Della Reese and their burning presence. But. Even with that.

Not only do we get caught up in the physical side of what it would mean to have an angel presence. Let's remember what angels bring. Angels bring word of God with them. And tonight.

[18 : 10] When we think of what it would be to be visited by an angel. When we consider.

What it would be. God to tell us. Something God needs us to hear. Hopefully that does in fact reach into our hearts and inspire us.

Hopefully that does for our souls and say we would love to hear that message. That message can be challenged on this night. Let's remember what the message to the world was.

The message was. There is good news. Great joy. For all. Now where we sit today.

Given what we experienced the past few years. Not to mention just the past two days. The fact that we touch with that simple truth.

[19 : 11] Is really critical for us. You know we've said multiple times that Christmas is still Christmas. Regardless of whether it's happening.

Regardless of whether your loved ones are in the room. That Christmas does not lose its meaning. Christmas does not lose its power. Christmas does not lose any of its joy.

Christmas does not lose any of its joy. The reason why we say that. Is because. Remembering what Christmas is. Because when we focus on the world and us.

When we focus on the list. When we focus on the weather. When we focus on what isn't happening.

Have we forgotten. What has happened. So easy to lose it. When our eyes and hearts and minds.

[20 : 11] Are places. So here's the question I'd ask you to consider. To. On this holiest of nights. When we.

Normally. Learned in our sanctuary and. Doing things that are great traditions. That means so much. Those are not happening. Tonight.

But will. Tonight for you. Be more about what didn't happen. Or about what. Because when we think about what did happen.

That God so loved the world. That he gave his only begotten son. For us. That.

Angels. Broke into our world with a message of good news. Of great joy for all people. People who felt very very invisible.

[21 : 11] People who felt very insignificant. People who felt as though they weren't doing anything special. Or were anybody special. People who felt marginalized and left out.

But the angel comes with great joy. That we. Even the most ordinary of people. Have roles to play what God is doing.

To bring all the human family. Back to God's precious. Can we. Focus on.

In the midst of it all. And hear me and hear me well friends. If you are experiencing. Crisis. I'm not asking you to pretend that you're not. I'm not asking you to simply.

Put on a happy face. And deny what may be happening around you. What God wants us to do. Is to remember. How deeply.

[22 : 09] How amazingly. How deeply. We are loved. And how the answer to all our questions. The answer to all our hopes.

The embodiment of all our dreams. Came to us. In that most vulnerable. And humble. Was found.

In that most unexpected. Of places. Because. Our God. Isn't worried about. The senses of the world.

God isn't worried about. Trying to. Impress. As much. As much. As he is trying. To show us. How much. We are loved. So let our hearts.

Somewhere. In the. All of this work. Somewhere. In the midst of all the disappointment. And frustration. We are all undoubtedly feeling.

[23 : 11] Let us remember. That still. Good news. Of great joy. And even in the midst. Of this storm. Even in the midst. Of whatever storm.

May be raging. In your own personal life. Know. That there are clearly. Angels. Among us. Those voices. That bring us comfort. And wisdom. Those hands.

That help us. When we need it. And we need it. To help us. To help us. When we need it. Bringers. Of a smile. Those bringers. Of a lift. Those bringers.

Of a lift. Those bringers. Of good news. There are clearly. Angels. At work. Among us. Whether they come. In heavenly form.

Or whether they come. In places of friends. We know. They may even come. In strangers. We encounter. But hear this. This. This. This. This.

[24 : 06] This. This. This. This. This. This. This. This.

This. This. Aulfur. This. This. So that's it. I would invite us to take a moment and give ourselves a chance to partake in a tradition in a different way.

We know that one of the most special things that happens when we gather this night is the singing of a special hymn, Silent Night. And so I don't know if you have a candle with you, but wherever you are, I do to sing along that we might indeed feel that connection, feel that moment as best we can across this time.

Knowing that not only are your other members of your church family singing along with you, but know that around the world tonight, so many are doing the same.

Because we know what I've done and it is marvelous in our eyes. Nancy, another of our worshipers, is going to be leading us in this hymn tonight.

[25 : 40] So I invite you to sing as she leads us. Merry Christmas, everyone. As we focus on that good news of great joy with the hymn that we cherish on this holiest of nights, I hope that you are safe and warm and continue to be and have a very blessed Christmas.

I'm bringing my son in with me. He'll be singing Silent Night with me. I hope you will sing along and I hope that your Christmas is wonderful. Silent Night with me.

Silent Night with me.

Silent Night with me.

Alleluia. Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born.

[28 : 04] Silent night, holy night, Son of God, lost your light, Radiant beams from thy holy face With the dawn of redeeming grace Jesus, Lord, let thy birth Jesus, Lord, let thy birth Silent night, holy night,

Wondrous star, let thy light With the angels let us sing Alleluia to our King Christ the Savior is born Christ the Savior is born Christ the Savior is born.

Friends, thank you so much for being with us. I want to thank Adrian, our tech and communications leader, as well as Pastor Jennifer and Nancy for being willing to lead in these ways this evening. I want to consider making a gift to the people of the church.

As you are able you can give electronically the ways that are available on the screen. So I hope that you will be able to do so as the spirit moves you.

Also, knowing that we have so many of us in very real crisis. I hope that you will reach out as the hands and feet of Christ to those who will need to be checked on those who need to know they are not alone, especially given what tonight means.

[30 : 55] I also want to share. We're hoping to be able to gather tomorrow morning. We wanted to see how things would unfold and where we stand in terms of the weather. We have decided to cancel our in-person during tomorrow morning.

And so there will also not be an online option. So please take that time to be with your loved ones as you are able. We will also be sent a message again. But for all of those who were not able to participate tonight and for all of those who may not be online, we know that the message gets out to them in all the ways at our disposal.

Friends, we thank you for spending some time with us, whether you watch us live or whether you are watching it another time. Know that you are loved by God and by us and we thank you. Hear this parting blessing as we head into our night tonight.

In the name of God, our creator and in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our comforter and our sustainer.

May God be with you all as we love God's children. Again, God bless you all and Merry Christmas. We look forward to the next time we can connect, whether online or in person. Have a great night.

[32 : 28] God bless you all and Merry Christmas. God bless you all and Merry Christmas.

God bless you all and Merry Christmas. God bless you all and Merry Christmas.

God bless you all and Merry Christmas. God bless you all and Merry Christmas to be serves. God bless you all and Merry Christmas to be v■i llskos, with cloudy Christmas, his friends, and merry Christmas Thank you.

Thank you.