

If the song (first sung by Andy Williams) is to be believed, “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year.” Everyone hopes for a time of warm, cozy happiness, accompanied by lights and trees, stockings hung by the chimney with care, silver bells, the whole deal.

However, as decorations appear and the atmosphere becomes more festive, some people begin to struggle. The merriness of Christmas feels light years away. Maybe that’s you. Struggling under the load of sickness or grief, trying to escape the fog of depression or the pressure of work. Struggling with a relationship that’s been damaged or lost. You feel like you’re out in the cold, looking in at a bright, happy party—a party at which you don’t feel you belong. If that is you, please hear me tonight. Christ’s Christmas—the real story at the heart of all this—is pointed right at you.

In Luke chapter two, you were introduced to people who didn’t have a lot of room in their lives for festivities. For them it was enough to survive. They were shepherds, people for whom work was a constant and respect was minimal. For various reasons they often didn’t take part in temple ceremonies and so were considered outcasts.

But the real Christmas, the birth of the Christ Child, was not announced to the religious leaders, or the theologians, or the politicians, or the well-to-do; the announcement comes crashing in to *them*. It comes crashing in to common shepherds with a huge display of power; power that would be enough to crush them in an instant.

An angel appears in the dark Judean sky. And then, after he speaks, “*a great company of the heavenly host*” shows up. Now do you know what that phrase “*the heavenly host*” means? “It means ‘an army of angels.’ The army of heaven invaded the night sky. We’re talking big, loud, immense, powerful, otherworldly, and intimidating! Which is why the lead angel has to say, “*Fear not.*”

“*Fear not.*” When the human instinct is to shiver and shake before the power of God, the angel reaches out with the message “*Fear not.*” You don’t have to run from heavenly power. You don’t have to hide from God. Not anymore.

“*Fear not;*” not because the power has been neutralized. Not because God has gone elsewhere. You don’t have to fear *because* there is great news! Today, in

the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. And the whole point of this Savior's life is to remove fear from human minds and hearts.

Were it not for His birth we would have *much* to fear. Were it not for His birth we would not be able to think our mortality without a sense of doom. Were it not for His birth we would remain separated from God, with a mounting debt of guilt and shame on our hands.

But fear not. Christ comes for the hurting, the struggling, the lonely, the sick, the grieving; precisely the sort of people that often feel like they're the odd ones out, the ones somehow missing the Christmas spirit. Christ's Christmas reaches out to those who are frustrated with themselves and their lack of purity. It reaches out to those who feel that heaven is so far removed from their existence.

It comes to people, like you and me, with all our regrets and imperfections and it says "*Fear not, for I bring you good news of great joy that will be for ALL the people.*" Yes, even for you. All includes you. The Savior has been born for you.

That angelic army has come not to fight but to praise: "Glory to God in the highest," they say, "and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests."

Did you hear that? Peace is coming into the lives of human beings because God, with all His power and justice, shows us favor. He looks at us with mercy. The angel army has not come to wage war against sinners; with the birth of Jesus, they can announce peace. Peace between God and humanity. The peace of knowing that God holds nothing against you. How can you know that? The Savior is born! Justice demands that evil be punished, we all know that. The good news of great joy is that this Jesus will shoulder that punishment as our replacement. So, the angelic army shows up to announce a truce. We now have reason not to fear God, but to love him and to run to him.

Christ's Christmas broadcasts the message: Do not be afraid of God! He's not come to punish you or make your life miserable with rules and regulations. He has come to pull you out of the mess, clean you off, and give you a life worth living. In fact, He wants you to be with him forever. The baby in the manger is proof.

In another couple of weeks we'll be putting away the decorations for another year, but the gift of peace you've heard about tonight—you get to keep that. Don't forget the message of God's angel army: Hear it ring out tonight: No more war between God and man! Our Savior is born! Fear not!

