

**Welcome Home**

CHRIST

December 24, 2021

**Isaiah 9:2-7**

*<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined. <sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. <sup>4</sup> For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup> For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup> For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

**Luke 2:1-20**

*<sup>1</sup> In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.*

*<sup>7</sup> 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.*

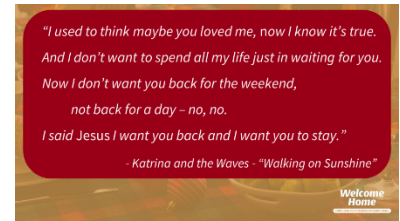
*<sup>8</sup> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

*<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*



How many of you remembered that song that just played at the beginning of this time together? It is by a band called "Katrina and the Waves" and is called "Walking on Sunshine."

Although not a religious or Christmas song, the lyrics to a verse remind me of our relationship with Jesus. Here are the words, with one slight modification:



*"I used to think maybe you loved me, now I know it's true.  
And I don't want to spend all my life just in waiting for you.  
Now I don't want you back for the weekend, not back for a day – no, no.  
I said Jesus I want you back and I want you to stay."*

My friends, yes, Jesus loves you. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we do not need to wait for Christ. Jesus is here and now in our presence as we gather on this sacred night. He desires to go forth from here, dwelling moment by moment, day by day, in our hearts. As we celebrate the birth of Christ tonight, it is my hope and prayer that he is born anew in your heart tonight. As we begin, let us pray...

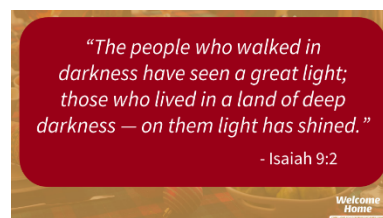
Welcome to Christmas Eve! In many faith traditions people of faith gather today to celebrate the coming of the savior of the world. We gather today to worship the one born tonight, the incarnate one who came as God in the flesh, the savior who came to offer salvation to all the world. We gather to celebrate the one who brought hope and peace and joy into this world of pain through his message of unconditional love.



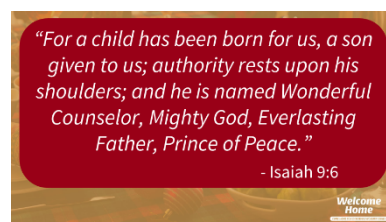
Welcome to Grace United Methodist Church! Welcome home. The church, this church, the family of God, this family of God, is a place for all people.

In a world where we all long to belong, to be loved, here you are welcome. In a world often filled with pain and hurt, in faith Grace offers a home to gather and to find peace and comfort, mercy and grace, forgiveness and love, meaning and purpose. Here you are welcome.

In Isaiah 9:2 we read, *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined."*



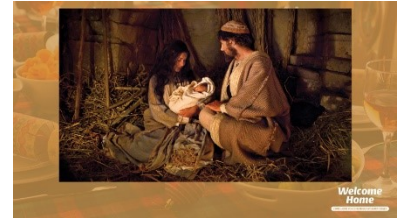
Long ago people of faith sometimes wondered if God loved them. Many of us used to wonder if God loved us. Some here tonight are maybe wondering if God loves them. As we continue on in Isaiah 9, we find assurance in verse six. Here the prophet Isaiah speaks of a time to come, saying, *"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* As we celebrate the birth of Christ tonight, we grab hold of the truth of this prophecy, and we place our faith in the one who fulfilled it just over 2,000 years ago. Now, because of Christ, we know that God loves us. We do not need to wonder. My friends, in and through Christ Jesus, God loves you.



As we turn to Luke 2, our gospel lesson, the opening verses detail the census ordered by Emperor Augustus and the trip made by Joseph and Mary. The census would be for tax purposes. They traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David.

This trip of 30 plus hours would bring Joseph and a very pregnant Mary to this small, small town. Joseph would have walked alongside Mary as she rode on a donkey.

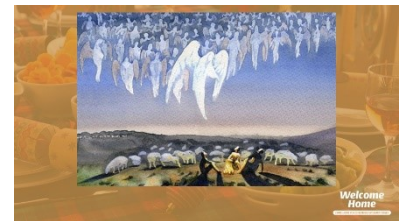
In verses six and seven we read, *"While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."* Bethlehem had become crowded with all the descendants of David arriving to be registered. It was a humble and simple birth for the Messiah, for the Savior of the world.



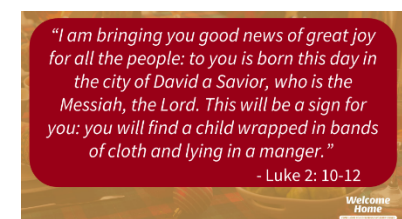
Turning to verse eight we get to the shepherds. That same night, the shepherds were out in the field, keeping watch over their sheep. As the night grows colder the robes get wrapped a little tighter, they creep a little closer to the fire probably just outside the sheep fold. It was night and you and I know what it is like at night. Our minds wander. We turn that incident at work or at school or at home over and over again in our minds. We worry and fret about that thing tomorrow. So too it was with the shepherds. How will we heal up that sick lamb? Where will we go to find better pasture? What predator will come along tonight – and when? How is the family back home getting along without me? Will we make enough at market to survive another year? The shepherds were not unlike us.

Shepherds were usually pretty rough characters. They spent long days and nights outdoors. They were unclean – but not only in the physical sense. Because of their occupations they were kept from worship and from the people who were the “good people.” Because of this, the shepherds were viewed as ritually unclean – looked down upon, marginalized. That is what makes what happens next amazing.

Just as God chose barren, old Elizabeth and young, unwed Mary to be the ones to bear very important children – John the Baptist and Jesus, respectively – God chose to send the angels to these simple shepherds, to these unclean people. Just sitting around the fire, passing the time, and BAM! The heavens light up and *"an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified."* That is just how you or I would react if angels suddenly appeared as we sat around the fire pit in the driveway. The shepherds probably thought it was the end of the world. Imagine the thoughts that instantly raced through their minds in that moment. Did they tell their children and wife that they loved them? Did they repent well for all of their sins and failure? What is coming next?



The angel tells them, *"Do not be afraid; for see..."* Don't be afraid. Fear not. I am here because I have an important message to deliver. As I consider this night long ago, I do not know what was more amazing to the shepherds: that an angel appeared to them or what the angel said. In verses ten through twelve the angel says, *"I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this*





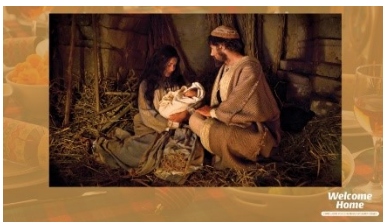
*day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.*" Good news of great joy. This day the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord – he has been born. And you – you shepherds – you will find him. What news for some shepherds out keeping watch in their fields by night to receive!

In their minds they must have wondered: Did you say to you a savior is born? For us? Maybe for those "good people." Maybe for the priests and other religious folks. Maybe for the rich and powerful. Have you ever had these thoughts? Have you ever wondered if you were worthy of God's love?

Yes, the angel said *"for all the people"* – not just for some. The savior, the Messiah, the Lord – he came for us all. Jesus came for me. Jesus came for you. Say it: "Christ came for me." Say it. Own it. Say it with me: "Christ came for me." Believe it. Jesus loves you. He came for you.



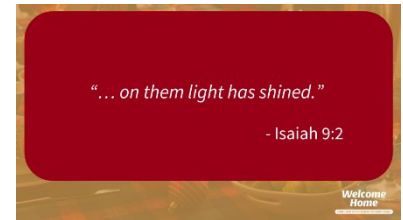
*Christ came for me.*



Did the angel say "manger"? Manger – something the shepherds know well. Maybe the angels are in the right place after all. *"Lying in a manger... wrapped in bands of cloth..."* - in rags. This they knew. Mangers and rags – this was their world, their language. Somehow mangers and saviors made sense to these shepherds. So, they decided to go and see *"this that has taken place."* They travel to Bethlehem and find Mary and Joseph in the stable and the baby Jesus lying in the manger. Suddenly the stable is their home too. Their clothes, their smell, the animals... this is their world. The shepherds are at home.

And they tell the story – the angels, the good news, the singing! In verse eighteen we read, *"And all who heard it were amazed."* At this point "all" are Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus and the animals. The point here is that the shepherds knew that they belonged, that they were loved. They were home with Christ the Lord, the Savior, the Messiah.

In Isaiah 9:2 we read, *"on them light has shined."* It shone on the shepherds. It shines on us. The light signals home. The light draws us in. The light of the world, Jesus Christ, invites us, no, wants to welcome us home. The shepherds didn't just hear the news and then turn back to watching the sheep. No. They stepped into the news that God loved them. They went and found their home right there by the manger. Being home matters. Where is home for you? Where do you draw near to the Lord? Maybe it's here at Grace. Maybe it's some other place of worship. Wherever that is for you, it is where you belong, where you find community, where you are loved. Our world needs more love, not less. Your life needs more love, not less. So invest in home, wherever that is for you.



The light that we see, the light that leads and calls us home, is a light that we can live each day. We can walk on the sunshine even on the cloudiest of days. We can sit and rest in that glow, even on our gloomiest of days. Advent, this season surrounding Christmas, is a reminder of what we already have, as well as a reminder of what once came and of what is promised again. Living in the light, we find peace and hope and joy and love.



Living in the light we find community and fellowship. Living in the light we find encouragement, support, comfort, and accountability. Living in the light we walk each moment with Christ, the one who was and is and is to come. Living in the light we walk with Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. May we ever walk in the light. Amen and amen.