

Sermon- Christmas Day- 12/25/2018- Our Saviors Lutheran Church Surprise Surprise!

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. As I said last night, a Merry Christmas from Kasey, Marcie, Ruthie, Colleen, Jennifer, Dave Z, Chris, Berdie, Ardy, Luann, and myself. We all hope that your Christmas is a blessed one. Who was here last night? (If no one, Pastor summarizes Charlie Brown and the wimpy tree - just needs a little bit of love)

Christmas is a day that is full of surprises. Packages that were left under the tree hold surprises that wait to be unwrapped. That is a particularly crazy challenge for my wife. She seems to order stuff from Amazon Prime and on-line shopping. I am told to not look at e-mails and not to open any boxes that arrive on the porch all during Advent. It is a challenge to keep the surprise active.

One man approached the clerk at Macy's at the mall in Appleton. He asked for a small bottle of perfume for his wife. "Is it a surprise?" the clerk asked. "Yes," the man said, "she's expecting a trip to Hawaii!"

Christmas is all about surprises. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive and bear a son, and that he would be the Savior of the world, Mary was surprised. "How can this be?" she asked the messenger. When Joseph learned that his fiancée was pregnant, Joseph was both surprised and angry, until the angel told him the rest of the story. Elizabeth and Zechariah were surprised and astonished when Elizabeth got pregnant as an old, old woman.

The Bible is full of surprises - just think about Moses, Paul and the disciples. But, in the Christmas Gospels no one is more surprised than the shepherds. Here they were, tending their sheep when an angel appears to them and announces the birth of Jesus. Shepherds, uneducated, irreligious, uncouth and unlikely. Do not be afraid, they were told. Of course they were afraid and sorely surprised. What happens next is a marvelous miracle, one of many that occurred on that first Christmas night. The first miracle is that they went! They didn't form a Committee, they didn't wait and ponder the economic impact, they didn't take a poll, or call in consultants, or request more information from the angels. They went! With haste. Immediately.

What does it mean for us in 2018. Jesus still wants to come into the lives of plain and ordinary people, in other words, US! Shepherds were not rocket scientists, or Sunday school teachers, or Nobel Prize winners, or Lutheran Pastors. They were ordinary people, just like us, trying to make it. The point is that God comes to us. In our homes, jobs, at the dinner table, with our aging parents, in our worries. Surprise, he says. Here I am!

The second thing has to do with the angel announcement that included the phrase, Don't Be Afraid. For us, easier said than done. Of course, we are afraid. When loved ones face serious illness, when money is short, when hope is fading, when relationships are strained, we become afraid. But we need to revisit the angel's words. They didn't only say, Don't Be Afraid. They said, Don't Be Afraid For I bring you news of great joy. A Savior has been born for you. Emmanuel - God with us. Always, forever, on-going. We will never be alone. God is here, in this fractured world. God is here with us in dark nights and hopeless situations. God has promised never to abandon us.

The last message for us this morning is that the shepherds went to see and to celebrate. That's what they were doing, celebrating. Giving thanks. That's why we are here this morning. To celebrate the fact that God is with us. We come to celebrate and give thanks. We come to recharge our batteries, to remember, to hear the words again that God is with us. It doesn't get any better than this. We are reminded that God comes with a whole lot of love not a little bit of love as Charlie Brown said looking at his wimpy tree.

A Savior has been born, one who will bridge the gap between a sinful world and a gracious God.

So we come to this place. Our Savior's Lutheran Church. To remember and to reaffirm that a Savior has been born. God has touched you with a promise that has taken root in your hearts. That although we are ordinary, that we are sinful Shepherds, a Savior has been born for US! That's why we have a reason to celebrate.

Thanks be to God,
MERRY CHRISTMAS
Let it be so.

Amen.