

Today I bring you good news of great joy for all the people!

However, according to Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose of Christmas*, he says, “Really? For many people, getting ready for Christmas seems more of a hassle than a source of happiness. It’s a source of stress. They feel pressure, not pleasure, when it comes to Christmas.” He goes on to say this could be because of those oddball relatives, or strained relationships, loneliness, or recent losses in your life.

The Grinch thought Christmas was only about the presents, the tree and lights, and if he stole those things away, Christmas would go away. But on Christmas morning, he still heard joyful noises and singing. He said to himself, “Hmm... It came without ribbons, it came without tags. It came without packages, boxes, or bags.” “Maybe Christmas (*he thought*) doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas perhaps means a little bit more.”

Christmas does mean more. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

This baby lying in the manger, wrapped in bands of cloth is a sign that God has come to be with us. John 3:16 describes Christmas this way, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” The whole purpose of Christmas is to show God’s love for the world in the gift of Jesus and to save the world.

Jesus’ birth has expanded the margins of who is now included in God’s good graces... it doesn’t depend on our bloodlines, the color of our skin, or how good we are at life. God’s action of coming to earth tells us, “I love you no matter what and there is a place for you in my kingdom.”

According to Micah 5:2, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem... the city of David. It just so happened that Emperor Augustus called for the whole world to be registered in their home towns for tax purposes. So the servant girl Mary, who was 9 months pregnant, and Joseph, her fiancé, slogged down to Bethlehem to follow the emperor’s decree. And these taxes did not come with local representation. There were no senators or representatives. They were

imposed to fund the extravagance of Caesar Augustus and the Roman Empire. These taxes were flat out unfair and unjust to people like Mary and Joseph. But even then, God can use this moment of injustice to carry out God's plan to save us.

This is the world Jesus was born into... it wasn't perfect... when the Roman government was dealing crushing blows on the occupied people. So if you are feeling down at all this Christmas or are disenfranchised with government... there is a place for you in the Christmas story.

Next, Jesus was born into a world of "no." Remember, there was "no room at the inn." For those who know what it is like to be rejected, or left out, there is a place for you. The humble birth of Jesus in a manger expands the margins of God's kingdom to those who are rejected or left out. After all, Jesus experienced rejection by his own family, disciples, and childhood religion. He experienced abandonment on the cross. If you are hurting in any way, there is a place for you.

Then God expands the margins of who will carry his message of hope by announcing the good news of Jesus' birth to lowly shepherds working in the fields. Shepherds were on the low end of the totem pole as far as social status. They weren't public speakers or princes. But the Angels chose them to carry this message of Jesus' identity to the manger. If God can use them, God can surely use us to spread the good news of Jesus. They dropped what they were doing and went to look for the sign of a child lying in a manger. When they found Mary and Joseph and the Baby, they shared the good news of Jesus' birth with them. Mary treasured these words in her heart, and the shepherds then went away Glorifying and Praising God. If you have ever felt unworthy or unqualified to share Jesus' love with others, "there is a place for you."

It is easy to lose the simple message of Christmas, which is God coming to earth to experience the joys and sorrows of humanity and to love us through it. We don't deserve this love, but God chooses to give it. It comes in the form of forgiveness and the message that you are already enough in Christ. There is a place for you.

In Ann Weems the book of poems called *Kneeling in Bethlehem*, she addresses the hope of Christmas in the poem “Not Celebrate”:

*Not Celebrate?*

Not celebrate?

Your burden is too great to bear?

Your loneliness is intensified during this Christmas season?

Your tears seem to have no end?

Not celebrate?

You should lead the celebration!

You should run through the streets to ring the bells and sing the loudest!

You should fling the tinsel on the tree, and open your house to your neighbors, and call them in to dance!

For it is you above all others who know the joy of Christmas.

It is unto you that a Savior is born this day,

One who comes to lift your burden from your shoulders,

One who comes to wipe the tears from your eyes.

You are not alone, for he is born this day to you.

Amen!