

Pedestrian Christmas Eve Service: “Good News of Great Joy”

First song as people enter: The Holy City played by Beth.

SLIDE 1: Good News of Great Joy – on screen.

Welcome: You may be here for the first time, the first time in a while, or you join us regularly, we are so happy you’ve decided to join us tonight. Amidst all the Christmas busyness and the excitement of what tomorrow holds, we believe that taking a few moments to pause & reflect on the true meaning of Christmas is important for all of us.

Tonight, we will be focusing on just one simple part of the Christmas story. Throughout the night we will talk a little, then sing, talk a little more, and so it will continue until we end in about 1 hour’s time. Tonight’s theme is one of my favourite parts of the Christmas story – and to introduce it, let’s turn our eyes to the screen.”

Part 1 - “Good News of Great Joy”:

SLIDE 2 – Angel (person holds up image)

The angels appearing to the shepherds. Regardless of your familiarity with the Bible, I’m sure you’ve heard this story at Christmas. Many of you – whether recently or maybe a little longer ago – have probably dressed up as angels for a school concert or church Christmas play. Angels are an important part of the Christmas story.

Let's all take a moment and imagine what it would have been like to be one of those shepherds on the first Christmas night. Allow me, to set the scene. It is a cold dark night, and it's getting late. You are a shepherd – poor, isolated and probably exhausted. You are trying to keep track of all your sheep, but by this time in the night, they are all starting to blur together. Did you count that one already? Did you doze off for a few moments? Are they all still there?

SLIDE 3 – Sheep - Person holds up image.

You are trying to stay awake when suddenly, the sky lights up. Is this the end of the world? You no longer need to try to stay awake – you've been jolted to your senses, along with everyone around you. Amidst all the light, a strange figure appears. He's like nothing you've ever seen before. Beautiful, yet terrifying. Heavenly, almost. He looks like... an angel.

Then he opens his mouth to start to speak. "Don't be afraid" are his first words. Ha! Easy for him to say. You are a regular old shepherd, minding your regular old business, and then – this. Terrified doesn't even come close to describing it. As the angel continues to speak though, you feel less afraid. You start to hear what he's saying: "I bring you good news of great joy, which will be all for people."

SLIDE 4 Good News held up

Good news! You haven't heard much of that lately. With Herod as the king of Israel, things have been anything but good. He's out to

get everyone and anyone who crosses his path – instituting more taxes and laws and rules. The religious leaders are making it even harder to get into worship – it seems like everyday they’re adding a new law or regulation. But yet, you believe the angel. Whatever he is about to say, whatever he’s about to tell you, you believe that news will be truly good.

What the shepherds couldn’t have known, but what we can know today, is that the news the angels shared really, truly is good. Not just good, but the best news that we could ever imagine! The angel’s news about a baby being born wouldn’t just change the lives of the shepherds, but our lives too.

In a world that is much like that of the shepherds – with so much hardship and difficulty and bad news – the news of Christmas truly is *good*. And it is good news for all of us. A baby has been born for us, and that is truly good news. It was for the shepherds, and it is for us too.

And that news is worth singing about! Let’s sing a carol.

First Carol: While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks.

Part 2 - “A Saviour is Born”

Anytime a baby is born, it is good news.

SLIDE 5 – Newspaper – image held up.

The family and relatives can't wait to let everyone know! Sometimes a photo is taken and posted on Facebook only a few hours after the birth. Birth announcements – shared with family, friends, and others. When a baby is born, everyone in your circle is told the good news.

In days gone by – before Facebook and photographers – good news was shared another way. Whether through a section in the newspaper an announcement at church or simply word of mouth – people shared the news that a baby was born! The good news of Jesus' birth was more than just regular good news. It was so much more than a regular birth announcement.

SLIDE 6: Luke 8-14 – all read together.

The words that the angel used aren't words you would use to announce the birth of a regular baby. While every baby is special, this baby was special in a different way. He was the Saviour!

SLIDE 7: Saviour – held up

Saviour, does anyone know what it means? If you look it up in the dictionary, SAVIOUR simply means a person who saves someone or something from danger. They are a rescuer! In simple, human terms, a policeman who protects you, a doctor who helps you when you are gravely ill, a friend who brings you coffee when the baby has been up all night – is a "saviour."

This term is used throughout the Bible to describe God, and particularly Jesus. Jesus was going to be the ultimate Saviour. The angel – perhaps the same one who appeared to the shepherds – told this to Mary & Joseph when they first learned Jesus would be born. “Call Him Jesus,” for he will save the people from their sins.”

He wouldn't just save the shepherds, and all people from danger or a bad ruler or a challenging situation. He would save them, and us from the ultimate problem, sin. Sin, put simply, is what separates us from God. From the Garden of Eden until today, sin infiltrates our world. We see it on the news, hear it on TV and radio – sadly all around us. But we also can recognize it in our own hearts and lives – anger, jealousy, resentment, and lack of compassion. We see it when we push God to the sidelines because we want to live our own way and sometimes, He is way down, at the end of the line.

Sin is a problem we can't do anything about. We can never be good enough, religious enough or kind enough to get rid of it. If we could, surely our world would be a better place by now. Surely, we would be better people. Sin can't be erased on our own. We need a Saviour. We need someone to deal with the problem of sin for us. God knew that, and so He sent Jesus. That tiny baby in a manger would grow to be a man who died and rose again to save us from sin. This was better news than the shepherds could have ever imagined.

A Saviour had come for them! And He has come for us! Jesus Himself said He came to seek and save the lost. I am one of those lost. We all are. That's why we need a Saviour! And that's what Christmas is truly all about.

Second Carol: The first Noel. (bells?)

Part 3: "This Will Be a Sign"

We see signs all the time!

SLIDE 8: stop sign held up – what does this sign tell us?

SLIDE 9: Pedestrian sign – what does it mean?

SLIDE 10: Right turn only sign – what does that mean?

SLIDE 11: Safety boots and goggles sign – what does this mean?

SLIDE 12: McDonalds?

Signs tell us about something important.

Do you know that when Jesus was born, the angels told the shepherds there would be a sign? It wouldn't be a sign that you would see on the side of the road or at a store. This is what the angels said: "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." That doesn't seem like a normal kind of sign, does it?

Instead of proclaiming that a Saviour had come with a big sign outside the stable or a banner hanging from the sky, the sign was a baby in a manger wrapped in cloths.

Slide 13 Manger image held up

The manger probably looked something like this one. It was just a box the animals used to eat out of.

Mary & Joseph didn't have all the things that your mom and dad had when you were born, so they just wrapped Jesus up in cloths. There were no cot blankets, or nappies or beautiful new baby clothes.

Slide 14 – Baby clothes image

When you think about it, it was an unusual sight! How often do you think shepherds saw a baby in a barn? Lying in the animals' feeding trough? It wouldn't be something they would have seen every day – probably never. Finding that baby would be a true sign that Jesus was exactly who the angels said He was. They were telling the truth! And that baby in a manger was the sign.

Third carol – Away in a Manger.

Part 4: Angels' Pronouncement

The story isn't quite finished yet though! After just one angel had shared this news with the shepherds, the skies were filled with a great company, or multitude, of angels. We have no idea how many, but I like to imagine that the sky above the shepherds' field was filled with angels and their shining light.

These angels joined together in a song that would be echoed for centuries following, and it still echoes today!

SLIDE 15: Luke 2:14 – all read together.

That proclamation is an amazing one and one that continues to echo in the hearts of those who follow Jesus.

This phrase “Glory to God” is a reminder that God deserves all praise and honour and worship. *Especially* because of His great act of love in sending Jesus.

This season, and always, we must be willing to give Him glory. We must echo the song of the angels & give Him worship for the gift of Jesus. As we give Him the rightful place in our lives, He fills our hearts with peace.

Beth plays “O Holy Night.”

Part 5: “Our Response”

In response to this out-of-this-world experience with the angels of heaven, the shepherds were faced with a decision. Would they ignore everything that was told to them, or would they go and see for themselves what the angels had said? The curious shepherds went to investigate, as Luke writes that: “When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to each other, ‘Let us now go to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’”

Every single year, much of the world stop their regular routine and celebrate Christmas. In the hustle and bustle of all the festivities and busyness, the song of the angels still sings out: “We bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone! The

Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem! How will you recognize him? You will find a baby wrapped in a blanket, lying in a manger!”

The message of the angels, that a Saviour and Redeemer has been born so that you and I no longer must live enslaved to sin, shame, and fear is still the message of Christmas. That Jesus is the long-awaited one who would break the bondage of this life and renew our broken relationship with God is still the song that the angels sing, and still rings in our ears today.

But here is the question: ***In your heart, how are you responding to the news of Jesus?***

Are you indifferent to the true meaning of Christmas, does it change anything for you? Or are you like the shepherds, who upon hearing news that seemed too good to be true, decided to go and find out more? I hope that the curiosity of the shepherds, and their longing to see the truth, is equally found in you. And I hope that like the shepherds, this Christmas you will say, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us!” For I guarantee that if you search for Jesus, you will not be disappointed.

Closing Song: “Silent Night” by candlelight – glow candles or glow sticks given out.

Prayer.