

- Speaker 1: [00:01](#) It has been a season of messages delivered by winged messengers, lots of drama to be sure one by one we have listened as Zachariah than Mary than Joseph all had their turn on the receiving end of some impossible news so far. All of those have been individual messages delivered somewhat in private in our scripture today. God's extraordinary good news is about to go viral, not just one angel, but a sky filled with angels interrupting another wise, peaceful evening with for some unsuspecting shepherds, do not be afraid, brothers and sisters to listen to this story as if you're hearing it for the first time.
- Speaker 2: [01:05](#) The gospel of Luke chapter two verses one through 15 in those days, a decree went out from emperor Augustus that all in the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph went to the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem because he was descended from the house of the family of David. He went to be registered with Mary to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While there, the time came for her to deliver her child and she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in bands of cloth lady the manger because there was no place for them in the end and that region, there were shepherds living in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night and an angel of the large stood before them and the glory of the large shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,
- Speaker 3: [02:20](#) do not be afraid for CE. 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 assigned for you. You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.
- Speaker 2: [02:54](#) The suddenly there was with the angel, multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying when the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another. Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord had made known to us. The word of God for the people of God.
- Speaker 1: [03:33](#) It is fun to sit up here and see how many people are looking for where the Angel's voice is coming from. I think that was just like the shepherds that I can imagine. They were just astounded. You know, we have been studying messengers for a month now and I've appreciated so much all of these favorite gospel stories for us, but I began to be curious about over the course of human history, what kind of messengers have delivered historic

important messages. I learned that in ancient Greece and unnamed soldier ran 26 miles to let the people of Athens know that the Greek army had been successful on the field of battle. It was 490 BC and the event that he was communicating about was, you know, the battle of Marathon, Marathon 26 miles. Who knew? I also learned about the key [inaudible] who were couriers. I probably didn't say that right.

Speaker 1: [04:35](#)

Couriers in medieval feudal Japan who ran an average of 80 miles a day delivering messages and set in place this network, this amazing communications network that was, um, part of the reason why the leaders were able to get so much power in that medieval time. Uh, their name translates flying legs 80 miles a day. Wow. Then I read the story of Nancy Wake in France in 1940 a career and a spy for the French resistance. She was so cunning, so ruthless that the Gestapo found it impossible to track her and they posted a considerable bounty for anyone who could help them get to her. They named her the white mouse in 1943 in Italy, there was another famous messenger the American army had called for bombers to take out a German position in a beautiful village of Italy. But what the Americans didn't know was, they were preparing for the campaign was that the British army had just taken the village. So a messenger was needed to send a message quickly. They named the messenger GI Joe and GI Joe was dispatched to stop the bombing. He covered 20 miles in 20 minutes arriving just in time to prevent an airstrike that would have threatened a thousand British soldiers on the ground. Did I mention that GI Joe was a carrier pigeon?

Speaker 1: [06:21](#)

So we've got the feathered GI Joe and our angel messengers. The casting call for messengers in the gospel of Luke was much more impressive than any carrier pigeon. Luke tells us that there was a single angel delivering the good news and I have seen some contemporary art that puts that angel down on the ground right in front of the shepherds who are kneeling, who are shielding their faces because of the divine light coming from the angel. And then immediately following the delivery of the message. A choral concert breaks out overhead. Can you imagine in the years to come how these simple shepherds must have struggled to capture in words what happened to them that not trying to describe for family and friends and anybody who would listen? This amazing experience they had had. Even the most articulate person would have had difficulty putting it all into words.

Speaker 1: [07:21](#) And these were men who more often than not spent their days communicating with sheep. It must've been so challenging. God was definitely making an interesting assignment here, choosing the shepherds to deliver such important news delivered to them by the angel. God was choosing uneducated folks near the bottom rung of the social ladder to spread the word about God's decision to come to earth and to well with us. That might seem to be an amazing selection, those shepherds. But you know, when we're listening for God's voice in our own lives, it's amazing how our creative God sends messages in all sorts of ways. You know what I'm talking about? Those times in your life when you've been praying hard for an answer, asking God to help you with a decision trying to adjust to a major change in your life and as you listen and as you wait, the answer comes to you in the words of a song as you derive to work or it's part of a conversation you overhear in the line at the grocery store or there's some words in an article of a magazine in the waiting room that seemed to be just what you needed to read at the time.

Speaker 1: [08:46](#) I think when we walk through our days in conversation with God, when we keep close to God's word day in and day out, we quickly discovered that God has limitless supply of messengers and ways to deliver mess messages to keep us on the right path, to align us with God's will. So for God to choose a bewildered group of shepherds to share the angel message, maybe it wasn't so surprising at all. There's one thing for sure. The message itself is a classic gospel proclamation. Martin Luther 500 years ago. Love to write about this particular passage, the personal nature of the message that the angel delivered. The angel says, I am bringing you good news to you is born this day. This will be a sign to you, very personal. Luther wrote in his commentary. The angel does not simply say Christ is born, but instead says for you he is born.

Speaker 1: [09:57](#) What good would it do mean? Luther asked if he were born a thousand times and if this were sung to me every day with the loveliest ears. If I shouldn't hear that, there's something in it for me that it should be my own good news. Although the shepherds are there to receive the news. The angel clearly states that this is news of great joy for all people and this end of the sentence, there has been a bit of a tug of war over the years with various translations of the Bible. The King James Version says, this is good news of great joy for all people. NRSV in keeping with the original Greek says, this is good news of great joy for all that people. That's what much more particular when you add the to it as in we the people of the United States, a

particular group of people, so let me invite you over lunch today or when you get home, you can do all your homework.

Speaker 1: [11:04](#) You can decide which translation you like. The one that I'm picking is the one that includes me. I don't care what that is, but if I'm included in it. That's the right translation. A few chapters later in Luke's gospel, when Jesus appears in the synagogue to launch his public ministry, he gives us a clue about who exactly this good news is for. He reads that day, you remember from the scroll of Isaiah and he broke claims. I have come to bring good news to the poor to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Such an important priority list for us as we get ready to embark on a new year of ministry. As we think about the shepherds this morning, I'm reminded of the great temptation any of us would have when we are asked to deliver an important message.

Speaker 1: [12:12](#) You know, it's really easy to get distracted by that kind of assignment to kind of put our own agenda in there, to take advantage of the role that we are playing, to use the message for our own purposes. Let me explain with an example. My oldest son Ben and his wife, Haley, we're picking up my granddaughter, Finley, three and a half from preschool and they were helping her on with her coat and putting your things in her backpack. And as they do in the afternoon, every day they were asking her what happened at school and what did she learn and of what else had happened. And um, Haley Finley's mom asked, so did you take a nap today? Finley answered immediately. Yes I did. Wow. Her dad says, are you sure? I don't think you've been taking naps too much lately. Both Haley and Ben had been made aware by the teacher then.

Speaker 1: [13:09](#) Not only certainly not interested in naps anymore, she's having a really hard time staying on her mat during quiet time, so they're appropriately surprised. So now they're out in the hallway walking towards the car and I think my granddaughter Finley must have been had the feeling that she was in a tight spot. So she stopped her spirit parents and she put her finger up, which is a son listen to me. And she said, I know I'll go ask teacher Anna if I took a nap. She looks at her parents and she says, you wait right here and I'll come back and tell you.

Speaker 1: [13:48](#) Do you suppose the shepherds were tempted to embroidery their message a little bit to add to it over the years, it's a big deal when you're carrying such an important message. Now any tour group in Bethlehem these days is going to make a stop at

the chapel of the sh at the Shepherd's field. It's a beautiful chapel designed mine, Italian architect to mimic the contours of all of the caves in that part of Bethlehem. And after you've visited the beautiful chapel, you can walk down a pathway and enter one of those caves. Anybody taller than me will need to bend over. Uh, it's a low hanging ceiling. There are very simple benches there where groups could sit for a worship service or where individuals could sit and reflect and look out over the pastures and imagine the night that we are talking about. You can look up at the ceiling of the cave and imagine all the fires that were lit inside that cave because it's Majed on the top from centuries and centuries of shepherds keeping more warm at night.

Speaker 1: [15:03](#)

And if you listen to the tour guide, you will find out that there's something particular about those pastures centuries earlier in ancient Bethlehem, the shepherds who worked at those pastures, they're not worked anymore, had a special assignment. They were under contract with the temple in Jerusalem. These were the shepherds who would care for the sheep that would one day become part of ancient worship at the temple. These were specialized shepherds with a very particular assignment. They were shepherds abiding in their fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Shepherds raising temple, sheep sacrificial sheep, the perfect messengers for good news, of great joy to all people.