

Dec 24, 2017

Luke 1:26-36, 38; 2:1-21

The Certain Gospel: A Knock on the Door

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

Last year Monica and I traveled to my **hometown** of Estes Park Colorado for the Holidays. It's known for being the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park. A lot of people visit there in the summer, but only about 10,000 live there year round. Many who grow up there leave when they graduate **high school**. Estes doesn't have corporate jobs. It doesn't have a great school district. It has lots of elk and lots of tourists, nothing **special** ever seems to happen there.

That first night we were there, we were eating dinner with my family when we heard a **knock** on the door. I went and answered it and it was my childhood friend **Jake** with his new wife **Maggie**, who looked **very pregnant** and **very tired**. I invited them inside and they sat down on our couch exhausted. Now I hadn't hung out with **Jake** in years, but I'd recently **Facebook stalked** him because he'd just married **Maggie**, who he met up north where he worked as a **carpenter** building **houses**.

As Jake sat there, I asked him what was going on. He explained the **Governor** of their state had passed a new bill requiring workers to demonstrate **proof of citizenship**. Of course it was being challenged in the **courts**, but he'd contacted the hospital in Estes anyways to send him a copy of his **birth certificate**. Due to a **clerical error**, they lost his paperwork, so they had to travel home to get his **registration** figured out. I said I was sorry for them, especially during the **Holidays**, but asked why he'd come to us.

He told me that none of his family **lived** in town anymore, and every hotel, **inn**, and Airbnb was full, and of all his old friends in town, he knew that my parents rented out our home as a **vacation rental**, so would they have an extra room they could spare for the night? I said, "normally, yes, but there's **no room** in our vacation rental. My mom and dad are hosting my three older brothers, their wives, and my combined **ten nieces and nephews**, so our house is packed."

Maggie burst into tears and said, "We just need someplace to stay. I don't want my unborn baby to sleep in the cold. He's special... An **angel** told me he is going to be the **King of Kings** and will **change the world**."

I thought, well that's kind of **weird**...

I think she saw the look on my face because she said, "The angel really told me the **Holy Spirit** would give me a baby and that I should name him **Joshua** because he will **save** his people from their **sins**. People are going to call him the **Son of the Most High**, the **Son of God**." (Luke 1:26-38)

What could I say to that? I was pretty sure from their wedding photos that their wedding was a **shotgun wedding**, since she was already pregnant. I thought she was crazy. Of course Jake was the father. I didn't **believe** her. I thought she was **making it up**. I didn't even stop to **consider** if there were some truth in what she was saying. Maybe this baby would **change** the world, but he definitely **wasn't** the Son of God.

"Are you sure you don't have a **place** we could stay?" Jake asked.

That's when I remembered that my parents were building a **tiny house** to live in the next summer as they rented out their home, but that although it wasn't quite done, it did have **insulation** in the walls and a **wood burning stove**. We were housing our **bunnies** out there, so it did **smell** like bunnies, but they didn't care. I moved our bunnies to the **garage**, took Jake and Maggie out to the tiny house, got a **fire** started, and left.

But five minutes later Jake banged on my door, his **face white** as a **sheet**. He said, “Maggie is having her baby!” So I said, “So take her to the **hospital!**” But he said, “We don’t have **insurance.**” I said, “Bring her inside!” But he said, “It’s too late, we can’t move her. We’re having the baby tonight in the **tiny house!**”

So I ran and got my sister-in-law who **gave birth at home**. And for the next couple hours we all sweated it out as Maggie screamed and yelled and Jake ran back and forth getting **hot water** and **towels** and looking **terrified**. Then the cries of pain stopped, and the cries of a baby filled the night air. And a few minutes later, the newborn baby stopped crying, swaddled by his mother, and it became a **silent night**, a holy night.

By this time it was **late**. We thought about going out to meet the new baby, but **newborn** babies are **gross** and none of us were family, so slowly we made our way to bed. But I stayed up **thinking** about what Maggie had said—that they would name this child **Joshua**, that he would save his people from their **sins**, and that he would be called the **Son of God**. I **googled** on my phone what “Joshua” means. I found out that Joshua is a **Hebrew name** that means “the Lord saves” or “Yahweh saves.” **Yahweh** is the name of God in the **Hebrew Bible**. This child’s name was **special**, if nothing else.

That’s when I heard **another knock** on the door. It was different than the first two times, **faster**, more **impatient**. I ran over to the door, expecting Maggie was having some sort of **post-delivery complication**, but to my surprise someone else was at the door.

It wasn’t just one person, but a whole family. I knew them instantly. It was **Tom** and **Linda Shepherd** and their five kids. They **lived** outside of town in the mountains and didn’t usually come into town. They were known around town for being a little **offbeat**. The dad and mom loved **animals**, and had given their love of animals to each of their five kids. The Shepherds family had horses, goats, four dogs, an actual herd of sheep, and the whole family **smelled** like they **slept** in the **barn** with those animals. Honestly, they were **social outcasts** who kept to themselves, but tonight they were at my doorstep.

“Can I help you?” I asked.

Tom said, “We were out by the pasture watching our **flock of sheep** tonight when an **angel** appeared in the sky!!!”

Oh no, not more of this... But he kept going. He said, “God’s **glory** shown all around us. The whole sky lit up! It looked like the trees and the hills and everything was **on fire**. They were **glowing** with heavenly light.”

I interrupted him and said, “That’s **impossible!** You must have seen a **shooting star.**”

His oldest son said, “Look, I posted a picture on **Snapchat!**” He showed me a picture on his phone but I couldn’t make anything out, it just looked like a **bright light**, like he’d taken a picture of the **sun**, or a **lamp**, or **lightning**. What caught my attention was not the photo but the **look in his eyes**. I could tell he believed it was true even if I didn’t. They all had that **look**.

Tom continued, “The angel must have saw how **terrified** we were because he said, ‘Don’t be afraid! I’m here to give you good news that can make you and all people really **happy.**’”

Alright, I like good news.

“‘Today in town a Savior is born, a Savior who is the Messiah, God’s only chosen King, the Lord! Go look for a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a **feeding trough**, a **manger.**’ And then immediately a whole angelic choir appeared and began to sing God’s praises. They sang:

Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth **peace** to those on whom his favor rests.

And then they disappeared. All the angels went back to **heaven**.”

“What do you think it **means**?” I asked him.

“It means the **savior** of **sinners** is here!” Tom practically shouted back at me. “It means that nothing will ever be the **same**! It means God has finally given **peace** to his people.”

“**Peace**,” I thought. “We need peace in this world. There’s no peace, just **wars** and **politicians** and **greed** and **bullies** and **injustice**. I don’t even know what true peace is. It’s not **out there** and it’s not **in me**. I **feel guilt** and **shame** all the time. I feel **sinful** and **condemned** because of the things I’ve done. I **need** peace.”

Tom interrupted my thoughts, “Once the angel left, your name **came to mind** as someone I should find. Do you know where the baby in the manger is?”

I said, “Well, **no**, but Jake and Maggie just had their baby in our tiny house. Do you mean them?” With that, I **led** him and his family out back. I knocked on the door and Jake opened it. As he opened the door I felt the **warmth** of the stove and the smell of **bunnies** pour over me. I saw the **light** flickering on Maggie’s **face** and her baby’s face as she stroked him. She’d wrapped him up in a baby blanket and placed him inside a **big wooden bowl** used for serving **bread**—a **feeding trough**, a **manger**…”

The Shepherd family **pushed** their way past me and they fell on their **knees** before this baby. They didn’t say anything. They bowed their heads, closed their eyes, and **praised God**. They **worshiped** this small child as if he were **God himself**.”

Maggie, looked up at me. Her eyes caught mine and it felt like she asked me, “Do you **believe** now?”

Everything I’d witnessed here seemed **unbelievable**. I’d been given an **opportunity** to believe earlier that evening when they **first arrived** at the house, but I hadn’t. Then I’d been given an opportunity to believe again when the **Shepherd** family told me what was happening, but I hadn’t. But now I was here, seeing the baby for the first time myself, and I had to figure out what I was going to **do**.

Was I going to **shut the door** and go back inside? Or was I, like the Shepherds and Maggie, going to **believe** in this tiny baby boy and worship him? He looked normal, like a newborn baby, but clearly he was **something special**. Would he change the world? Was he the Savior? Was he God’s only chosen King?

If you haven’t **caught on** by now, it’s time for me to **confess** that this isn’t my story. This is a **creative retelling** of the story of **Joseph** and **Mary** and the birth of **Jesus** in Luke chapter 2. “**Joshua**” is the **Hebrew** form of the **Greek** name “**Jesus**.” This is me **imagining** myself into the story as the **innkeeper** who had no room in the inn. I wanted to intentionally **place myself** into the **story** because that’s how we’re supposed to read it. Now I want **you** to intentionally **place yourself** into the story and **consider** for a moment if it **might be true**. If you were in the story, how would you **respond**?

1. Are you like one of the **shepherds**? A social outcast who doesn’t care what others think, and when you receive the good news of Jesus you believe? If you believe, “**spread the word**” just like the original shepherds. Praise God as you tell others the good news this Christmas that the story is real.
2. Or maybe you’re more like **Mary** (aka. Maggie). It says in Luke 2 that she “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” Maybe you need to mull this over, to think about it. **Go home and read Luke 2** and imagine yourself in the story. Are you like her?
3. Or are you like the **inn keeper**? We don’t **know** much about him but we do know he **shut the door** on the King of Kings. Either your **heart** isn’t ready to believe or you still think it’s all just a **fairy tale**. It wasn’t any **easier** for those **first people** who heard the story to believe than it is for you today.

You've probably **heard** the story of Jesus and his claim to be God before, and like me in our story, you probably thought it was really **weird** the first time you heard it. You probably thought, this is **ridiculous**, this can't be true. But in so doing, I think you missed the **possibility** that it just might be **real**.

What if the story of Jesus were **true**? What if it really **happened**?

- What if Jesus really was born 2,000 years ago in the small town of **Bethlehem**?
- What if he was conceived by the **Holy Spirit** and born to a **virgin**?
- What if **angels** really did fill the sky to announce Jesus' birth to **shepherds**?
- What if Jesus really came to **save** his people from their **sins**?
- What if Jesus is the **Son** of the **Most High**, the **Son of God**, God's only **chosen King**?
- What if he lived a **sinless** life and died an **innocent death** on a **cross** to pay the **penalty** for your sins?
- What if he didn't stay **dead**?
- What if three days later he **rose** from the grave?
- What if he promised that if you **confess** your sins and **trust** in him, he will give you eternal life?
- What if **eternal life** is not just living forever, but having a **relationship** with Jesus, the Son of God?
- What if this **Christmas** is not like any other Christmas because this year you believe in Jesus and worship the King of Kings?
- *Will you shut the door or believe?*

See, you're **in the story** now whether you like it or not. What will you **do**? *Will you shut the door or believe?* Will you believe like the **shepherds** and tell others? Will you treasure it in your heart like **Mary**? Or will you shut the door like the **inn keeper**? Don't close your heart. For a moment consider that the original Christmas story just might be true. I promise you, that if you believe **in Jesus** as your Lord and King, you will never regret it. *Will you shut the door or believe?*

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).