

# McCabe United Methodist Church

*“All I Want for Christmas Is...”*

**Christmas Message by Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut**

**December 25, 2016, 10:30 p.m.**

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Merry Christmas!!

Let's Pray:

Dear God, on this Christmas Morning may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Come Lord Jesus be our guest. Amen.

So... I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Maybe I'm too old school. Maybe I don't have nice pajamas. I just couldn't break down and stand before you this morning in my pajamas. And then, I hear Pastor Jenny preaching last week. The Angels telling Mary... The angels telling Joseph... Fear Not. I bring Good News!

So I broke down. I put on jeans and a comfortable jacket AND I'm wearing slippers. 😊

Baby steps, but I guess it's progress...

I'm mindful of how great a privilege it is to stand before you on Christmas morning. At the same time it's a little daunting. How do you do justice to trying to preach on Christmas Day?!

And I hear the Christmas story unfolding. Fear Not. Today is a day for Christmas Joy!

Sometimes I like to get here early in the morning. For me it's a great time to read my Bible and to pray. I use this time to seek God and to stay connected with God. But this is a big building. There are spaces all over. There's the prayer chapel. There's the kneeling rail. Sometimes I sit in the choir loft or I pray in one of the children's ministry rooms. Sometimes I go way downstairs and then, in the belly of the building, the boiler rumbles, the ceiling creaks, and a light flickers. And in the darkness I pause and I listen. Am I really alone?

And I open my Bible and hear this morning's Scripture. Fear Not. I bring Good News of Christmas Joy!

Isaiah 9:2 says: The people were walking in the darkness and they saw a great light.

And then, a few short verses later, Isaiah 9:6: For unto us a child is born and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of PEACE.

This was written 700 years before Jesus was born. This was written announcing the birth of our Redeemer before Jesus was even born. Words from Scripture: Fear Not. A Savior. A Savior is to be born. That's Christmas Joy!!

Think about hearing that sound in the middle of the night. It's late. It's dark and you hear that sound. You should check it out, but what if you actually find something or someone?

The shepherds were guarding their sheep. The fields were dark. The shepherd's were anxious. There were dangers seen and unseen.

And all of a sudden there's a great light. A voice from the heavens announcing the birth of Jesus.

I'd invite you to hear again a reading from Luke 2:1-20 titled **The Birth of Jesus**

**2** At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.

If you had to return to your ancestral town where would you go? For Mary and Joseph this wasn't an easy day trip. There were travel arrangements like food and lodging needs. Mary and Joseph probably walked 70-90 miles, almost from here to Jamestown. <sup>4</sup> And because Joseph was (from the shoot of Jesse and) a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, (This was) David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. <sup>5</sup> He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, (And Mary was very pregnant. She) who was now expecting a child.

Difficult travel. Registering the family. Late in a pregnancy, and an unconventional pregnancy to say the least.

The people were anxious and walking in darkness.

<sup>6</sup> And while they were there (registering), the time came for her baby to be born. (We know that she gave birth under less than ideal conditions. Even so) <sup>7</sup> She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and (she) laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

The people were walking in the darkness and yet they trusted. And trusting they went from confused and afraid to...

Remember both Mary and Joseph's initial response when they found out Mary was having a baby? What? How can this be? And yet they trusted. They submitted and obeyed.

Mary and Joseph, from confused and afraid... The people were walking in darkness... to Christmas joy! and then they saw a GREAT LIGHT! To you is born a child. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace...

### The Shepherds and Angels

<sup>8</sup> That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. (The shepherds were alert. There's potential for danger. Anxiety. An underlying sense of fear).

(And) <sup>9</sup> Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared (and startled them...) (xxamong themxx), and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them.

They were TERRIFIED(!!!),

<sup>10</sup> but the angel (of the Lord) reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you (Christmas Joy!. I bring you) good news that will bring great joy to all people. <sup>11</sup> The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord— (He) has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! <sup>12</sup> And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

(Another startling, even terrifying twist). The Savior, The Lord laying on a bed of hay in a barn...

And the story continues to startle...

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly, (this one) angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in highest heaven,  
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

Glory to God and peace on earth. That sounds nice...

And then I'm thinking: Glory to God, and peace on earth, to **those**  
with whom God is pleased. I wonder: Is God is pleased with me?

I know God loves me.  
But is God pleased with me?

When God looks at my words, and my thoughts, and my actions, and  
my wallet, and my computer, and the way I treat others, and the way I  
worship Him...

I wonder if God is pleased with me?

(Then...) <sup>15</sup> When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds  
said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s (check it out! Let’s) see  
this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

From Fear Not to Christmas Joy!

<sup>16</sup> They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was  
the baby, lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> After seeing him, the shepherds told  
everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about  
this child.

This isn't an anxious, frightened retelling of the events of the night.  
This is overflowing excitement and exuberance. This is an: I want to be  
part of this and it's so great I want you to be part of it too!

From Fear Not to Christmas Joy!

<sup>18</sup> All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, (These guys  
worked the night shift. These guys were just some lowly shepherds from  
the fields and the hills) <sup>19</sup> but Mary kept all these things in her heart and  
(she) thought about them often. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds went back to their flocks,  
glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as  
the angel had told them.

## No More Fear. Only Christmas Joy!

A humble baby. Terrified shepherds. Angels rejoicing. Shepherds going and telling anyone who would hear. The Shepherds weren't just calmed down. The shepherds were completely changed.

The shepherds were scared to death. They were ready to run away and hide. Yet changed by Jesus they sprinted to get a closer look, then tell everyone about it.

Christmas is all about a birth that changed the course of history. And Christmas is about a birth that has the power to change you and me.

This birth... It has the power to save us from our fears and from our sins.

This birth... It has the power to save us from the wounds others inflict upon us and this Christmas birth... It even has the power to save us from ourselves...

Unto you a child is born. He's The Christ child, God in the flesh. He shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace. He is The Bread of Life, The Living Water, Our Lord and our Savior.

Will you let the Christmas story not only touch you?  
Will you, like the shepherds... Will you dare to let the Christmas story change your life?

Let's Pray:

O God, we come to worship this Christmas morning bringing with us all that we have. This morning we're reminded that there are times when your voice scares us and startles us, and yet, when we trust, when we let you in, we have an opportunity to experience that true Christmas joy. Come Lord Jesus, be our guest. And I pray in the name of the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty King, Prince of Peace. Amen.