

Because of What the Angel Said!

I’m going to need the help of everyone ten years of age or younger for this sermon. You remember this little Shepherd on the Search who’s been making his way toward the manger since the First Sunday in Advent? Well, he’s *almost* there tonight. And here’s what I need you to do: Every time I hold him up high like this, your job is to say, “Because of what the angel said!” very loudly. Okay? Let’s practice.

A long, long time ago, in the southern part of a nation called Israel, there lived a little girl and her family. The girl’s name was Hannah, and this is the story of what happened to Hannah one starry night – in fact, it was just about 2,000 years ago this very night!

Hannah and her family had gone to bed, and it was very, very quiet, as it was most nights. But suddenly, she was awakened by the noise made by a boisterous group of people outside her house. Hannah jumped from her bed to see what all the commotion was about, and in the bright starlight, she could see a group of shepherds running down the path in front of her house, talking excitedly with one another as they went.

This had never happened before, and, being the curious girl she was, Hannah was eager to learn what was going on. So she threw her shawl around her shoulders, put her sandals on her feet, and hurried outside. But by the time she got there, the shepherds were well down the road and it seemed she would never know what they were up to.

As she turned to go back into her house she spied one more person, a little shepherd boy about her age running up the road. The thong of his sandal had come untied and he was struggling to tie it without falling too far behind the older shepherds.

Hannah ran up to the little shepherd boy and said, “Excuse me, but – why are you all out here running down the road in the middle of the night?” And the little shepherd boy replied, “Because of what the angel said!”

“Oh,” said Hannah. “And where is it that you’re in such a hurry to go?”

“Bethlehem,” replied the boy.

“Bethlehem!” exclaimed Hannah, “They roll up the sidewalks there at sundown. Why would anybody go to Bethlehem in the middle of the night?”

And the shepherd boy replied, “Because of what the angel said!”

“Well, what are you going to do when you get there?” asked Hannah.

“We’re gonna look for a newborn baby boy,” he replied.

“Why do you think you’re gonna find a newborn baby boy in Bethlehem?” the curious girl asked.

And the shepherd boy answered, “Because of what the angel said!”

“Well, where are you gonna look for him? There’s a whole lot of people there now because of the emperor’s census.”

“Well,” the boy said, “I’m thinking he must be in a stable or a livery or a barn or some part of the house where they keep livestock.”

“Why would you look for a newborn baby boy in a stable???” said the skeptical Hannah.

And the shepherd boy replied, “Because of what the angel said!”

“Oh,” said Hannah. “And what’s so special about this baby boy that you’re going looking for him in a stable, in Bethlehem, in the middle of the night?” said Hannah, beginning to think these shepherds might be as fuzzyheaded as the sheep they cared for.

“He’s the King!” said the shepherd boy, still struggling to tie the laces on his sandal. “He’s the Savior, the Messiah, Christ, the Lord!”

“Really?!” exclaimed Hannah! “Wow! Why do you think this baby is the king, the savior, the messiah, Christ, the Lord?”

And the shepherd boy responded, “Because of what the angel said!”

He finished tying his laces at last and said, “Excuse me, but I really have to catch up to the others.”

“Of course,” said Hannah. “But I have one more question: Can I go with you?”

“Why would you want to come with us?” the shepherd boy asked.

And Hannah replied, "Because of what the angel said!"

What the angel said, of course, was this:

"Be not afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be to all the people. For to you is born this day in the City of David a savior, who is Christ, the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angle a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward all.'"

And tonight I wonder:

Are there still those who listen for the brush of angel wings and look for stars above some godforsaken little stable?

People who reorder their lives because of what the angel said?

Are there still those who long to hear an angel's song, to kneel beside some other shepherd in the hope of catching a glimpse of eternity in a baby's smile?

Are there those who sing "peace on earth, goodwill to all" and take those words to heart, not merely as lyrics to a lovely carol, but as gift and task and mission statement?

If there are – and I believe there are – then let our Christmas prayer be that God will keep ablaze their flickering candle in the darkness of this world.

And help us trust that the peace and joy and light of God's love are ours not just for a season, but for a lifetime. Why?

(Let's all say it, one more time,): "Because of what the angel said!"

Merry Christmas!