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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Christmas 1

Luke 2:15-20
Celebrate Christmas All Year Long

*Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to His people on earth! Amen.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Drive around and you can see Christmas trees on the curb. In the stores, the Christmas decorations went on clearance ahead of Christmas to start clearing the shelves for the next marketable season. For the world, it's time to sweep away all thoughts of Christmas and move on.

May it not be so with us! Don't put Christmas away! Now don't feel bad if you already started packing up the decorations. That's not what I'm talking about.

But even as we take down the trimmings, let us never put away the message of Christmas: **A Savior was born for you.** Instead, let us learn today from those very first Christmas Christians to continue to celebrate that saving message, indeed let us **Celebrate Christmas all year long.**

The shepherds heard the Christmas message from choirs of angels: **Do not be afraid...I bring you good news of great joy... for all the people... a Savior was born for you...you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger...peace, goodwill toward mankind!**

What did the shepherds do with this amazing message? They believed it. They trusted the Christmas message **a Savior was born.** That is why they said: **"Let's go to Bethlehem."**

Notice they didn't say, *"Let's go to see if these words are true."* Far from it. They said: **Let's go... see this thing that has happened. *Has happened.***

Note the past tense. Though they hadn't seen it, they trusted there was a Savior in a manger. They believed they needed this Savior to rescue them from their sins. They trusted that despite their unworthiness, they were loved by the Lord.

They trusted, because they knew who the message came from: **“the Lord has made known to us.”**

Like me, have you ever wished you could have been one of those shepherds who got to hear the first Christmas sermon from the angels and see Jesus lying in the manger? Sure that would be neat, but don't let that thought make you miss what God *has given* to you and me.

There's no reason for us to be jealous of the shepherds, for we have all heard the same message: **A Savior was born for you.** That they heard it from angels does not matter. It was not the angels' message, but the **Lord's message.** It's not the messenger that matters, but the

message of peace and forgiveness the Christ child brings.

Anyway, we have also heard the message from a heavenly source: God's Holy Word, the Bible that the Holy Spirit gave through the Prophets and Apostles. The book of which Christ himself says: **Your word is truth.**

In this **word** we find the same message that brings us escape from hell and death that the shepherds already enjoy right now! **A Savior was born for you.**

Yes, **for you.** For *you* God the Son took on human flesh. For *you* He gives his holy birth in place of your sinful one. To *you* he gives his holy life to cover your imperfection and his innocent death on a cross to remove every wrongdoing. To you He gives His rising from the grave as the proof your body will rise to life without end. The Christ child gives you **peace** with God. Like the shepherds **Trust it**, because **the Lord has told us!**

Where can you get such faith like the shepherds? From the Holy Spirit, as we go to **see** Jesus, just as they did. Jesus is no longer in a manger at Bethlehem, but you will still find him exactly where He says He will come to you. You will find the Christ child in the Bible, the **Scriptures** that **testify about him**.

You will find Jesus in the Lord's Supper, with his body and blood to forgive. You will find him each day in the promise He made at your baptism: that He has swept away all your sin and made you part of God's eternal family. Find Jesus in the message of Word and Sacrament, and **Celebrate Christmas all year long: as you Trust it**.

The shepherds also show us how living faith shows itself in words and actions: **When they had seen him, they told others the message they had been told about this child**. The shepherds took seriously that this **good news of great joy... will be for all the people**. And so they told **others** about the Savior's birth.

But what equipped them for such work? They didn't have a seminary education. I doubt they were expert public speakers with magnetic personalities, you don't need such things to watch sheep!

So how could they be God's messengers? Because the **Lord** told them. They didn't have to come up with some fancy message or need to carefully package it in some attractive way. They could simply repeat the **message they had been told** by the angels: The Savior was born for all, the Savior who brings peace with God.

God gave them a message, and God gave them faith. That's what prepared them to **speak** about the Savior.

Again, we have exactly what the shepherds had! We have also heard God's promise that this child is **for all the people**, not just for those in our congregation, our community, or those who have our same skin color or same language, but **for all the people**. Let us trust that truth just as

we trust Jesus forgives us and gives us a home in heaven.

God has given us the message and given us faith in Jesus. That means He has also given us all we need to **tell** the simple truths about what Jesus has done for us. Even little children can tell how we need a Savior and how Jesus is the Savior we need! Give prayerful thought about the people in your life you can tell or invite to hear the message with you.

Remember how with your prayers and offerings and support of the congregation's work you get to help tell this message to the children in our Grow in Peace Learning Center, to our school and Sunday school and with our support of missions we get to help **tell** that **message** to **others** throughout the world!

God gives us the easy part. We only need to **tell the message...** God the Holy Spirit will take care of the results. **Celebrate Christmas all year long** as like the shepherds we work to **tell this good news to others.**

Now, thanking God for the Savior's birth is not limited to serving in church and speaking aloud the good news. Consider what else the shepherd's did to celebrate God's love: **The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**

The shepherds returned. They didn't leave everything to live in a monastery. They didn't trade their shepherds staffs for clerical collars as if the only way to *really* serve God is by full time church work. They didn't sell their sheep to build a shrine over the manger in Bethlehem.

They simply **returned** to the work God had given them with hearts filled with the joy of knowing the Savior from sin. They didn't consider caring for sheep too demeaning and lowly, but they were content to be where God had placed them in life and praised him by doing their work faithfully.

The shepherds are a great example of what Paul writes: **Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**

Like the Shepherds, **celebrate** the good news of **Christmas all year long** as we **live it**. If God has given us a job, let us praise him by doing it faithfully. Glorify God in carrying out for Him whatever role He has given you: whether as a student in school, or at home taking care of children, by managing what God has given us as we take care of our homes.

Washing the dishes and shoveling the snow is about as glorious as tending and sheering sheep, but done with believing hearts filled with thanks for Jesus, it's a way to **celebrate Christmas all year long** with our whole lives.

Since we are not yet home in heaven, we still have sinful hearts and weakness that so often make our celebrating the birth of our Savior in all we do fizzle with failures to confidently trust, boldly speak and joyfully live for the Lord. Let us

throughout year the year admit our sins before our God.

But then let us also do what Mary did: **Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.** Though we have only earned God's punishment, His great love has given a treasure to hold in our hearts, just like Mary. The treasure of knowing Jesus Christ is God's Son born of Mary, the **Savior who was born for all the people.** *All the people* means you and me too!

Jesus' holy life was lived for *you*. He confidently heard, learned and trusted the promises of God's Word. For years He faithfully served in a lowly job as a carpenter and then went about His work of preaching and teaching with all His heart! Treasure the **good news** that all Jesus did: His holy life, His suffering hell and death on the cross, His rising on Easter morning, it was all was done **for you** to give **you** His own victory over guilt and grave!

Like Mary, **treasure** this message: **a Savior was born for you...** for *your* forgiveness, for

your peace with God, to prepare a home in heaven *for you*. **Treasure** the good news of Jesus at the center of your life. Through it the Holy Spirit will lead us to **trust**, **speak** and **live** it until we celebrate the greatest Christmas in heaven's joys! Amen.

I bring you good news of great joy... A Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. Amen.