

## Victory of the Lamb – Hope – Luke 2:6-20 - Hope is Here

### Christmas Eve 2019 - Pastor Bill Limmer

Think of one or two of your most memorable gifts that you've received for Christmas. I remember getting a train locomotive that blew smoke out of its stack. I was one bad five-year old! The other one that sticks out in my mind was a pinball machine. But it wasn't one you probably are picturing in your head. Because this is what I actually got: a handheld plastic pinball machine. I was one sad adolescent.

There are different kinds of gifts. There are not so good gifts. Gifts we need. And gifts we want. And every now and then we get gift that is better than what we had hoped for.

I want to share one such gift with you today. And to do so, we need to unwrap history and go back to when this whole Christmas thing started. And so, in a day and a time, when political parties were full of corruption, when the sides were pitted against each other, each side grasping for prestige and power, this happened. **"In those days –Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while<sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son."** Christmas is a fact of history. On a specific day, in a specific place, to a specific young girl, one of a kind baby boy was born who came to bring hope to a sin corrupted and dark world.

You see, I don't know what your year was like, and I was certainly blessed in so many ways. So blessed that I have to fight against the sin of entitlement. There were others sins and difficulties including the wages of sin which is death. This last year, I lost my mom. My mom now has an end date on her headstone. You see, Jesus didn't come into a great world to have a good time and live a life of luxury, or even an ok world to bring some good cheer. He came into a messed-up, hurting and dying world to bring hope.

It is into this messed-up world with first world, third world, and real world problems that Jesus was born. Here are the first to hear about it. Luke 2:8-12 **And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

The shepherds were common people at best. Perhaps smelly, outcast, and homeless describes them better. For sure no one was going to go to them and ask their opinion on social justice or for their theological insights not even what should I get for my boss for Christmas.

I imagine that the shepherds on that first Christmas night were hoping for some good conversation, a good snack to eat, maybe a shooting star. They were hoping that nothing was going to happen because to this point when something happened it meant the sheep were being attacked by their nocturnal predators. In which case, the shepherds would have to fend off these wild animals with their staffs, sticks, and stones. They were hoping for a silent night.

What are you hoping for tonight? For some of us are hoping for an Alexa, an instant pot, air fryer, some nice clothes, gloves, scarves, slippers, perfume or cologne, tools, Nintendo Switch, Kindle Fire, My Little Pony, a drone, or some other tech gadget, a handle of our favorite beverage, bank from grandma and grandpa. For some of us, that Amazon gift better be on the doorstep when we get home. And we hope that you bought the right size batteries for all the toys. For some of us we are hoping that the family will arrive safely, that our spouse pays attention to us, and that the kids will put down their phones and have face to face conversation with us. For some of us, we are just hoping for a silent night. But what if you received something better than what you hoped for?

That's what happened for the shepherds. Here is how the shepherds found out about the gift better than they hoped for. Luke 2:9-12 **An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

So it wasn't a Fedex, UPS, or even an Amazon Prime delivery person whom we are always so glad to see, or a text or email alert but an angel telling them their gift had arrived. The angel tells the shepherds how the gift is going to be wrapped. Not in shiny gold, or a cherry red, or a regal blue, or candy cane stripes, but in strips of cloth. Kind of reminds me of my wrapping jobs where I need to add some strips to cover up my lack of skill. But that's another story. The angels tell the shepherds what the gift is wrapped in strips of cloth and that "Hope is here!"

The shepherds had a concept of hope. They probably thought that hope was just wishful thinking, or optimism of a better day. The shepherds new about hope and there was a decent enough chance they knew they didn't have any, that they were hopeless. Maybe that is how you feel too. Your past mistakes hold a grip on you, or what was done to you seems to be a prison that you can't break out of. You feel hopeless because there is conflict, darkness, disappoint, grief, heartaches, illness, pain, suffering, and trouble.

But with the angelic announcement that there was great joy not just for a few people, not just for some people, not just for most people – BUT FOR ALL PEOPLE: the outcast shepherds, the broken you, the I am trying you, the façade you, the running away you, the I have never heard of this before you is included.

**Luke 2:15,16 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.** They couldn't just hear about it, they had to experience it. And when they got to Bethlehem. There he was. There was God lying in the mess of life. They saw the gift with their own eyes. Hold the gift with their own dirty hands. Cherished the gift with their own broken hearts. Jesus was Hope better than what they had hoped for.

This child born on that day to Mary came to do what all the rules, regulations, stipulations, opinion and philosophy, good works, charity runs, bell ringing, striving, singing, worshiping, praying, wishful thinking could not do. The baby would bring redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, love, and unity. He

brings Hope. The very thing that we still need in our lives today. Into every sin and situation Jesus brings hope beyond your dreams. Jesus is the gift of hope better than you/we hoped for.

Every Christmas, there is a time where I am able to steal away and just sit in awe and wonder by our lighted Christmas tree and think back to God, the author of life, taking on human flesh, and lying in a manger. And the reason for which he came. To be put up on a tree, not as an ornament but a sacrifice, a payment for my sin and all sin to bring us peace with God, unfailing love, and Hope.

Near the bottom of our Christmas tree this year is the Hope ornament. Hope in Jesus is the core of Christmas and Christianity. For those who have walked away from Jesus in either misplaced priorities or open unbelief, or to worship someone or something else, or walked away in anger, Jesus has already provided for you a way back. There is nothing too far from the reach of God's forgiving grace and mercy. Jesus is better than what you hoped for!

For those who are down and out, feel unloved, experiencing the weight of grief or regret, and hopelessness is crushing your spirit, Jesus comes with an understanding heart and ear, loving companionship into every single disappointment, grief, and tough circumstance. Jesus is better than what you hoped for!

For those who have never really heard about Jesus before today and think it is too good to be true, and you have nothing to offer but a skeptical or timid you, Jesus welcomes you with open arms because he is better than what you hoped for!

For those of you who made it here with crossed arms not expecting much than hopefully a few good songs, time with family, a good short message and you ended up finding God. Wow. How cool is that? Jesus is better than what you hoped for!

Hope is not just a powerful word, full of optimism for a brighter day. Hope is a person. Hope is Jesus. So, a question I have for you on this Christmas Eve is: Will you try Jesus? Just try him – don't speculate about him; actively seek him. And if you do this is what you will find. You will find that, just like he sought Mary, just like he sought Joseph, just like he sought those unnamed Shepherds, just like he sought me, God is already seeking you. It's just that way because... Jesus is Hope better than anything you ever hoped for.

Merry Christmas!