Voices of Christmas: The Shepherds Tell the Story  
Luke 2:1-20  
A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells

Tonight we continue our sermon series on the Voices of Christmas. During this Advent season, we’ve heard the Christmas story told from several different angles. We’ve heard:

- From the Jewish pilgrims who sang songs of praise to God as they went up to worship in Jerusalem, praying for God to send a savior who would end injustice and oppression.
- From John the Baptizer, who called God’s people to return to God’s ways, and to prepare for the coming of the Messiah who would bring justice and peace to God’s world.
- From Joseph, the husband of Mary, whose actions spoke for him when he took Mary as his wife and the child she was carrying, Jesus, as his adopted son.

Tonight we listen for the voices of the shepherds who were the first to receive the news that God’s son, the Messiah, was born in Bethlehem. We hear the familiar angel voices proclaim the good news to the shepherds: “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Something strange and wonderful was going on here. *Hope was being born in the most unlikely of places.*

“This will be a sign for you,” the angels told them, “you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). *Hope was revealed that night to the most unlikely of people: lowly shepherds.*
They were lowly not just because they were poor.
They were lowly because that’s the way people treated them.
Shepherds were the migrant workers of the ancient world. They were not to be trusted. They were the kind of people that all “good folk” knew to stay away from.
And yet God chose to reveal this great good news to shepherds, people living on the margins of society.
People who weren’t even looking for God.
Remember, they were not deep in prayer that night. They didn’t go on a spiritual retreat in search of the divine. They were watching sheep. Most likely, they were trying to stay awake and stay warm and just get through the night without losing any sheep.
The shepherds were not looking for God; but God was looking for them. Why?
Because hope is born in the most unlikely of places, and is revealed to the most unlikely of people.
That’s just the way God works.
And after they had gotten over the shock of seeing the angels, of being overwhelmed with the brilliant light of heaven and the sublime angel voices, they knew what they had to do: “Let us go now to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:15).
Can you sense the excitement in their voices? “Let’s go NOW!”
Not 15 minutes from now.
Not after we gather up all the sheep.
Not after the dishes are done.
Not after we finish this video game.
This is a “Drop what you’re doing—we’re going RIGHT NOW!” moment. So they went, and they found the family, and they saw the child with their own eyes.

And then they told the story; this strange and wonderful story about angels; and a bright light in the middle of the night; and words about a savior-child; and a song of joy sung by an angel choir.

They told everyone present about what they had seen and heard. Those who heard it were amazed and the Good News spread—these days we might say the story “went viral,” as far as it could in old Bethlehem, anyway.

And already the Good News was having a positive impact. Lives were changed by the news. Mary and Joseph’s, to begin with. But also the shepherds—the ones God found that night. They returned to their fields praising and glorifying God.

Their night didn’t start that way. They weren’t looking for God.

For the shepherds, it was a routine night with routine chores to do.

But it ended with the best news of all: The savior, the Messiah, is born!

What does it look like when hope is born again in our world?

Some years ago, the school system in a large city had a program to help children in the hospital keep up with their schoolwork. One day, a teacher received a routine call asking her to visit a particular child. She talked briefly with the child’s regular teacher and learned they were studying nouns and adverbs in class. “I’d be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn’t fall too far behind,” she said.

The hospital program teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. But no one had told her that boy had been badly burned and was in great pain. Upset at the sight of the boy, she stammered as she told him, “I’ve been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs.” When she left, she felt like she hadn’t accomplished much.
The next day, the teacher went to the hospital again and was stopped by a nurse. “What did you do to that boy?” asked the nurse. The teacher thought she’d done something wrong and began to apologize. “No, no,” said the nurse. “You don’t know what I mean. We’ve been worried about that little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He’s fighting back, responding to treatment. It’s as though he’s decided to live.”

Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. He put it like this: “They wouldn’t send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?”

That’s what hope looks like when it is born in our world. A school system sent good news to a despairing young boy in the form of a teacher, and that gave him hope.

Hope that his life was worth living.
Hope that he had a future.
And as we think about the birth of Jesus, we come to the same realization that boy had:

**God would not send a savior to a world that is not worth saving.**

This is the Good News of God’s love for all people that is made real for us, for you and for me, in the birth of Jesus the Messiah. This is God’s answer to the bad news of this world:

- a world full of oppression and violence;
- a broken world of suffering and heartbreak;
- a world where we cannot save ourselves from our sins.

But God can! And God is saving this world in the life of Jesus the Christ.
You’ve probably heard the saying: “I don’t know what the future holds; but I know who holds the future.”

Go back to Mary and Joseph and the shepherds in the stable. Picture, if you can, a new mother holding her infant child.

Mary and Joseph held the future of all humankind in their arms.

Did they know that God’s future was really holding them?

God has interrupted the dark sorrows of our lives with the brilliance of joy in Christ Jesus. May we always remember the hope that was born in the most unlikely place and proclaimed to the most unlikely of people so many years ago is hope for our world, and for us, too.

Hope that was born in a stable so long ago.

Hope that is born in our hearts again this night.

Amen.