

Unto You

Christmas Eve; Series A

Luke 2:1-20

A blessed Christmas to all of you! This evening we celebrate the good news that God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, once broke the heavens and came to earth to be born for us. Jesus' birth was the beginning of his plan to do what was necessary for all people that he created to have a forgiven, right relationship with him once again. Our God is all-powerful, ever-present, all-knowing, and unchangeable. He is the same "yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8). He came to bring his constant, consistent, and unchangeable message of salvation for all people. Jesus' was born for all people. Yet, every person is different from every other person. We can marvel that to all of his different and varied creatures God offers the same promised Word of salvation. He offers his Son, the Word become flesh.

What I would like to do with all of you this evening is take a few moments to contemplate this profound truth of the Christian faith. It is the truth that to all of his different and varied creatures our triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, offers the same Promised Word of salvation. This is the truth, that, even to you, a person who is wonderfully made and uniquely different from everyone else, even to you he offers this gift of a forgiven, peace-filled, right relationship with him. I would like to contemplate this profound truth with you this evening by taking a closer look at how two of the uniquely different characters of the Christmas story interacted differently with that Promised Word in which they believed.

The same Word believed in and trusted yet interacted with in different and unique ways by people who are uniquely different from one another. Boy, are each and every one of us different! We have uniquely different personalities and some come from uniquely different cultures, generations, and places. All of us here tonight are different from one another. One difference that I would like to speak about for our purposes this evening is the difference between introverted and extroverted personalities.

A Test like the Myer's-Briggs Type Indicator Assessment is a tool based on a psychological theory that helps us understand our own personalities a little better. After taking the Myer's-Briggs test one can determine, according to the parameters of the assessment, whether he or she has an introverted or extroverted personality. Some of us are extroverts who get energized by being with other people, lots of other people. When we see a great crowd of people our first reaction is to jump in the middle and start talking and engaging. Others of us are introverts who get energized by being alone in a quiet setting reading a book, writing, or thinking and reflecting, perhaps while listening to some music. An introvert's initial reaction is to stand on the edge of that crowd of people. If you don't know which one you are, no need to take the Myer's-Briggs test, a spouse or a close family member will tell you! The theory of introverted and extroverted personalities underscores the truth that we are all different and unique.

I would like to suggest that the theory of introverted and extroverted personalities can also assist us tonight as we take a closer look at how the shepherds and Mary believed in and trusted God's promised Word of salvation and interacted with it in different ways.

We will look at the shepherds collectively, as one character, the way St. Luke describes them to us. They were all together keeping watch over their flock when the good news came to them, "For unto 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 baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:11-12). After this Promised Word given by the angels hit their ears and was made known to them, they went to check it out. When they saw the Promised good news fulfilled with their own eyes, they immediately went forth to find a group of people so they could make it known and talk about it (Lk 2:17). To me this seems like a pretty extroverted response. They received the Word. They believed the good news. Then they found others to whom they could blab the good news.

But St. Luke tells us that Mary reacted quite differently when she heard the promised Word. We heard that Mary "treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). To me this seems like a pretty introverted response. The Greek word that is translated as "treasure" can also mean "keep close" or "preserve closely." The Greek word that is translated as "pondering" can also mean "to turn over, or throw together." While Mary received, believed, and trusted in this Promised Word of salvation, "keeping it close" and "turning it over" in her heart, the shepherds immediately received, believed, and trusted in the Promised Word and "made it known," talking about it with others. Different people with different personalities who believed in and trusted God's promised Word of salvation and yet interacted with that Promised Word in different ways.

Now, I do not mean to imply that Mary kept this Promised Word of salvation all to herself. Nor am I suggesting that the Shepherds never thought about and personally reflected on the news they received. On the contrary, the shepherds glorified and praised God. We have every reason to believe that, like Mary, they "kept the Promised Word of God's salvation close" and "turned it over" in their hearts. Indeed, their response of joining with the chorus of the angels to praise and give glory to God is evidence of how much they treasured and pondered this Word of God.

Furthermore, we have evidence that Mary did more than just keep the Promised Word of God's salvation to herself. In the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel he tells us that Mary made known and shared the good news of her pregnancy to her relative Elizabeth (Lk 1:39-45). More than that, her joyful response to the good news that she was pregnant with Jesus led her to break out in song. Her song, the "Magnificat" (Lk 2:46-55), is still a song that the Christian Church sings today. Oh how Mary made known and proclaimed the Good news of the fulfillment of this Promised Word of salvation! Yet, in a sense, we might say that Mary initially responded to the hearing of the Promised Word of God in an introverted way and the shepherds, in an extroverted way.

I propose that this is good news for us. You and I are different still from Mary and the shepherds. We live in the 21st century rather than the 1st century. We come from a different culture. You and I have each have different likes and interests from one another. We each have different backgrounds and come from different family and life situations. We each have different personalities, some classified as introverted and others as extroverted. Because of our differences, our different backgrounds, our different personal histories, our different personalities, we may think God's Word of promised salvation in the birth of Jesus isn't for us. Yet, to you, like he did with Mary and the shepherds, God brings the same, unchangeable Word of Promise filled with great joy for you to believe and trust in. It is a Word of God's Promise that was fulfilled in the birth of one who was at the same time fully God and fully man. Though he was all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful, and unchangeable, he also cried, ate, slept, got angry, and had his own unique personality.

Through this Jesus of Nazareth God fulfilled all that was promised by the prophets who came before him so that you, though you are different, could share his name, his peace, his forgiveness, and his eternal life.

We are always meant to hear, receive, and believe this good news of great joy—this good news that brings to us the Christ child. As we hear this Good News of great joy all over again this year, may God’s Spirit work through it to illicit the appropriate response. Whether we, like Mary, initially treasure and cherish this Word, bringing it close to examine, inspect, deliberate, ponder, and turn it over minds and hearts, or whether we, like the shepherds, exit these doors and look for the nearest crowd of people to tell about and make known what you heard and saw here tonight, it is my prayer that you will continue beyond just the day of Christmas to hear and interact with this Word of Promised salvation in such a way that God strengthens your faith and trust in the Promised One, Jesus Christ. Unto you, one who is uniquely different but no less important than anyone else, “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11). Amen.