

Good morning and welcome to this First Sunday of Christmas. I hope and pray you have had a relaxing day on Friday. As we gather today in our homes rather than in church buildings, we are going to have a short time together in which we will worship together in song, we will pray for God's forgiveness in our lives, we will hear his Holy Word proclaimed, we will seek the Spirit's direction from his Word, we will pray for the World, and we will seek God's blessing for the week to come. And so let's begin by singing

Let's consider our own failings in life as we come now to confess our sins to Almighty God. In the prayers that follow, when I say We have sinned, your response is Forgive us and heal us.

Let's take a moment of silence in reflection.

Lord of grace and truth,
we confess our unworthiness
to stand in your presence as your children.
We have sinned:
forgive and heal us.

The Virgin Mary accepted your call
to be the mother of Jesus.
Forgive our disobedience to your will.
We have sinned:
forgive and heal us.

Your Son our Saviour
was born in poverty in a manger.
Forgive our greed and rejection of your ways.
We have sinned:
forgive and heal us.

The shepherds left their flocks
to go to Bethlehem.
Forgive our self-interest and lack of vision.
We have sinned:
forgive and heal us.

The wise men followed the star
to find Jesus the King.
Forgive our reluctance to seek you.

We have sinned:
forgive and heal us.

Absolution

May God who loved the world so much
that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive us our sins
and make us holy to serve him in the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Reading Luke 2:15-21

15 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.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Sermon

If you were to describe this past few weeks to me as a Church (apart from mad and busy), I’d say I would summarise it as “good news of a great joy.” Yes this Christmas is like no other, and I really hope that Friday was a day not of loneliness for you, but a day where you have had the chance to be with those you love. So whilst Covid continues to greatly affect us, I hope there has been in the middle of the uncertainties, a moment or two of great joy.

For us as Church we have to be the carriers of Good News, especially in these time. Good news is for all people, not just for ourselves in the Church. Remember, the angel said to the shepherds, “I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for **all the people**.” “For all the people,” not just the shepherds. You see there’s a ripple effect that happens with the Gospel.

On Boxing Day every year we normally go to Hillsborough Forrest for a walk around the lake with the boys. Unfortunately that hasn't happened this year with the way things are, but often the boys will throw an odd stone into the lake. Once it happens, irrespective of the size of the stone, a ripple is caused stretching out around its centre. And that's the same effect that the Angel's good news had on the Shepherds. They were the most ideal of candidates for getting the good news out. They didn't just hear the news and say oh that's nice, and move on to something else. Once the Angel leaves them, the shepherds say to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." They want to go and see for themselves. The glad tidings from the angel, the announcement of the birth of the Saviour – this creates a desire and an excitement in them to go and see. In fact verse 16 of our readings says 'And they hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.'

But the ripple didn't just end there. The text says that 'When they had seen Jesus, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them'.

So first the angel tells the shepherds the good news. And so secondly the good news makes them respond in checking it out for themselves. And thirdly because the news is so good, the shepherds just can't keep it to themselves, and they go out and tell others. Ripple, ripple, ripple.

You know something I think with all our strategies and programmes and planning, we have lost something significant in the church. We've lost the fact that we all need to just spread the good news to others. There's no secret formula. It's just very natural.

Isn't that the way it is when you get some wonderful good news? You just naturally want to share it with others. You don't need a program. You don't need to be pressured. If you've got something good, and it's something you can share with others, and it's something they can rejoice in too – well, you just do it.

I know you will say to me, but Jonny it's ok for you, because you have been to theological college and you have studied all this. It qualifies you to be able to do this. Is that what happened to these Shepherds? Remember, these guys were the lowest of the low in society. They were considered a lot of the time as outcasts. They spent their life with the

sheep in the hills. Ironically they and other simple folk would be the ones who would most connect with Jesus than the well educated, the priests, those considered as contributing most to the wellbeing of society.

They knew Good News when they saw it, and so they responded. It was as simple as that.

I suppose it really depends on what you see as the most valuable thing in your life. And so if you are not sharing the Good News then it means one of two things. It means you either don't consider it as Good News to share – that something else is better than it. Or you haven't accepted the good news for yourself. It's no guilt trip. It's fact. There is no greater thing that you can have in life than Jesus, and there is no greater thing that you could share with others than Jesus. So you've got to be honest with yourself and ask why are you not sharing him with others. Imagine the ripple effect that will take place if you speak with your relative, or your friend or your work colleague about Jesus. Imagine the transformation that might take place from it.

You see when your heart is full of the good news of Jesus, guess what your mouth is more likely to speak? That's right. It's kind of built into the nature of things for us Christians. We like talking about Jesus. This Christ is someone God wants everyone to know about—and to know. And when we have a chance, God will even use our feeble witness to spread the word.

What the Lord made known to the shepherds, they made known to others. It happened that way with the shepherds. And it will happen that way with us, too. That's the Good News we carry but it's useless if you don't tell someone else. It's also the Good News that I hope and pray this Christmas season that you know for yourself. If you are that person that doesn't know Jesus intimately today, then let me share as I finish. The Good News that I know tells me that God who made everything perfect saw the failings that humanity has brought into the world through sin, and so God the creator of everything good has a rescue plan to ensure that everyone including me can be restored into a perfect relationship with him. And so he comes to us, he doesn't send someone else, he comes himself in the form of a human. He demonstrates to those around him what his kingdom is. And he willingly places himself in vulnerability, carrying with him all that I have done that is wrong, dishonest, selfish and untruthful, and he takes it to death so that all that is sin is destroyed. He does this instead of us, and he does it because he loves us. But he doesn't just die. He defeats death to demonstrate his

power to destroy sin, and establish a way for all of us who accept him as Lord to reestablish a relationship with God. GOOD NEWS! He's called Jesus. Have a watch at this next video, and give me a call if you want to know that Good News for yourself.

Intercessory Prayer

We are now going to move into a short time of Intercessory prayer, lifting before God those known to us and situations that we may feel hopeless in helping, and yet our God hears our prayers and answers them. When you hear the words Jesus Saviour, simply reply hear our prayer.

Christ, born in a stable,
give courage to all who are homeless.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, for whom the angels sang,
give the song of the kingdom to all who weep.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds,
give peace on earth to all who are oppressed.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.
Christ, before whom the wise men knelt,
give humility and wisdom to all who govern.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, whose radiance filled a lowly manger,
give the glory of your resurrection to all who rest in you.
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Jesus, our Saviour, Son of God,
you know us and love us,
you share our lives
and hear our prayer.
Glory be to you for ever. Amen.

And now as we conclude our prayers let us join together in the prayer which Jesus taught us :

And just before our final song, can I remind you that both David & Dianne are off on annual leave until 4th January. Should you need anything during this period please feel free to get in touch with me on my mobile. And remember that in-Church services will not recommence again until 10th January . So as we go let me pray God's blessing on you. Let us pray.

May the Father,

who has loved the eternal Son

from before the foundation of the world,

shed that love upon you his children.

And the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

be among you and remain with you always.

All Amen.