

**Dec 8**          Glories Stream   “Joy”

Psalm 86: 9-11

Luke 2: 8-20

As we continue our celebration of the carol “Silent Night” we hear in verse two: *Shepherds quake at the sight, Glories stream from heaven afar, Heavenly hosts sing “Alleluia”! Christ, the Savior is born.* From our scripture lesson, we hear of that encounter between shepherds and angels. It says that “The glory of the Lord shone around them.” If you do a search for “glory” in a Bible concordance you will find that the Old Testament is full of texts using the word “glory” when it comes to God. This continues into the Gospel depictions of the presence of God. At Jesus’ baptism and the transfiguration, we hear about the glory of God.

Throughout the scriptures, “glory” often has to do with “shining,” with light. God is light and the light of God sometimes surrounds us and we call it “Glory”. God’s presence, God’s deliverance, God’s strength is with us like that pillar of fire, the burning bush, and now the star and accompanying angels bringing their singing to the shining. They show us the appropriate response to this shining light... “Glory to God!” Praise is the only thing we can do in the face of such power and the promise that we are not, ever, alone.

This Sunday is about joy, the joy we experience when we are caught up in the wonder, the Glory, of God. Yet, as the scripture shares with us, fear can block joy. To understand, let us focus on those shepherds for a bit. Apparently, the shepherds didn’t immediately take to the drama surrounding them. When the angels appeared, the shepherds were scared. There may have been plenty to fear for these folks. It is likely that these were possibly not only the “lowly” in terms of job importance, but these may have been the lowliest of shepherds... the hired hands, not owners of the land or the sheep... the indentured slaves or lowest-wage earners working the night shift and literally “living in the fields.” Already it is dark, a time when the critters prowl, but then something that felt absolutely apocalyptic was shaking the earth where they stood. No wonder they were afraid!

We get this. We are inundated every day, on the news, on our phones, seemingly everywhere with negative news. If we are jumpy already, we get hyper-aware and on the lookout for the bad stuff of life. God might be sending angels to celebrate with us and we are cowering in fear!

*“When people are frightened, intelligent parts of the brain cease to dominate”*, Dr. Bruce Perry, a neurologist, explains how when we are faced with a threat, the cortex responsible for risk assessment and actions cease to function. In other words, logical thinking is replaced by overwhelming emotions, thus favoring short-term solutions and sudden reactions.

We have all experienced it. I call it my knee-jerk reactions to life. They are emotion driven and never my best or highest expression of life, love, or compassion. I know when I get overwhelmed (and who doesn't in this fast-paced, expectations-out-of-control world), I start to enjoy life a lot less. I start thinking constantly about how to solve whatever problem seems to be front and center and I stop seeing the good all around me. I am wired to be afraid of change, of life, of anything different.

Today, we need to hear that joy is an antidote to fear. The angels understood what the shepherds were experiencing. They begin by saying, “Fear not!” I am not sure I can quit being afraid just because I am told not to fear, but at least it might make my brain re-engage so I listen to what comes next. And what they have to share is amazing! The angel's message is: “We've got *Good News!*” This is another term often used in scripture for God's presence and strength. In fact, what the angels were about to tell the shepherds, these lowest of the low, was that God's presence had just made a “landing.” “*Your*” savior (not just “a” savior) has been born. If it was a savior for them, it would be everybody's savior... this is Good News for ALL. This good news would lead them going to see this thing that was told to them by the angels. It ends saying they return, praising God. The story starts with them filled with fear but it ends with them filled with joy. The fear they had felt had been replaced by joy, a joy that came from seeing how God was at work in the world. They left the stable with awe and wonder.

We need to realize that we are often like the shepherds. We are consumed by life and that life does not seem exciting. We don't see all the things around us that are

worthy of joy, because we are distracted, jumpy, with fear, foreboding or a sense of uncertainty. The shepherd's story is one of transformation from fear to joy, from panic to praise. We need that transformation as well. Today we need to celebrate that the "glory" (remember, glory is code often for "light") of God streams upon us. God's goodness, presence and strength is all around us and IN us. Every time we let ourselves embrace joy (even and especially in the midst of everything not being perfect) we will find, for a moment, our fears banished.

Today we are to focus on the joy of God with us. How our God is still around us doing amazing things. From that we are to let our joy spill out, streaming all over the place. Sometimes we get embarrassed by joyful expression in others. We don't want to be seen as silly by our peers so we hold it in. It is even possible that our church experience is a bit less than "glorious" even as we proclaim the "Good News." We need people and a church that remember to belly-laugh, gasp in delight, seek out beauty and see the world through the lens of wonder. For we believe in a God who is "awesome and a wonder-worker." And when we give in to joy we let go of fear.

### **Quote from Marianne Williamson**

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous,  
talented and fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.  
Your playing small does not serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other  
people won't feel insecure around you.  
We were born to make manifest the glory of  
God that is within us.  
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine,  
we unconsciously give other people  
permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear,  
Our presence automatically liberates others.  
(from *Return to Love* by Marianne Williamson, Harper Collins, 1992)

This week we need some “silence.” The silence I am speaking about is the need to silence the onslaught of exposure to messages of fear that are out there in our world. Silence to the things that make us feel inadequate or different. Silence to the thoughts that God doesn’t care about us. Silence to all the “what ifs’ of life. Silence to the voices that tell us not to give in to joy. In those spaces of silence, God calls us to open ourselves to see and experience the beauty of life, to see all that sustains our joy of life and perhaps laugh out loud at life. At least we need to give in to praise. What brings you joy? Notice it and celebrate it. This is the “good news” and it is all around this week.

God delights when we are delighted with life. We need to see that this is not a stick our heads in the sand and ignore the realities of living. It is a call to embrace the message that we serve a God who is with us, who saves us, who does amazing things. We need to be filled with this awe and it will fill us with joy and hope. This is good news. So laugh at and with life. Let joy banish your fears, if for a moment. This is part of how we worship and celebrate the good news that for us a Savior has been born.