

Unto you is born a Saviour - Luke 2: 8-20

At the end of 2020, we need some good news, don't we? This year has been a year of enormous pain for the whole world. And maybe the news the whole world wants to hear is that a vaccine against the coronavirus has been found, a vaccine that is 100% effective without any side effects, a vaccine that is safe. We want a vaccine that is available to everyone, right away, and it would be nice if it was free.

We are told there are vaccines, but it remains to be seen whether these vaccines are effective, whether there are any unwanted side effects and we know that for most of us there will be a delay of many months before we can get vaccinated. So, yes, the vaccine is good news, but there are still some "buts". This is often the case with good news. They come with "buts". A close friend finds a job but it's in another country so we will see him a lot less. A family arrives at the church in January but it is only for 6 months.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the announcement of good news, the best news you can imagine. The 4 best-known books in the Bible are called the "Gospels". The word gospel simply means "the good news". This morning we want to see together how some very good news was announced two thousand years ago. Luke 2:10: "The angel said unto them, Do not be afraid, for I bring you the good news of a great joy which will be for all the people: today in the city of David a Savior is born to you, who is Christ, the Lord."

Those to whom the good news is announced

In the UK, even though news of the birth of a prince or princess spreads all over the world within seconds, it is always Queen Elizabeth who gets the news first. No one else has the right to hear the good news before the Queen. The good news goes to the most important person first. It is difficult to imagine any more important news than the birth of the Son of God. Yet the news of the birth of Jesus Christ was not first announced to the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, the most powerful man in the world at the time. It was not announced to King Herod either. Verse 8 tells us, "There were shepherds in this same country who spent the night in the fields tending to their flocks."

The news of the birth of the Son of God, of the Savior of the world, it is announced to a small group of shepherds. 2000 years ago, in Palestine, one would never have expected such an announcement to shepherds. Shepherds were often looked down upon at that time. The nature of their work was such that they were considered unclean and in law court, for example, the testimony of a shepherd was not accepted. It was assumed that a shepherd was not serious, not trustworthy. To be a shepherd meant to be at the bottom of the social ladder. Why then announce the birth of the Son of God to shepherds? Why choose these people despised in their society, these poor and a little wild people? What message does God want to send to the world by announcing the birth of his Son to shepherds? Luke is the only author of the 4 Gospels who adds this detail, that the announcement of the birth of Jesus is made to the shepherds. But this does not surprise us because throughout his gospel, starting at the very beginning, Luke seeks to show that God sends his Son into the world, not to be the king of the great, to spend his time in the palaces of kings and nobles, people of influence. He comes to seek and save those who are lost and who know they are lost. This is what we see throughout Jesus' ministry. Salvation is for those who are ready to recognize that they need it. It is for people who recognize that they do not deserve anything from God. Humble and poor people, especially spiritually poor. Salvation is for those who recognize their need, who recognize their spiritual poverty, that they do not deserve anything from God.

In Luke 5: 31 and 32 Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The good news is not for people who believe themselves to be righteous or those who believe that they lack nothing. The person who thinks he is in good health will never call a doctor. The person who believes himself to be righteous will never call for a savior! The good news is announced to humble people to tell us that we too must humble ourselves, admit our spiritual poverty, to come with empty hands but open hands.

The news that was announced.

As I have already said, at the end of 2020, for the overwhelming majority of people, the best news that can be announced would probably be the production of a vaccine, available, safe, effective that will say "goodbye" to the coronavirus in 2021. The whole world is looking for a solution to save us from the health crisis.

And the people of Judea two thousand years ago, what good news would they have looked for? The announcement of the fall of the Roman Empire? National and political freedom for the Jews?

But that is not at all the nature of the good news announced by the angel. No! It is something more glorious, more important, more urgent. Verse 11 "A Savior is born to you." A saviour. What is a savior? It is a word that we only see twice in the Gospels but it is often found in the Old Testament where it means someone who frees, who delivers from evil or danger. And in the Old Testament it's a word that describes what God does. God delivers, God sets free, God saves. When the angel announces, that a savior is born, saving is what God does.

The Angel did not say from what danger this "Savior" was going to deliver the people. But we who know the rest of the story know what danger he's talking about. The greatest danger to mankind is that the God who created us will judge our sin and our rebellion. Those who have disobeyed God are under God's judgment. This is the greatest danger for every human being. And the angel announces, "someone has been born who will save you from God's judgment against your sin."

But telling the shepherds that a savior has just been born is all very well, but who is this savior? Will he be able to save? Can we trust him? We announce that a vaccine has been developed and immediately we want to know, is it effective? Does it work? Telling us that there is a vaccine is good, but we have to be sure it works! And to say that a savior is given is good, but we have to know: who is this savior? Could he really save us? Is he really powerful to save?

The Angel reassures by saying: "A savior, who is Christ, the Lord." This Savior is none other than Christ, the Messiah of God. The Savior is the One that the Old Testament prophets had spoken of, who was to come to deliver, to deliver, to save his people. For hundreds of years, God's people had to wait. "When will Christ come, the Messiah of God? The Old Testament says that the coming Christ would be a descendant of King David. This is why the angel talks about the city of David. It is a confirmation that the newborn is the fulfillment of the promises. Christ is the King, greater than King David.

And he's not just Christ. The angel also says that he is the Lord. If you read the first two chapters of the Gospel according to Luke, you will find the word "Lord" 26 times. 25 times it speaks of the Lord God, the Almighty, the Creator, the God of Israel, the One who gave his law, his commandments, the one who sent angels, the sovereign, glorious, exalted and blessed God.

This word "Lord" is the word which is translated "the Lord" in the Old Testament, Yahweh, Jehovah. The angel is breaking incredible

news. The one who is just born is God himself. The God of the universe has become a human being. The creator of the universe is lying in a manger. God has just become flesh. God himself came to save, to deliver. That is good news!

But there is a little word in verse 11 that makes this news even more wonderful for these shepherds. The angel does not say: A savior has been born. He said, "To you a Savior has been born." He was born "for you", for your good. He was born to be your Savior, to set you free, to deliver you and to save you. This is good personal news. It's a personal message. And in verse 10 we see that it is a matter of joy to "all the people." For these famous vaccines, this is good news, but is it for all the people, all the peoples? We fear that this is good news for rich countries but for poor countries, for those who do not have access to health care, is it good news? But the savior is for you, for all the people.

With these words I can stand before you this morning and say, "A Savior is born to you." I can go to the streets of Nantes and Orvault and say, "A savior is born to you. His salvation is offered to you." We saw in Abraham's life that the good news is for all nations. We saw in the book of Acts and we will see it again, the disciples are sent to the ends of the earth to proclaim, "A Savior is born to you." My friends, maybe there is a lot of news that you would like to hear but this one is by far the best and the most important. The angel said that this was very joyful news. The greatest joy. Jesus Christ was born to save us from our sin. This is news that changes everything, here on earth and for all eternity.

The good news confirmed.

These verses before us are arguably among the best known verses in the Bible. I have read and heard them hundreds of times. And perhaps because of this, it is easy to forget the immensity of this appearing of the angel to the shepherds. When was the last time you saw an angel? Never? The same goes for these shepherds. They would never have seen an angel so it is not surprising to read in verse 9: "They were seized with great fear." We too would have been seized with such fear. How are they to understand everything they see, everything they hear. Good news, a savior, Christ, the Lord? They would have had a hard time understanding all that.

So the angel explains to them again to reassure them, to convince them. First, he gives them a sign, a confirmation that will help them believe, that strengthens their faith: "You will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." Luke 2:12 Go to Bethlehem, the angel said to them. You will see this little baby in a manger and it will confirm my message. This is not a dream, nor a joke. I'm telling you the truth.

That the child is wrapped in swaddling clothes does not distinguish him in the eyes of the shepherds. This is not what will help the shepherds recognize Jesus. Every Jewish mother would have wrapped her baby. But no Jewish mother would have placed her baby in a manger. That's the sign. This is what shocks! The Savior, Christ, the Lord, he will be in a manger. Here is the humiliation of Jesus. Born in such humble, low circumstances. Here is Jesus setting aside his majesty, taking on the form of a servant. Here is the born servant king.

But there is a second confirmation which is much more spectacular and Luke describes it in verse 13: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God" As if one angel is not enough to confirm that God is acting, to the first angel is added a multitude of angels. Impossible to count them. God brings out his loudspeaker.

And what are these angels saying?: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men with whom he is pleased". Glory to God, glory to God because it is God who acts. It is God who saves. It is God who gives grace. It is his idea, his plan, his mission that comes from his heart, from his love. God sends his Son, Christ the Savior, for the glory of his Name. We have to get this. The purpose of salvation is for God to be glorified for his grace, for his goodness, for his love, for his mercy. The coming of the Savior enables the world to see the glory of God. Jesus comes for the glory of God to be manifested on earth. Yes, we see it in creation, in the vastness of the universe he created, but we see his glory supremely in the person of Jesus.

And the angels also say: "peace on earth among men with whom he is pleased" Centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah had spoken of Christ who would be called "the Prince of Peace." And the peace that Jesus brings to mankind is primarily peace with God, the peace that was lost when mankind chose to rebel against God. But thanks to this savior, peace will be established between God and men. The relationship will be restored. And we know how the Savior acquired this peace. It was by dying on the cross that he paid the debt of sin, he suffered God's punishment for the sin of his people. The wrath of God was poured out on him. God's righteousness was satisfied and peace restored. Again the prophet Isaiah: "But he was wounded for our sins, Broken for our iniquities; The chastisement which gives us peace has fallen on him" Isaiah 53.5

This multitude of angels sees and understands the glory, goodness, generosity, grace, and mercy of this spectacular gift from God. This is an outpouring of praise and worship, and this gift is not even for them. They don't need a savior. They are already at peace with God. But look at their joy all the same. And if the angels rejoice and glorify God at the news of the announcement of a Savior, how much more should we rejoice and glorify God for the salvation that is offered to us. The gift of a savior is not for angels, it is for us. If the angels are overflowing with joy, they who gain nothing and have no need of a Savior, how should we respond when we hear that a Savior has been born to us, we who need him so badly. How should we respond to this announcement of peace, forgiveness and salvation?

The shepherds show us how to respond:

They show us first that we have to believe. The shepherds believe the message to be true, that it is indeed a message from God. We know this because they say in verse 15, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see what has happened, what the Lord has made known to us." They recognize that it is God speaking to them and they believe. So you have to believe that God himself is talking to you.

Then you have to come to Jesus. Verse 16: "They hurried there and found Mary, Joseph, and the newborn in the manger." You need a meeting with Jesus. You need a relationship with Christ, the Savior, with God. And this passage shows how an encounter with Jesus changes the lives of all those who come to him.

A personal encounter with Jesus, the Lord, the Savior, the Christ, always leads to what we see in verses 17 and 20. In verse 17, the shepherds tell others about what has happened in their lives. They bear witness to the work of God. And that's what a Christian always does. He tells others what God has done.

And then verse 20 the shepherds return to their shepherd life but transformed. They resume their life but glorifying and praising God. This encounter with Jesus, opens their eyes and their hearts to see the glory of God and they are changed forever.

This morning, we have had an encounter with the Christ. He has spoken to us. He has touched us. Let us return to our life in this world at peace with God, glorifying and praising him.

The announcement of a vaccine that is safe, effective and available to all would be really good news. But in Jesus Christ we have a safe, effective, Savior available for all. "He can also save perfectly those who draw near to God through him" Hebrews 7:25. He perfectly saves all those who believe, all who come to him.