

How do you make a big announcement? How do you tell people about your wedding, the birth of your first child, your big birthday party, the opening of a new business or your retirement? There are a lot of different ways to do it. You could go old school by sending an announcement or invitation via snail mail. You could do an Evite or send out a twitter announcement. You could use social media or go big time and post it on an electronic bill board. Some of these may be more effective than others, depending on who you are trying to reach. Choosing the right way to make your announcement can be critical.

God had a big announcement to make when Jesus was born, the announcement that brings us here today. God sent an angel to tell a group of Shepherds, **“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”** (vss. 10-11)

That wasn't the first time God made his announcement. His first message was posted centuries before by men know as prophets. God used His prophet Isaiah to announce that the promise Savior would be the son of a virgin who would be called Immanuel. Immanuel means God with us. So God promised to be with us in a very special way. Isaiah also announced that the Savior would be called the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. The prophet Micah said the Savior would be born in the city of Bethlehem.

God set His plan into motion by sending the angel Gabriel to tell the Virgin Mary that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of the Savior. An angel told Joseph that God was fulfilling His promises given through the prophets and that he should get married to Mary. God's message to them was very personal. But God can also work behind the scene to get things done. So God used the Roman Emperor, Caesar August, to announce a census that sent Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem their ancestral home.

The Gospel of Luke announces what happened when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. **“So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”** (vss. 6-7) You may have read this account many times. Movies have been made about it. Artists have made paintings of it. But how did God get the message out then?

God sent an angel to tell the good news to Shepherds watching their sheep on the hills outside of Bethlehem. The angel told them, **“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”** (vss. 10-11)

The angel who told the shepherds about Jesus' birth was joined by a choir of angels that sang, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (vs. 14) Talk about making a big announcement. The shepherds listened to the angel and headed out to Bethlehem where they found Mary, Joseph and Jesus. When they left the shepherds became the first to tell others about Jesus. God had kept His promises and they wanted everyone to know it.

After Jesus was 40 days old, Mary and Joseph took him to the temple in Jerusalem so that Mary could fulfill the required sacrifice. When they came to the temple an old man by the name of Simeon had been told that he would not die before he saw the promised Savior. Simeon recognized the baby Jesus when the family came to the temple. Simeon held Jesus and said, "My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." (vss. 30-32) Simeon was the next to announce Jesus' birth. But he wasn't the last.

Jesus came as the Savior of all people. God wants everyone to know that. So when Jesus was born, God found another way to make His grand announcement. This time God used a star. The Gospel of Matthew tells us, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." (Matthew 2:1-2) The star led them to Bethlehem where the wise men worshipped Jesus and gave Him gifts fit for a king. God warned them in a dream not to tell Herod where Jesus was, they went home a different way. Their lives were changed by Jesus.

We know the story. But what is the message? First of all the message is Good News. There was so much bad news in the world when Jesus was born, the people needed to hear some Good News. That sounds a lot like today. The Good News brings joy because it is from God.

The Good News is the message that the Savior has been born. The Good News was a personal announcement to the shepherds. The good news that Jesus is our Savior is very personal for you and me as well because God is with us. Jesus came to save each one of us.

The Good News of the Savior brings Peace. Jesus gives us peace with God by forgiving our sins and taking away our guilt. When Jesus is living in our hearts and lives, he helps us to live at peace with one another. So Jesus brings Peace on Earth.

But the message is more than just words because Jesus is the message. The Prophet Isaiah said the Savior would be called "Immanuel" which means "God with us." Jesus is both true God and true man. He is really with us. God loves us so much that He entered our world to be with us.

But Jesus didn't just come into the world to hang out with us for a while. He came to save us from sin and all of its consequences. Jesus came to defeat sin and death. He died on the cross to pay the price for our sins. He rose from the dead to defeat death and to open the gates of heaven for all who believe. He paid the price for the sins of all people. He is God for us.

God didn't make his great announcement using social media. He made it in a very personal way to Mary and to Joseph, to the shepherds and to the wise men. God has a personal message for us. God is with us! God is for us. God wants the very best for us. He promises to never leave us. He promises that nothing can separate us from His love. God speaks to us through His Son and opens His kingdom to us. His Spirit lives inside of us.

This is the biggest, most important announce we will ever hear. But it is not a message that we should or can keep to ourselves. It is the good news that God wants us to give to the people in our lives in a very personal way. Don't just give gifts that are wrapped and placed under a tree. Give the gift of Jesus, the gift of God's love, the gift of forgiveness and new life. The good news of Jesus is too good to keep to yourself. Amen.