

Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Do not be afraid.

This year, with all its tumult and uncertainty, we need this reminder more than ever – that God is bigger than our fears, and desires to reach out and comfort us.

Yet in this year, marked by the fears of a global pandemic, extreme political and social division, and widespread economic distress, we would also do well to remember what comes next: **good news of great joy.**

This message of **reassurance** and **hope** was first delivered on a night not so different than this one, in a country that faced its own strife, to a group of shepherds living isolated in the wilderness.

All that didn't stop God from finding them then, and even though this Christmas finds us scattered from one another, it doesn't stop God from finding us now.

That's what God does after all, God is ever and always reaching out to us in **love.**

And that's at the heart of what we celebrate tonight – the incarnation, the birth of Jesus, when God became human and lived among us so that we might know the fullness of God's love.

This was the good news of great joy the angels announced: the birth of a baby, who would grow to become a man, who would **show** us how to **live** God's **way of love**.

Because God's love is not simply a feeling, it is a call to **action**.

God's love was **birthed** in the form of Jesus.

The angels **brought** the good news to a world in need of hope.

And when the shepherds heard the angels' message, they **went with haste** to see this thing that had taken place – and after seeing it they **made known** God's love, so that all who heard it were amazed.

So, Christmas is more than the sentimentality peddled by the world, it is more than the power of our nostalgia, and and it is bigger than our disappointment that it looks so different this year. Christmas is our yearly reminder that as followers of Christ we are called to **be** Christ's hands and heart in the world, as exemplified in the words of the great author and theologian Howard Thurman:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.¹

¹¹ Howard Thurman, "The Work of Christmas" from *The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations* (1985).

The world today needs this – needs us – now more than ever.

When we do this work, **we** become messengers of God, proclaiming to the world do not be afraid. When we do this Christmas work, we bring the **good news** of God's love to a broken world.

On this Christmas night that looks so different than in years past, let us cling to the heart of God given to us in the birth of Christ, and in turn let us commit to do the work of Christmas throughout the entire year. Amen.