

Christmas is amazing! The global economy relies upon the outpouring of generosity inspired by the birth of a peasant child in a cave in a small village in a remote part of the Roman Empire 2000 years ago. From Wall Street to Washington DC, from Beijing to Berlin, the powerful and the privileged tremble with fear because the fate of the world (recovery, recession, or God-forbid, depression and meltdown), the future of their fortune is determined in large measure by the way we celebrate Christmas. They may not know Jesus, but they certainly know Christmas!

Amazing, but it shouldn't surprise us. Luke tells us from the start that Christmas is about turning the world upside down. Mary learns she is pregnant and sings, *Luke 1:52-53 (NRSV) He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.* Luke begins his account of Jesus' birth by talking about Caesar Augustus doing what Caesar's do; it's time to check the tax rolls; we want to make sure they're fair. Let's give the world a shake and see what happens. Hail Caesar! So a working man from Nazareth has to travel some 40 miles with his very pregnant soon-to-be bride to Bethlehem to his family home.

What a festive atmosphere that must have been! Imagine we were the family in Bethlehem. We'd stayed home. We'd stuck to our roots. Now, thanks to Caesar, everybody who left for better things is coming back. Company is coming, and we don't know who or how many or for how long. We watch the house fill up. We watch the food supply empty. Then, who should appear but this Joseph, who isn't married, but the girl with him is in labor! What next?

They did the best they could. The human living space was full, but the next level down in their cave dwelling was where the animals were kept. It kept them safe and warm. And it was there, amidst the waste and the whining, that *Luke 2:11 (NRSV) to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

Amazing! Wonder-full! Caesar doesn't get that message; the angels don't appear to him. He's done his part; he's background; he's a prop; he is sent away empty. The message comes to shepherds in their fields; the angels sing to ordinary men going about the course of their ordinary lives; they're not particularly good; they're not particularly bad; they live on the edge; they don't have it made; everyday they walk the fine line between getting by and going under; they're nobodies who represent everybody; ordinary people like you and like me who live our lives longing for more.

Amazing! Wonder-full! God makes known His way for this world to the ordinary and the outcast. The angels sing not to Caesar but to shepherds, *Luke 2:14 (NRSV) "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

We hear that message, and we hear God speaking to our deepest desires. We hear God's tidings of comfort and joy addressed to the strains and struggles of our existence. "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight." We hear the way to what we're longing for.

Listen to that longing, and we just may hear the song of the angels: Wonder of wonders, *Luke 2:11 (NRSV) to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

That's what the angels made known to the shepherds, and that's what the shepherds made known to everybody. The message turned the shepherds into angels; messengers from God. The message turned those ordinary shepherds into people who turned the world upside down, *Luke 2:18 (NRSV) and all who heard it were amazed [wondered] at what the shepherds told them.*

God doesn't call the qualified. God qualifies the called; the way of God is accomplished through the humble service of humble servants.

Christmas is amazing! Listen to the longing; the longing in your heart; the longing in the hearts of those around you, the company that has come from near and far. You've heard the message. You may not feel like an angel, but you can be a messenger from God. You've heard the message; you are qualified. Be a humble servant of your Lord. Offer Him your humble service. Join those shepherds who turned Bethlehem upside down. Your words may turn someone's life right-side-up. Your words may speak to the longing in their heart. Through you, the gift of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord may be given. You don't have to have all the answers, but like those shepherds of old, you can simply stand with people where they are as they are and say, "Christmas is amazing! We wonder!" Merry Christmas. Amen.

