

Christmas Day, Year C

- “Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people”
- We’ve heard this story so often that it can seem a little too familiar – simply table dressing for Christmas morning, - lot like tinsel that we’ve hung, or decorations on Christmas trees
- Forget that this is meant to be a surprise – whole thing is - Mary becoming pregnant, getting ready to give birth – having nowhere but a manger to lay the baby – angel standing before the shepherds
- We’ve heard it so often, forget that one line: they were terrified – we think of the Bible sometimes as written during a time when this sort of thing was ordinary; miracles were old hat – oh, look, another angel – yawn
- Truth is shepherds were no more prepared than we would be
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- One of my favorite illustrations of how people would treat modern-day angels comes from my favorite Christmas movie: It’s a Wonderful Life
- George Bailey, main character, encounters his guardian angel, named Clarence, charged with saving George’s life in order to earn his wings – telling this to George prompts George to say:
- George: Look, I think maybe you better not mention getting your wings around here.
Clarence: Why? Don't they believe in angels?
George: A...Yeah, but...you know...
Clarence: Then why should they be surprised when they see one?
- We’d be at just as much of a loss as the shepherds were – story takes us just as much by surprise
- It’s a plot twist, a shock for us to see the baby Jesus in the manger
- Because that infant Christ isn’t just another person
- In prologue of John’s Gospel, get the story of the Word, existing from the beginning of creation
- That Word is the agent of the creation of the world – from nothing
- From the pews on which you’re sitting to the you sitting on them; from the wreaths hanging on the windows to the snow gently falling beyond them, and everything that snow is falling upon
- All of those things, everything around us – was made from nothing at all
- Sounds unbelievable, incredible – kind of thing if we heard about would either be a

miracle or impossible to believe – but even science agrees: Big Bang says everything was made, in an instant, from nothing

- The distance between the being capable of doing that and us seems impossibly great
- Until this morning, when we see that being lying in a manger
- It's as if any of us were to paint a picture or to make a sculpture - or, perhaps more seasonally appropriate, to put together a Lego set – And then suddenly, become a part of that creation
- That in a moment that distance, that chasm between an all-powerful God and the occasionally powerful humanity could be bridged so completely, that God could be made flesh, is quite a plot twist
- The Incarnation of God – incarnation – word that means “made meat or flesh” – same root as some others, like carne asada – how shocking, that a divine God, beyond time and space, should be made meat, made flesh – how shocking is that?
- But it's also good news of great joy for all people
- Reminds of another famous verse of Scripture, John 3:16:
- “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”
- For some people, that's their go-to verse – summary of the Good News – but, I'd argue, doesn't quite do the story justice – mean no offense to John or his Gospel, but no single sentence can summarize the Good News
- But that particular sentence leaves a bit out
- God didn't just send someone, some errand boy, some angel, guardian or otherwise
- God became flesh
- Majestic creator, awe-inspiring maker of all things, became a tiny human, took fragile flesh
- And that is Good News for all of us – God's name, in Christ, comes to be “Emmanuel”
- Meaning: God is with us
- So for those of us joyous at the prospect of spending today with our families, God is giddy in anticipation right along with us
- For those of us separated from those we love due to distance or circumstance, God is right here and heartsick with us and right there with those we miss, as well in the distance between us
- And even if you're like many millions across the globe for whom the holidays can be a sad

occasion, a reminder of those we love but see no longer; God is right here with us in our sadness

- Today brings Good News, of great joy for all people: God is with us, this night/morning, and forever