***The christmas Code***

**Advent Worship Series – Week 4**

***Code Word:* Gospel**

**December 18, 2022**

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| **WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINE**S  Each worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. Sermon manuscripts are included as a *sample* and not to be preached verbatim. |

**[*Project* “Week 4.QRCode”***(in Graphics file)* ***or below words on screen as people enter*]**

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| **Code Word: Gospel**  ***The baby in the manger came to tell us the worst news ever,***  ***because until we accept the worst news ever, we’ll never want the best news ever.*** |

***Good News, Bad News***

**Call to Worship:**

Today our Christmas Code word is **Gospel** or good news.There are two parts of the Christmas story, and you need both parts to make proper sense out of the whole story. The part of the story that tends to get the big billing, and it should, is the amazing, miraculous narrative of God putting on human flesh and coming to earth in the form of a baby. Could there ever be better news than this?

Why would God do such a thing? This is where the Christmas story is the worst news ever. God had to invade our world in the person of Jesus because there was no other way; because our big problem in life is not familial, historical, societal, political, relational or financial. The biggest, darkest thing that all of us have to face isn’t outside us; it’s inside. If the only thing human beings needed were a little external tweaking of their life circumstances, then the coming of Jesus to earth wouldn’t make any sense. But if the greatest danger to all of us lives inside us and not outside us, then the radical intervention of the incarnation of Jesus is our only hope.

(*Come Let Us Adore Him*, pp. 58-60)

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| **SB#113/SS#193/CF#2 – Joy to the world!** | TB-87 – same  SS-193  CF-2 | HTD4-T9 (3 vs.) |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#73/HC#141/SS#28 – All hail the power** | TB-306 – Coronation  HC-141  SS-28 | HTD5-T5 (4 vs.)  HCD13-T11 |
| **SB#100/HC#280/SS#186/CF#5 – Angels, from the realms of glory** | TB-407 –Regent Square  HC-280  SS-186  CF-5 | HTD4-T12 (4 vs.)  HCD26-T20 |
| **SB#103/CF#41 – Christians awake, salute the happy morn** | TB-476 – same  CF-41 | HTD10-T1 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#108/HC#270/SS#191/CF#1 – Hark! the herald angels sing** | TB-270 – same  HC-270  SS-191  CF-1 | HTD4-T5 (3 vs.)  HCD25-T20 |
| **SB#114/HC#146/SS#137 – Light of the world (Here I am to worship)** | TB-653 – Here I am to worship  HC-146  SS-137 | No HT CD  HCD13-T16 |
| **SB#116/HC#140/SS#194/CF#6 – O come, all ye faithful** | TB-496 – Adeste Fideles  HC-140  SS-194  CF-6 | HTD3-T1 (3 vs.)  HCD12-T20 |
| **SS#187/CF#17 – Angels we have heard on high** | SS-187  CF-17 | No HT CD |

*The Candle of Love*

**Lighting of fourth Advent Candle**

**[The first, second, and third Advent candles should be lit prior to the service.]**

**Reader 1:** On the night Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the shepherds received an invitation to greet the newborn King. That was an honor reserved for the lowliest of the low and the least educated of men. They bore names nowhere recorded in the Bible. Yet whatever their names may have been, they graced the guest list for the most joyful moment in human history. On this night they were favored by heaven.

**Reader 2:**  Imagine the wonder of that evening for those humble shepherds. One moment the skies were dark, and their moods were perhaps darker. The next moment angels were in their presence with amazing news. Surely the shepherds were afraid and asked: “Why here? Why us?”

**Reader 1:** Perhaps as they grew old, their minds returned to that remarkable picture of the skies opening up. As soon as the first angel had delivered his message, *“a vast host of others—the armies of heaven”* appeared, all of them praising God: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased”* (Luke 2:13-14, NASB).

**Reader 2:** These words would not be forgotten—not as long as the shepherds had life and breath. Angels could appear to them. To *them*. And there would be peace on earth “to those with whom God is pleased.”

**Reader 1:** And who would have thought that God might favor a shepherd?

**Reader 2:** They thought God was far away. Now they were seeing Him face to face. They thought God didn’t care for them. Now God had singled them out to be the first to look upon the newborn King. God did not need to be feared. This Child showed them how much God loved them!

**Reader 1:** In Jesus, the shepherds discovered the gift of love.

**Reader 2:** On this fourth Sunday of Advent we light the Candle of Love. May we respond as the shepherds did. *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”*

**[Lighting of the fourth Advent candle.]**

**Prayer:**

Dear Savior, I thank you that you are *my* Savior and *my* Lord. Thank you for coming. Take me

to the fields to learn from the shepherds. It is a wonder the announcement of your birth came

to them—the lowly, the listening, the searching.

Please grant me the grace, that someday I might experience a spilling of heaven’s glory on the fields over which I watch. Grant me an echo of some angelic song amid the monotones of my day-to-day work. And grant me a heart to behold heavenly things in the humblest of places. Amen.

(*Moments With the Savior*, pp. 37-38)

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| **SB#122 – See, amid the winter’s snow** | TB-259 – same | HTD10-T12 (4 vs.) |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#102/SS#188/CF#16 – Away in a manger, no crib for a bed** | TB-511 – The Manger Scene  SS-188  CF-16 | HTD6-T14 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#111/SS#192/CF#24 – It came upon the midnight clear** | TB-133 – same  SS-192  CF-24 | HTD9-T7 (3 vs.) |
| **HC#169 – Hallelujah** | HC-169 | HCD15-T19 |

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| **Children’s Moment – Gospel: Good News/Bad News** |

**Announcements and Offering**

**Scripture:**

**Leader: 6**When the time was right, the Anointed One died for all of us who were far from God, powerless, and weak. **7**Now it is rare to find someone willing to die for an upright person, although it’s possible that someone may give up his life for one who is truly good.

**All: 8**But *think about this:* while we were wasting our lives in sin, God revealed His powerful love to us *in a tangible display*—the Anointed One died for us.

**Leader: 9**As a result, the blood of Jesus has made us right with God now, and certainly we will be rescued by Him from God’s wrath *in the future.* **10**If we were in the heat of combat with God when His Son reconciled us by laying down His life, then how much more will we be saved by Jesus’ *resurrection* life?

**All: 11**In fact, we stand now reconciled *and at peace* with God. That’s why we celebrate in God through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed.

(Romans 5:6-11, *The Voice*)

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| **Drama – Bad, Worse, Worst** |

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| **HC#187 – Jesus, Messiah** | HC-187 | HCD17-T17 |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#77/HC#151/SS#31 – Fairest Lord Jesus** | TB-206 – Ascalon  HC-151  SS-31 | HTD5-T1 (3 vs.)  HCD14-T11 |
| **SB#565/HC#89/SS#43 – All I once held dear (Knowing You)** | TB-725 – same  HC-89  SS-43 | No HT CD  HCD7-T19 |
| **HC#120 – In the Manger** | HC-120 | HCD10-T20 |
| **HC#156 – Enter In** | HC-156 | HCD14-T16 |
| **HC#169 – Hallelujah** | HC-169 | HCD15-T19 |
| **HC#220 – Incarnate** | HC-220 | HCD20-T20 |

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Sermon – Code Word: Gospel**

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| **HC#120 – In the Manger** | HC-120 | HCD10-T20 |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#118/SS#195/CF#8 – O little town of Bethlehem** | TB-136 – same  SS-195  CF-8 | HTD3-T5 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#124/SS#196/CF#25 – Silent night! Holy night!** | TB-842 – Stille Nacht  SS-196  CF-25 | HTD4-T15 (3 vs.) |
| **SB#376/HC#219 – King of kings, majesty** | TB-722 – same  HC-219 | No HT CD  HCD20-T19 |
| **SB#402/HC#186/SS#73 – When I look into Your holiness** | TB-927 – same  HC-186  SS-73 | No HT CD  HCD17-T16 |
| **SB#439/HC#139 – There is a message** | TB-879 – same  HC-139 | No HT CD  HCD12-T19 |
| **HC#123/SS#55 – Shine on Us** | HC-123  SS-55 | HCD11-T13 |
| **HC#136 – We All Bow Down** | HC-136 | HCD12-T16 |
| **HC#169 – Hallelujah** | HC-169 | HCD15-T19 |
| **HC#187 – Jesus, Messiah** | HC-187 | HCD17-T17 |
| **HC#220 – Incarnate** | HC-220 | HCD20-T20 |

**Advent Blessing**

Be people of love.  
Let love live in your heart and share the love of Christ with all you meet.  
Share love by loving those you see regularly. Start by loving your community.  
Share love by loving those you do not know. How do your actions affect the rest of God’s creation?  
Share love by praying for our world.  
In this Advent season, we need to see, feel, and share love.  
As you go out into the wonder of God’s creations, share love, joy, peace, and hope with those you meet. Amen.

*(Submitted by Rev. Susannah DeBenedetto, Christ Congregational Church &*

*Takoma Park Presbyterian Church, Takoma Park MD, LiturgyLink.net)*

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| **SB#116/HC#140/SS#194/CF#6 – O come, all ye faithful** | TB-496 – Adeste Fideles  HC-140  SS-194  CF-6 | HTD3-T1 (3 vs.)  HCD12-T20 |
| **Additional Optional Songs** | | |
| **SB#73/HC#141/SS#28 – All hail the power** | TB-306 – Coronation  HC-141  SS-28 | HTD5-T5 (4 vs.)  HCD13-T11 |
| **SB#77/HC#151/SS#31 – Fairest Lord Jesus** | TB-206 – Ascalon  HC-151  SS-31 | HTD5-T1 (3 vs.)  HCD14-T11 |
| **SB#106/HC#260/SS#189/CF#43 – Go, tell it on the mountain** | TB-631 – same  HC-260  SS-189  CF-43 | HTD11-T4 (2 vs., start with chorus)  HCD24-T20 |
| **SB#112/HC#180 – It was on a starry night** | TB-535 – A starry night  HC-180 | No HT CD  HCD16-T20 |

**NOTE:** Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV). © 2011 by Zondervan. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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| **Advent 2022 Week #4** | |
| **DRAMA**  **Bad, Worse, Worst**  **By Martyn Scott Thomas**  © Copyright 2021 by Martyn Scott Thomas. All rights reserved. Used by permission. | |
| **Topic:** | Sin |
| **Scripture:** | John 3:16; Romans 5:6-11 |
| **Synopsis:** | The troubles of this world are contrasted with the Christmas story. |
| **Characters:** | Reader 1  Reader 2  Reader 3 |
| **Props/Costumes:** | None. |
| **Setting:** | Bare stage. |
| **Running time:** | 2 minutes |

[*Readers 1 and 2 should be on one side of the stage. Reader 3 should be on the opposite side. Lines should be read slowly and deliberately, not rushed.*]

**Reader 1:** Garden.

**Reader 2:** Apple.

**Reader 1:** Self.

**Reader 2:** Pride.

**Reader 3:** Promise.

**Reader 1:** Sin.

**Reader 2:** Suffering.

**Reader 1:** Punishment.

**Reader 2:** Death.

**Reader 3:** Life.

**Reader 1:** War.

**Reader 2:** Famine.

**Reader 1:** Pestilence.

**Reader 2:** Disease.

**Reader 3:** Mary.

**Reader 1:** Crime.

**Reader 2:** Violence.

**Reader 1:** Rape.

**Reader 2:** Murder.

**Reader 3:** Joseph.

**Reader 1:** Earthquakes.

**Reader 2:** Tornadoes.

**Reader 1:** Hurricanes.

**Reader 2:** Drought.

**Reader 3:** Manger.

**Reader 1:** Thieves.

**Reader 2:** Liars.

**Reader 1:** Cheaters.

**Reader 2:** Bullies.

**Reader 3:** Angels.

**Reader 1:** Racism.

**Reader 2:** Slavery.

**Reader 1:** Bigotry.

**Reader 2:** Hatred.

**Reader 3:** Shepherds.

**Reader 1:** Law.

**Reader 2:** Altar.

**Reader 1:** Sacrifice.

**Reader 2:** Blood.

**Reader 3:** Baby.

[*pause – change of tone*]

**Reader 1:** You see, at just the right time,

**Reader 2:** when we were still powerless,

**Reader 3:** Christ died for the ungodly.

**Reader 1:** When we needed him most,

**Reader 2:** God sent his only son,

**Reader 3:** as a baby in a manger.

**Reader 1:** Whoever believes in him

**Reader 2:** shall not perish

**Reader 3:** but have everlasting life.

[*Blackout*]

***The christmas Code***

**Children’s Moment – Week 4**

***Code Word:*** **Gospel**

**December 18, 2022**

**Written by Katie Laidlaw**

**Synopsis:** *The Christmas Code* Children’s Messages are given from the perspective of Gabriel, the angel. Gabriel’s perspective is meant to help children understand the narrative of the Christmas story, while encouraging application, and remembrance of the true meaning of Christmas.

**Set-Up/Staging:** Invite children to come to the front, either having them stand or sit for the lesson. (I personally recommend having the children stand, as this helps keep them attentive, engaged, and involved in the lesson—especially with the dynamic of the congregation watching them. In this more public/formal setting, sitting provides a more relaxed/informal mindset, allowing the children to disengage and merely be present in the moment.)

**Props:** Halo, wings, white shirt

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| **Week 4 – Gospel: Good News/Bad News** |

***Script:***

I think you know who I am by now! But, if you need a reminder, it’s me, Gabriel, the angel of the Christmas story!

I have a few questions to ask you:

What would be the best news ever? [*Allow children to answer*]

What about the worst news ever? [*Allow children to answer*]

How do you react to good news, and how does that good news make you feel? [*Allow children to answer*]

How does receiving bad news make you feel? (Allow children to respond)

Well, what would you think if I told you that the Christmas story includes both good news and

bad news?

Let’s get the bad news out of the way first. We are all dead in sin. We talked about sin a few weeks ago. We are in need of a Savior to pay the price for our sin – to save us, forgive us, and redeem us; to make us holy, so we can be like Jesus.

Now, for the great news! God never leaves us in a place without hope. Our God is not a God that makes us sit with our bad news in sadness, hopelessness and worry. God promises to give peace, hope, joy and rest. With God, we always have the good news that God sent His Son Jesus to save us.

Hey, this reminds me that I had the pleasure of sharing this great news with a group of shepherds all those years ago. I remember saying to them:

***10****“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring great joy for all the people.****11****Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord.****12****Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”* (Luke 2:10-12, NIRV)

This news had been talked about and waited on for YEARS. It was what everyone had hoped for, including us, all these years later. It really is the best news ever! I got so excited about this news, that after I told the shepherds, I got A BUNCH of my angel friends to help me celebrate sharing the news. We sang some beautiful music, singing:

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”* (Luke 2:14, NIV)

Good news is worth CELEBRATING!

How can we celebrate the good news of Jesus? [*Allow children to answer*]

During the times where we have bad news, and we feel worried, afraid, sad, or unsure how to move forward, we can remember the good news of Jesus and share this good news of hope, love, and joy with others. We can celebrate in the hard times because Jesus has a plan for us and our lives – Jesus has already defeated all bad news!

[*End with prayer.*]

**Main Points:**

* Bad news: sin, Good news: Jesus saves, forgives, redeems
* God never leaves us in a place without hope. Our God is not a God that makes us sit with our bad news in sadness, hopelessness and worry. God promises to give peace, hope, joy and rest. With God, we always have the good news that God sent His son Jesus to save us.
* Good news is worth CELEBRATING!
* Jesus has already defeated all bad news!

**Questions:**

* How does receiving good news make you feel?
* How does receiving bad news make you feel?
* How can we celebrate the good news of Jesus?

***The christmas Code***

**Advent Sermon – Week 4**

***Code Word:* Gospel**

**December 18, 2022**

**By Major Peter Mount**

***The baby in the manger came to tell us the worst news ever,***

***because until we accept the worst news ever, we’ll never want the best news ever.***

**TITLE: *Code Word:* Gospel**

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 2; Genesis 1-3; Romans 6:5-10**

**CHARACTER/S: Shepherds**

**PRE-SERMON PREP:** *Prep work for sermon – On 6 large sheets of poster size paper write the letters G; O; S; P; E; L; (one letter per poster page). This will be used throughout the sermon.*

**SERIES AND/OR SCRIPTURE CONTEXT:** Advent Week 4 – Shepherds and the G.O.S.P.E.L. Acrostic (Based on Dare2Share ministries)

**INTRODUCTION:**

Extra, extra read all about it! – Big Announcements! Unfortunately, I do not have any big new announcements for you today – the Corps Sergeant Major gave them at the beginning of the service! What we are looking at today however is the oldest, grandest, most magnificent, Earth-shattering announcement the world has or will ever hear: THE GOSPEL.

**SCRIPTURE CONTEXT:**

**The Shepherds shared the good news of Jesus’ birth**

This Christmas season I’ve been thinking about what it looks like to share the gospel. This morning we are going to take the lead from the shepherds and learn what it means to know and share the Gospel. The shepherds often are looked at in the Christmas story as dumb shepherds. I don't think they were. It took a lot to be a shepherd—a lot of courage and knowledge of what it means to take care of their flock.

**READ SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2:8-15

The shepherds saw the angels, but then we very seldom give the shepherds credit for what they did next: (**READ LUKE 2:16 and 2:20).** The shepherds didn't keep it to themselves. What they did with the news of Jesus is the most incredible part! As soon as they saw Jesus, they went and did something with the news – they shared it!

**TRANSITION:**

Let’s take some time today to remember what the GOSPEL is, so that we, too, can share it with others.

**INTRODUCE G.O.S.P.E.L.**

[*This is where you will need 6 volunteers or a way to display the 6 poster-sized letters you have made. You’ll go through the description of each letter. Have fun with this and get the audience involved as much as you can*.]

**‘G’** [*Have someone hold the ‘G’ or turn it around so all can see it.*]

The **G** of the gospel is for **God**. [*Have congregation repeat after you – ‘GOD’*]

This morning we're going to learn what it looks like to understand the gospel and we are beginning with ‘G’ – God. **God** created us to be with him. Genesis 1:1 is where the whole of this story begins. None of this life happens unless God created! The GOSPEL begins with God. God created us to be in relationship with Him. So, let’s repeat again the first letter of GOSPEL and what it represents: GOD!

**‘O’** [*Have someone hold the ‘O’ or turn it around so all can see it.*]

The **O** of the gospel is for **Our.** [*Have congregation repeat after you – ‘OUR’*]

**Our** sins separate us from a relationship with God. God created an amazing opportunity for people to be reunited with Him through the birth of His Son Jesus. That's who the shepherds saw, that's what the shepherds heard, and they went and rejoiced. For the ‘O’ we move into Genesis 2:3. Sin messed up creation, and as a result we are separated from a Holy and Perfect God. This is why we need the gift of Jesus our Savior and why we celebrate at Christmas – OUR sins separate us from God, and our Savior, Jesus Christ, is the pathway back! Just like the light of the angels invaded the shepherds’ lives that night, the light of Jesus interrupts our lives of sin. It's interesting what light does, isn't it? Light invades the darkness and shows what is in secret or in the dark! Our sins are both private and public. But Jesus can free us from them all and give us forgiveness!

**‘S’** [*Have someone hold the ‘S’ or turn it around so all can see it.*]

The **S** of the gospel is for **Sins.** [*Have congregation repeat after you – ‘SINS*]

**Sins** cannot be removed by good deeds. Many people do many good things! We see this cycle of trying to do good to get into God’s favor throughout the whole of the Old Testament as well! And it is a lie from the devil, that you just need to be better so that God will love you more. It is true that there is nothing you can do to save yourself or earn the love of Jesus Christ. So many of us, and friends that we know, spin our wheels over and over again trying to make up for what we've done wrong. But you can’t. The good news of the Gospel is that there is someone who can – Jesus!

So, let’s review these with me: GOD; OUR; SINS.

**‘P’** [*Have someone hold the ‘P’ or turn it around so all can see it.*]

The **P** of the gospel is for **Paying.** [*Have congregation repeat after you – ‘PAYING’*]

**Paying** the price for sin, Jesus died and rose again! When we celebrate Christmas, too many people leave Jesus in the manger where He was born! **READ LUKE 2:19.** I don't think Mary knew at that point what was coming. God knew, and He knew that those precious tiny baby hands were being prepared for the nails at crucifixion; that the brow of that baby was being prepared for the crown of thorns.

Christmas is supposed to be a happy, and I know we’d like a cheery Christmas Sunday morning, but the reality of this Christmas should not be lost upon us in the fact that that baby—in just a few short years—would become the Savior of the world, paying the price for sin that you and I have committed and still do! Paying the price for sin, Jesus died, and *Hallelujah* rose again! You see, we can't have Christmas without Easter, and we can't have Easter without Christmas. This is the wonderful message of forgiveness and hope in the books of the New Testament where we see Jesus coming, paying the price for our sins, dying, and rising again.

Everybody ready let’s review again: GOD; OUR; SINS; PAYING.

**‘E’** [*Have someone hold the ‘E’ or turn it around so all can see it.*]

The **E** of the gospel is for **Everyone.** [*Have congregation repeat after you – ‘EVERYONE’*]

**Everyone** who trusts in him alone has eternal life. **READ Romans 6:5-7**. These verses are the definition of grace. We do not get what we deserve but we receive forgiveness and renewal from guilt and shame when we confess our sins. **READ Romans 6:8.** Because of the death of Jesus and His resurrection, we can have life! And this is why I believe the shepherds responded the way they did, by worshipping and telling others about what they had seen and heard. They did not keep it to themselves.

Nobody likes to brag! Even worse, no one likes a bragger! However, as Christians, I give you permission to brag about something. I want you to brag about the gospel; brag about the Lord Jesus Christ; brag about who He is and what He has done and continues to do – change lives!

So, where are we? GOD; OUR; SINS; PAYING; EVERYONE

**‘L’** [*Have someone hold the ‘L’ or turn it around so all can see it.*]

The **L** of the gospel is for **Life.** [*Have congregation repeat after you – ‘LIFE’*]

**Life** now and life that lasts forever. This is the joy and excitement of the gospel. Life starts now and lasts forever—that is the gospel in a nutshell. That is what the shepherds were sharing. They had encountered this baby and this baby had changed their lives.

For those of you who have kids or have been around kids, you know that a baby changes your life. You don't sleep anymore, and everything begins to revolve around this little one. And Jesus is the baby that changed the world, through all of time. His arrival is the Good News that paved the way for *all* people to experience LIFE, now. And just like the angels told the shepherds in Luke 2, this good news will bring all the people GREAT joy!

**CHALLENGE:**

Friends, people today need great joy! People today STILL need good news! So, what are you going to do about it? Unfortunately, for some in this room, your lives are not full of great joy! And for some, your lives are full of joy despite your circumstances.

Joy comes from the Lord and is found when we accept, live out and share the gospel and all that it means. Let’s stop focusing on what we do not have and start sharing what we do – the Gospel! A God who created us and loves us, sent His Son for us. A Son that was born for us, died for us and rose to give us life. And the Holy Spirit walks alongside us and with us as we share this gospel with others. So, our challenge today is twofold:

1. **Do you know the GOSPEL?** God, Our, Sins, Paying, Everyone, Life!
2. **Which people in your life are you praying for, that their hearts will be receptive to your sharing of this gospel when the Lord gives you opportunity?**

Do you have an urgency to share the good news about Jesus, just as the Shepherds did?

If so, then ask God for opportunities to share it. If not, then ask God to give you that urgency and courage to share when He gives you that opportunity. You have heard the Gospel, now go learn it, love it, live it, and share it with Joy!

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