

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**

Pastor Troy Schreiner      www.victorylutheran.org

**Worship Series: *Good News of Great Joy***

**Service Theme: *A Savior Has Been Born!***

**Sermon Theme: *Good News of Great Joy***

**December 24, 2023—Isaiah 7:10-14**

The date was October 13, 2010, at 11:15pm ET. Between the three major cable news networks—CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC-- over 10.6 million Americans were watching live; and that's not even including the millions of others watching internationally. 69 days earlier, a cave-in at the San Jose gold and copper mine in Chile had trapped 33 miners 2,300 feet below the earth's surface. The rescue efforts proceeded slowly for the next two months, until finally, with tens of millions glued to their TVs, the first trapped miners were brought safely to the surface. Anyone remember that?

For perspective, typically there's about 2 million people watching those news channels at that time of night. Meaning, the rescue of those 33 Chilean miners drew an extra 8 million Americans' attention at that late hour.

Why do you think that was? Maybe it was the suspense. Maybe it was because those miners' story had become kind of a cultural phenomenon around the world. Ultimately, I think 10.6 million people were watching live because we love good news! We love rescue stories where people are saved from grave danger, because good news fills our hearts with great joy!

I think that's especially true these days, with a 24-hour news cycle that's constantly reporting the latest bad news, tragedies, and atrocities. Just for kicks, I checked a news site when I was writing this sermon and found top headlines about murder, sexual assault, a mass shooting, sex trafficking, war in the Middle East, the tanking economy, and a natural disaster. There's a reason news stations usually throw in videos of cute animals or babies, or an inspirational human-interest story at some point in their bad news deluge. Whether we realize it or not,

we're starved for good news. We need good news to soften the continual mental and emotional bad news body blows we absorb!

That's why Christmas is such a life and eternity-changing event! Because as the angel told the shepherds on that first Christmas, "***bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.***" That's the ultimate good news that fills our hearts with great joy! The ultimate rescue story of people being saved from grave danger!

But that **Good News of Great Joy** was actually shared long before the angels proclaimed it on the first Christmas, and to a much different audience than those humble shepherds in Bethlehem's fields. Seven centuries earlier, God proclaimed it through his prophet Isaiah to a powerful king on Jerusalem's throne.

His name was Ahaz, the king of Judah at the time when God's people were divided into two opposing kingdoms—Israel and Judah. And let's just say, Ahaz was not a good dude. His claim to fame was leading God's people further from God and into evil and idolatry than any king before him. He was...pardon the pun...bad news!

But then the bad news king received some bad news. The kings of two of Judah's enemies—Aram and Israel—were teaming up to take him down. Outnumbered by these fierce enemies, Ahaz and the people of Judah quaked with fear! But instead of telling Ahaz, "You're gonna get it, just like you deserve!" God instead graciously promised Ahaz, "***It will not take place, it will not happen.***" God's promised good news of rescue and salvation!

Then, to give Ahaz even more certainty that God would keep his promise to rescue his people, God commanded him, "***Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.***" This was an opportunity for Ahaz to strengthen his trust in God. He could have asked God to perform any miraculous sign or wonder, and God would have done it. He could have asked God to turn

the sky lime green, and he would have. He could have asked God to make pigs fly, and little oinkers would have flapped past his face!

But Ahaz refused. He tried to sound pious, claiming he didn't want to test God. But to do what God tells you isn't testing him! Ahaz's refusal was evidence of his complete lack of faith in the true God. He didn't want to have to trust God. He didn't want to need God. He was self-reliant, and thought his earthly power and wisdom was all he needed. In fact, he'd already taken matters into his own hands to try and create his own good news, rather than relying on God for it. He'd reached out to the powerful Assyrian Empire and begged their king to save Judah. Ahaz didn't ask God for a sign, because he thought he already had good news. The Assyrians were coming to save them and defeat their enemies! But while the Assyrians did defeat Judah's enemies, if not for a miraculous act of deliverance by God, the Assyrians would have destroyed Judah too! Because Ahaz was looking for good news in the wrong places, it ended up being bad news.

Despite Ahaz's refusal to ask for a sign, and despite his lack of trust, God said, "You're getting a sign, whether you ask for it or not!" ***"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*** Even more miraculous than a lime-green sky, or making pigs fly would be to make a virgin conceive and bear a child. With a sign like that, you'd have no reason to doubt that God is capable and faithful to keep his promises! God told Ahaz that if a virgin conceived and gave birth to a son, that would be a sign that God will keep his promise to rescue and save his people!

Seven centuries later on that first Christmas, God kept his promise and fulfilled the sign he proclaimed to Ahaz. As the angel Gabriel proclaimed to a lowly virgin named Mary nine months earlier, ***"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."*** Just like the sign God promised, the virgin

conceives and gives birth to a son who is ***"Immanuel,"*** which means ***"God with us."***

That's why the angel could tell the shepherds on that first Christmas night, ***"I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."***

The sign of Immanuel, born of the virgin; the sign of a baby, wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger is God's sign, given to comfort and reassure his people; God's sign to assure us that he has kept his promise to rescue and save his people. Christ the Savior is born! The ultimate good news! The ultimate rescue story!

It's the ultimate good news because of who it was that came to rescue us! Ponder a second on the name God gave to this child: Immanuel; "God with us." As the angel told Mary, this child born in Bethlehem's stable is none other than the eternal, all-powerful Son of God. The same God who promised the sign of Immanuel is that same Immanuel, conceived and born of the virgin. What love! What sacrifice! That the all-powerful God would humble himself to come down and become one of us—so that he could make us one with him! God makes a promise to save his people, then backs it up by coming to save us!

What else could we say if the President of the United States didn't just send soldiers off to war, but put on the uniform, took up a weapon, and went to the front lines. If the County Sherriff didn't just oversee the actions of the police from his safe office, but went to the streets as the point man on a SWAT team hostage rescue. What else can we say about the God who doesn't just sit up in heaven watching, but embeds himself into human history as true man and true God to rescue the world from sin, death, and hell. What else can we say except, "Wow...how he loves us! How he cares for us!" That's good news of great joy!

And the reason this is the ultimate good news is because of who it's good news for. God prophesied Immanuel, son of a virgin not just for

Ahaz or the people of Judah. Not just for the shepherds or the people of Bethlehem. Immanuel, son of a virgin is, as the angel said, ***“Good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”***

The reason Jesus’ birth is such good news for all people is because bad news isn’t just “out there.” It’s also “in here.” We might look at all the bad news headlines about murder, theft, assault, fraud, and war, and tell ourselves, “At least I’m not like those people.” But if the sinful actions you’ve performed in the public eye or behind closed doors; if the sinful thoughts of your mind; if the sinful lusts and desires of your heart were broadcast into headlines for the whole world to read or segments on the evening news for the whole world to watch, could we really feel that the Savior is only needed by “those people?”

The reality is, the birth of Immanuel is the ultimate good news because it’s the ultimate rescue story of how God came down to save sinners like us! Christmas is good news of great joy, because the sign of Immanuel gives us absolute certainty and trust that through his life, his death, and his resurrection, the child born in Bethlehem is the fulfillment of God’s promise to save and deliver all people, including all of us gathered here tonight.

The rescue of those Chilean miners was a good news story that captured the attention and hearts of millions of people the world over! But now, 13 years later, how many of us had completely forgotten that good news, unless you come across it in history books or the pastor uses it as a sermon illustration? We’re reminded of that good news from long ago and say, “Oh yeah! I remember that!” but pay it no other mind. Do you think that’s how those 33 miners and their families have felt over the last 13 years, though?

I would guess that every single morning they wake up; every special moment they get to spend with their family; every celebration they enjoy, they’re reminded of and thankful for the good news of rescue that was for them.

That’s why the good news of great joy we hear once again at Christmas is something we rejoice in, give thanks for, take to heart,

and marvel at not just on Christmas—but every day. Because every day, we’re reminded of that good news of great joy that is for all people—including you and me. That ultimate story of rescue that is for you and me. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. Our Savior. Our Immanuel. O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord!