

The light-hearted pieces on the news are a breath of fresh air. The stories of success and joy and bewilderment punctuate the hardships of the world coming through your radio or tv screen or news feed like well needed commas, giving you space to slow down and lighten up. I wouldn't be surprised if each company actually has a policy on this—"here at CBC we need to have one upper story for every 4 and a half downers." I wouldn't be surprised if there's research into the perfect ratio to keep an audience attached—we don't want them feeling so free and easy that they decide to go for a walk outside and enjoy life, but we also can't beat them down too much. So they give us just the right amount of stories of families reunited and diseases defeated, obstacles overcome and puppies adopted. Just enough optimism to keep us going when the majority of what they have to report on is crime and war and politics and the economy and the anger dividing the world.

Good news is what we need in a world that is falling apart. It is not hard to see, to feel the effects of sin on this supposed-to-be-perfect creation. What the media appears to hone in on, beating us with all the negatives, these are things that are all too close in our own lives too. Relationships disintegrate, our environment sends storms our way, bodies begin aching before they cry out in complete agony. Wars rage on even though history tells us that everyone loses when we go to battle. People lay awake at night with anxious thoughts, others sleep through each day with crippling depression. Some go without power because they've prioritized food, and others sit hungry because they need the heat, all while the greedy sit feeling empty because they've realized not even money could satisfy them. Death causes too many to experience first Christmases without a loved one before the second, and the third.

We don't need the media to overwhelm us with bad news because our communities, our own lives are full of it as is. It all needs to be broken up by stories of reunion and success and laughter, stories of healing and figuring it out and marriage and birth. They're little gifts that give us reason to carry on in spite of pain and loss.

I'm sure the shepherds' lives were no different. Some of them were hurting bad that night because they had to sprint after the one stupid sheep always hunting down a chance to get lost. Some of them are tired of being away from their family. Some have a disease sitting in their bodies, and they're unaware of what the coming months and years could look like. There may have been conflict among the comrades so sitting around the fire was a little tense. Who knows? All we can know is that their lives weren't really all that much different than yours and mine.

To these ordinary shepherds, caught in the midst of a routine night in a regular life, an angel appears and the glory of God shines around them. In the darkness of night, God's glory, more brilliant than the Sun, surrounds them. "Don't be afraid" he proclaims, though they'd have every reason to cower and run at such a strange sight. "No don't fear, but instead maybe take a seat because I bring you good news of great joy for all people."

Better than hearing that your grandpa is coming around and has the strength to eat again; better than your friend telling you that he and his wife are going to make it work; better than your kid coming home to tell you that they've made a best friend and they want you to take them for ice cream. Better than hearing that a cease fire has been called or that someone will be providing a meal for you when funds are tight or when your wife tells you it's positive after years of trying.

All other news pales in comparison to what the angel proclaims because all other news, as good as it is, is temporary. A bill of clean health can only last until the next sickness or until death; reconciliation is perfect until the next conflict, or again until death; charity is wonderful but it gets used up and runs dry; news of a growing family brings wonderful excitement but also new struggles. All of these things are great news, a gift from God even, but they are temporary.

The angel has the privilege to proclaim a singular message, one never to be repeated for the rest of eternity because it's effects will last for as long as eternity. And it brings about only goodness and joy.

In the town of Bethlehem, a lady had her baby. It sounds as though the birth went okay—mom and child are resting, he in rough swaddling blankets, but that's not the wonderful news. No, what's wonderful is that the little one laying in a manger is actually the saviour of the world. He seems quite helpless right now as He needs to be held and fed and changed, He even needs to be comforted, but He's the One the world has waited for, the very one all the prophets of old have spoken of. This baby is Lord.

And that's good news of great joy for all people.

Friends, you are among the "all people." Though the angels delivered this message once, and you'll never get the chance to rush over with the shepherds to Bethlehem and see a baby born of a virgin resting in a manger, the consequences of such a miraculous night are reverberating still today. That evening's effects are still rippling out into your life now. Right now.

Because that baby wasn't just born to be Lord in His little corner of the world in that brief 33ish years of His life on earth. And this baby that grew and learned and taught, that multiplied bread and calmed storms and healed the sick and even raised the dead, this baby in a manger, who will receive gold and frankincense and myrrh at His baby shower which ultimately point to His death on a cross, His birth is good news for you. And I have the privilege of proclaiming this to you this night.

Because He was born, God in the flesh rested in the arms of Mary, so that He could live a holy and perfect life in place of the shepherds, in place of Joseph and Mary, in place of wisemen and in place of you.

He lived, He died, and He rose to life again.

This means that this news has no end. Nothing can touch the promise that Christ was born to wash away your sins and defeat your death. It doesn't matter that you were born 2000

years later, on a different side of the world, that you speak a different language. It doesn't matter what you've done, it doesn't matter what's happened to you. This baby has grown up but is still Lord of all, including you, to take care of you all your days and to carry you even through death because He's already been there and defeated it. This is good news.

Of great joy because it is promised even when your health is decaying or your relationships collapsing or your sin seems to be consuming and controlling you or your mental health is clouding joy itself out of your life. Christ was still born into your world, to be with you, to forgive you and to care for you.

The same news the angels proclaimed to the shepherds, this same news that you have heard this night, this is the same good news of great joy for you and your world that He proclaims constantly. It's why the church gathers week after week, Christmas after Christmas, Easter after Easter. In a world that seems so full of bad news, in lives that can't seem to handle all the bad that comes our way, He proclaims it day after day so that we believe it, that we don't forget it, that we cling to it, and that He clings to us through whatever may come.

So hear it once more. In Bethlehem, in a manger, resting in Mary's arms, Jesus was born. God came to live on earth so that your sins would be paid for on the cross and forgiven, forgotten, no matter what you have done. He came to die your death so that your last day, whenever it comes and however it happens, it would simply be the day you go to be with your Lord. He was born, and lives even though He died, so that means whatever you are living through these days, He would be with you, God with you, Emmanuel.

Today I bring you good news of great joy for all people, for you. For in a manger in Bethlehem was born the Christ child, Jesus your saviour and Lord.

Amen.