

## Christmas Eve Message

### Christmas: A Night to Pause, Ponder, and Praise. (Luke 2:1–20)

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Christmas Eve shifts from self-reflection to gratitude and gift-giving. Yet, we are called to reflect on what Christmas means today, especially the good news it carries. Luke’s Gospel moves from announcing Christ’s birth to its evangelistic significance. The angel said, “I am bringing **you** good news...to **you** is born this day...This will be a sign for you.” Not just announcing Christ's birth, but emphasizing it as “**for you.**” Who is this “**you**”? Does this “you” specifically refer only to the shepherds? Martin Luther wondered, “What good would it do if he were born a thousand times and sung to me daily, if I did not hear it was for me?” Who is this good news for? How does it stay meaningful today? Christmas Eve is busy—services, meals, gifts, gatherings, and preparations—that make our minds race and our hearts restless. Yet, it is also a holy night meant to deepen our understanding of the good news. One cherished carol, “O Holy Night,” captures this tension perfectly. Its history is as surprising as the story of Christmas itself. Written in France in 1847, the original *Cantique de Noël* was eventually banned by the Catholic Church because of its unlikely origins: a collaboration among a country priest, a secular socialist poet, and a Jewish composer. Nevertheless, the song’s message endured. It crossed the

Atlantic, where abolitionist John Sullivan Dwight fell in love with its message of freedom:

*“The redeemer has broken every bond... He sees a brother where there was only a slave.”*

During the Civil War, Northern Christians sang it as a song of hope in a divided nation. Later still, during a Christmas lull in the Franco-Prussian War, French soldiers sang it across the trenches, and German soldiers answered with hymns of Martin Luther. Enemies paused—if only for a night—to sing across the darkness.

The lyric that continues to resonate across generations is this:  
*A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.*

Every generation knows weariness. Every generation longs for hope. And that longing draws us back to Bethlehem.

Luke reminds us that the first Christmas was not quiet or convenient. It unfolded amid political pressure, a census, overcrowded towns, inns with no occupancy signs, people trying to catch up with time and space, and, amid this hustle and bustle, a young couple far from home, waiting patiently, not knowing what to do and where to go. Yet in the middle of all that activity, God did something astonishing. Heaven touched earth. Eternity entered time.

And in Luke 2, we meet people who did not rush past the miracle but received it with holy attentiveness: Mary, who paused and pondered; the shepherds, who paused and praised; **all who heard**, who were struck with wonder. Christmas becomes holy for us, too, when we learn to **pause, ponder, and praise**.

## **1. Christmas Calls Us to PAUSE**

Luke tells us that the shepherds were out in the fields, working the night shift—doing what they had always done. Then suddenly, the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. Their first reaction was fear. Fear comes naturally. Noise comes naturally. Hurry comes naturally. But pausing—that takes courage. The angel says the words every weary heart longs to hear: **“Do not be afraid.”** Before the shepherds moved, they had to pause. This message was addressed explicitly to the shepherds watching their flocks at night. They needed to listen carefully and stop long enough to hear the good news. Various questions might have come to their minds: why were we, the shepherds, chosen? Why not convey the good news to the king? In countries like India, shepherds are often viewed with suspicion—nocturnal nomads engaged in activities society disapproves of, which marginalizes them as outsiders. It was natural for them to feel frightened, as they did not expect any good news from anyone. They might have thought that they were not worthy enough to receive good news. Yet, the angel appeared not to kings or aristocrats. By choosing shepherds, the angel expanded the audience to “to all the people,” implying that this

good news is for everyone seeking hope, salvation, justice, love, and acceptance. This message remains relevant today, even after two thousand years. *“To you is born this day... a Savior.”*

The shepherds might have dismissed the moment as a dream or an illusion. They could have hesitated to accept the good news or claimed they were too exhausted and responsible to leave their flocks. Instead, they chose to say, “Let us go now to Bethlehem.” Christmas Eve is God’s invitation to pause: Pause from fear, pause from worry, pause from the pressure of daily routine, and pause long enough to let God’s peace settle in your heart. If we never pause, we may miss what God is doing right in front of us. But when we pause, we discover a peace the world cannot give—and the peace that cannot take away.

## **2. Christmas Calls Us to PONDER**

After the shepherds arrive and tell their story, Luke tells us that *“all who heard it marveled.”* But Mary responds differently.

*“Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”*

The word *“ponder”* suggests she was holding these events together—turning them over and reflecting deeply on what God was doing. Mary had heard the angel’s words months earlier. Now, those promises were becoming reality.

She pondered: How God chooses the humble, how divine love enters human fragility, how the Savior of the world is born in a manger, and how this child would change everything. Mary does not rush to explain the mystery. She holds it close. Christmas invites us to ponder as well: Why would God come as a baby? Why choose poverty instead of a palace? Why reveal the news first to shepherds, not kings? Why love a world that so often forgets God? What kind of peace is going to be given to humanity? The answer is breathtaking: because God desires closeness, not distance. The angels are not announcing that peace is at hand for those who please God. What they meant was that peace to be realized is God's gracious gift, given to us freely, and it is God's pleasure to provide it to us freely.

Mary taught us that faith grows through reflection. You don't have to understand everything to believe—but you do need to make room in your heart for wonder.

Tonight, ask yourself: What is God saying to me in this manger? What might God be birthing in me this Christmas?

### **3. Christmas Calls Us to PRAISE**

After seeing the Christ Child, the shepherds return to their fields *“glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard.”*

Notice this: nothing in their circumstances changed. They were still shepherds. The nights were still long. Life was still hard. But they were different. Their praise flowed

not from comfort, but from encounter. They had seen the Savior. They had heard heaven's song. They knew God had come near. And so they praised: Because God is with us—Immanuel, Because God knows our struggles, Because light shines in the darkness, because hope rises in weary hearts, because love has a name—Jesus. Praise is the natural response when we realize that the Christmas story is *our* story. Christ is not only born into the world—Christ is born **for you** and me. On this holy Christmas Eve: **Pause**, like the shepherds, to hear the angel's message of peace, **Ponder**, like Mary, to treasure the mystery of God's love, **Praise**, like all who witnessed the miracle, for the Savior has come.