



Words of Blessing

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High School/College Weekly Words Epiphany Week 1: January 7, 2007

Living the Word

Luke 2:4-20 Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David’s town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great army of heaven’s angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

Matthew 2:1-12 Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, “Where will the Messiah be born?”

“In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,” they answered. “For this is what the prophet wrote: ‘Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah; for from you will come a leader who will guide my people Israel.’”

So Herod called the visitors from the East to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: “Go and make a careful search for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may

go and worship him.”

And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshiped him. They brought out their gifts of gold frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him. Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

The Stable, the Child, and the Christmas Egg

This is the season to think and pray about what happened on Christmas and the days that followed. Sit down and be still. Close your eyes and picture the scene at the manger where I was born and came into the world as the son of God, but also as a child with a call. Pray about the scene at the stable and those people who came together. Their gifts were opened in new ways. They went on to do special and greater things in my name than they thought possible.

The shepherds each worked alone in the fields and found their own unique gifts, but they also worked together. They helped, supported, and encouraged each other to find their own special path and work. Mary had and used the gifts of helping and faith, but she also worked with Joseph in his call and gifts of teaching and support. Joseph taught men and children in their village how to use their gifts. Mary and Joseph worked separately with their own gifts, and they also worked together.

Keep looking at the stable and see me, the baby in the manger. See Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and even the innkeeper and his wife who let Mary and Joseph stay there and begin a new time in their lives. The light from God shone down on each person, on the path each would take, and on the way and place where each person’s call and life would unfold.

One shepherd was shy and was known for his great compassion and mercy for others. He was the one all the others went to when they were hurting. He sat around the fire with groups of people and let them share. One shepherd was always thinking of a new adventure and had the gift of evangelism. He went on to be a missionary in the hills and towns around him. One shepherd had the gift of encouragement and got the others to go out and follow the star. Then, after seeing Mary, Joseph, and the baby, he used his gifts of encouragement and discernment to guide each shepherd to see how he should share this news and what the news would mean to each of them and to the world. Joseph was a carpenter, but he was also good at supporting others. Mary was a woman who cared for her child and helped her friends. Each person gathered in that stable came offering a gift or talent. Think of that.

Picture yourself there. Look at Mary, Joseph and me. Say yes. A gift, a Christmas egg, awaits you. My child, when you receive your egg, your call, and the work you are to do for me and for others, know that you can do it in your own unique way. Know also that you may be called to help someone else in a ministry. One of the shepherds had his own gifts and knew how to begin using them, but he was also prayerful and giving and realized that he was needed in the work and call of the other two shepherds. Your call may be hard to discern, but if you are humble and trust in me, you will be blessed beyond what you can imagine, just like the people in the stable that night were blessed.

The people gathered in the stable that night were to begin the task of bringing my love, words,

and reality to the world, each in his or her own unique way. They worked together and alone. They prayed and listened. They were filled with faith in my call because they knew God would always be with them.

This year begins a very special time of taking your gifts and going out to share them with others, to help others in their work, and to be open to the miracles and power of the Holy Spirit. Eggs and gifts and call will be the focus of my words to you this year. I love you and bless you. Ready?

Important: I ask you and want you to read these words many times. I ask you to share these words with others. If you have a group, share the words with them, but also share with other groups and individuals or get a new group together, especially for those who are not sharing the words with others right now. Go to church each week and offer to share the weekly words and eggs with others. Everyone needs to share the weekly words with as many others as they can in the year ahead. You should not be reading and working with these words alone. My love, words, and reality are meant to be shared with others. Eggs and words just sitting in a box will do nothing, and I know the important and exciting things you can do to save lives in my name. Make the time; you have it and can do it. This is a gift to you, and it is very important. My words in the year ahead will change your life and the lives of everyone around you. The words I give you will show you how you can use your gifts, just like those who came to the stable, to change lives. You will see the same star, miracles, and blessings, and you will know what a difference your life and ministries can make. Keep thinking about that night at the stable, and you will see yourself standing next to a shepherd or maybe a king. Then you too will go out and use your gifts to bless lives in my name. These words are a special gift to you. I chose you. You are a beautiful, special egg.

Eggs: There will be more about eggs in the next few weeks. Watch for them to hatch. Be open to the miracles and possibilities for what your gifts and call can do in the world, your life, and the future. You will be blessed. I am with you. This will be a powerful and exciting time in your life. Be ready. There will be more instructions in the weeks to come, but for now know that each week we invite you to send in a witness of what the new call and words from Jesus means in your life today. What are you doing with your gifts and how have you stepped out to be involved in a ministry to others? What has happened because of your response to the star? What do eggs mean in your life? Have you offered eggs and my words to others?

Word for the week: Gifts and eggs

Prayer question: How could you use your gifts in a wider way in the year ahead?

Action for the week: Share these words with at least three new people. Begin some sharing groups. Talk about the words and help each other to find how and where I need each person to use his or her gifts in a special call and ministry. Pray about where each person is called to support another person's ministry. Show others how they can stand in the light of the star and receive the gift of love I offer. Your actions and decisions right now are important and life changing. I wait.

Daily prayer for this week: Jesus, just like the shepherds, the kings, the innkeeper and his wife, and Mary and Joseph, I want to share my gifts in your name. Show me what work you have for me to do so I can share your love, words, and reality.

The following words are for you. You will know which ones speak to you and answer your

questions or prayers. These personal words are guidance for you in your journey today. The special words this week are to encourage you in your gifts and call to go out.

- Like the youngest shepherd, you have the gift of giving. He used this gift for his family and friends and for his community and church. He patiently gave of his time to pray for others. He made time for people who needed a friend or listener, just like you do. This shepherd never complained about spending extra hours in the field so a friend could rest. Bless you for what you do for many.

- The oldest shepherd, Josh, was ready for more schooling and education, but he didn't know what to do and where to go. How would he get the money? But his hope was renewed when he saw the Christ child and the innkeeper and his family. If they could live with joy, giving, and faith, so could he. He would go home and work with his friends, community, family, and church to find ways that all the shepherds could learn, go to school, and become their best. Then, in time, they could return to their towns and teach and help others. He would tell the story about this child, Jesus, to all.

- Hens in a barn work together, supporting and looking out for each other's needs. They are a team, and their goal is the same: to watch over those in need, those who need support, and those who need a companion. I bless you for how you look out for others. Know that I have five people who need you at this time in their lives. Keep them safe by bringing them to me and to community and by praying.

- One king, Caspar, left the stable that night with a new sense of purpose for his life. He thought about that as he offered his gift to the child and his mother. Caspar knew this child was the son of God, and he knew he had been one of the first to see him and then be sent out. Now who should he tell? He had to go back to his country and begin by telling his friends, family, and the people in his palace and town.

- The inn had guests—one was John and one was Bill. The innkeeper told them about the other guests in the barn. Together John and Bill watched the scene from their window. They had believed that the Messiah would come one day. Was this child the one? Did they have a part in sharing this news? Bill would go home to his job and get coworkers involved in sharing the Lord's words. John's call would bring him to those who needed new life and healing and to the youth, telling them all about the newborn king.

- One king, Balthazar, came a long way to seek the child. He was following the star and a call. After seeing the poor family together in the stable, he reflected on how many others needed shelter and protection in his own country. On the way home, he planned a way to set up leaders to do this in each of three countries from which the kings came. He would see teamwork happen, each helping the other.

- You have a call to share your gifts, time, and love with others. Begin in a church where you can give the gifts needed as well as your support, attendance, prayers, and love. The church is there. It calls you each day. They need you, and you need them. Bring my words with you when you go. Watch miracles!

- Decisions. What should you do next? Picture yourself at the manger. Look at my mother, Mary, and think about how you would have responded to such a call in your own life. I ask you to find a statue or picture of Mary or a rosary and set it out where you can see it. Use this as a way to think about the night I was born and the years that followed for Mary. Pray about a decision you have to make, and ask Mary to show you the way.

- One shepherd went home to his family and shared what he had seen—the baby, the Christ child. His family listened to him in awe and gave thanks for this news. The shepherd asked his family to join him in a new work in their village, done in this child's name. They all said yes!

- The innkeeper wondered about the family who came to his inn. He knew they needed help, rest,

and shelter. He went to the stable and saw the child, the parents, the shepherds, and the animals gathered together. The shelter he offered was so poor. What could he do to offer better shelter for others in the future? He would talk to his helpers and those he with whom he worshipped in town. Together they could help this family and other families. He would change things beginning now.

- Life is filled with the joy of a Christmas scene and the uncertainty of a new road to travel. Your life this year is going to be filled with times of great joy, two opportunities to bring joy and peace to your family, two invitations to help others, and one sacrifice that will show the world your faith.

- As Mary and Joseph were surrounded by love and support, so are you. I have blessed you with many people who care about you and are there for you—guiding, helping, praying, and listening. It is time to share that love and help with others in a greater way. Prayer, as always, is your anchor. You know where to begin: your family, your church, and where I have put you right now.

- I love you very much. There is nothing we cannot do together and with your faith in me. I ask you to bring hope to others, offer healing and compassion, and make the needs of others a priority in your life. I will show you how. Just say yes to being my hands and love to everyone.

- You will travel out, like the three kings, to evangelize and share my love, words, and reality in the world. But you will begin with a blessing from me. I will give you a gift that will be a surprise and a reminder of your call to go out and give our love and time to others. It will come in a word and deed done for you. You will be surprised and humbled, and you will go to many places.

- After they had visited the stable, shepherds gathered together and shared about what this baby, born a king and a savior, meant to each of them. What were they called to do now to share this news? What about you? Gather groups together to share the same questions in the weeks ahead. Go!

- The innkeeper's wife was touched by the plight of the family that came to them. She was glad she could offer at least some simple shelter. Later, she went out with a blanket and some warm items to help the family and wondered how many other poor travelers need such help? The next day she decided she would go and talk to the youth in her town and ask them to help provide blankets. They could work together.

- King Melchior was touched by the prayerful quiet at the stable where the star had led him. People had come together to pray and quietly celebrate this birth. When he got home the king decided what he could do with this miracle event. He would gather a prayer team in his town and where he worshipped. Together they could do much to help this child, this new king. Through prayer they could bring others to believe and have lives of giving, faith, and love.

- There was an angel at the stable; her name was Christina. She had heard about this exciting event, the birth of the Savior, and she sang with joy at this wonderful miracle. She is going to be a big part of people's lives in the year ahead so that the call that began that night to many will go out farther. She is going to show you the gift and call you were given to help many this year.

- Eggs wait for the right time to hatch! The time is here and now for you to look at your goals, hope, and gifts and get busy. Your eggs are ready. Are you? I ask you to let go. I will help and guide you to a new time in your journey. It will be the most exciting year possible. Trust.

- Family is a blessing. Picture the family at the stable, loving and supporting one another, and making sacrifices so that each one is cared for, loved, and encouraged. Mary helped Joseph. The shepherds helped and supported their parents. The innkeeper helped his wife and family. Your family needs you in many ways. Listen to these words, for they are guiding you in what to do.

- You are where I need you to be. Trust. I ask you to step out and look for people who need to

know my love, words, and reality and ways and places to meet them. Share these weekly words. You can start at least two groups, just like the innkeeper and his wife did. Begin and trust that people will be blessed and changed by the words. It is time to step out of the boat and help my people.

- One king brought gold to the stable to show his love and humility and to honor the baby, the newborn savior. The king's love and humility in honoring this baby who would one day save the world and his willingness to share his Lord's love, words, and reality are a powerful inspiration that is important in your life today. Bring your gift of faith to me and to making the world a better place. Begin with family.

- Invitations for you to offer your help are coming. You have to step out and trust, but you can do it. Angels will point the way. One shepherd went home and was asked to share what he saw that night. Many people waited to hear from him, so he started a group to share my love, words, and reality. It did amazing things. It brought their community closer, and they built a place to worship.

- I think you saw an angel when you were out. Did you notice the smile? This angel, Fiona, had words for you: Believe, love others, be kind, have faith, and know you are on the right path in your call to help others. You are where you need to be for so many, many reasons.

- Christmas is a time of renewal. What did the wise men, shepherds, and innkeeper do after seeing the baby, Mary, Joseph, and a lot of angels? They were filled with joy! I blessed them that day. I bless you today. I am going to give you a special miracle in the days and months ahead. Your call, gifts, and life will be renewed. In turn, you can bless and help renew my church.

- I need you. You have the gifts and love needed to encourage others to keep on, to go out, to believe, and to be healed. Use your gifts to help me, to look for eggs, and to share my love, words, and reality with others. It is time to be really busy in a wonderful exciting way. Go out!

Read and pray my words to you

Please note that the Bible verses are drawn from the Good News Translation (or Today's English version), so references to a particular stopping place may not match your translation exactly.

Isaiah 2:1-3

Jeremiah 42:3-6

Zephaniah 3:16-18 (end with "festival")

Isaiah 42:5-10

Ezekiel 3:4-6, 12

Isaiah 58:7-10

Psalms 9:1-2

Psalms 146:5-8, 10

Psalms 25:4-5

Psalms 119:124-125, 140-144

Psalms 16:5-6, 11

Psalms 98:1-3

Acts 2: 43-47

John 1:29-34, 43-45

Luke 18:26-30

Acts 8:4-6

Matthew 4:18-24

Acts 16:14-15

Mark 16:14-20

Matthew 21:21-22
2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 and 3:1
Romans 8:28-31 and 37
Ephesians 4:2-7
1 Corinthians 12:4-11
Philippians 1:1-6
2 Peter 1:1-3, 10
Galatians 2:9-10

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