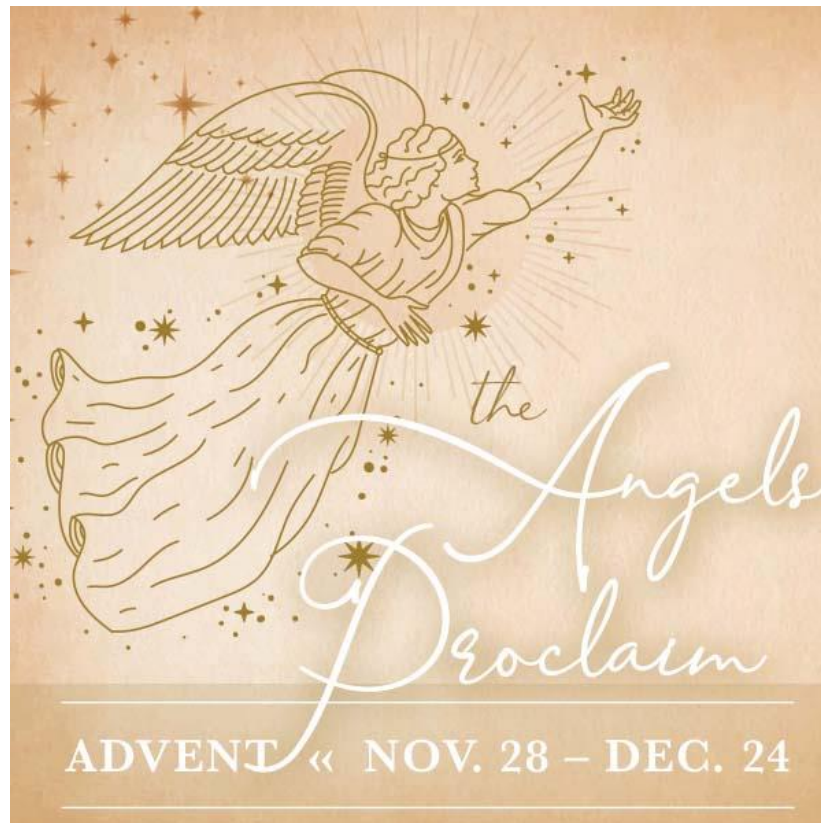


**Sermon, Christmas Eve, 2021**  
**Isaiah 9:2-7; Matthew 1:18-25**  
**“The Angels Proclaim: Peace”**  
**Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor**



My maternal grandfather made his living in the coal mines of West Virginia. By the time I came along, he had long since retired, having contracted black lung from those years working in those mines. But he would tell us stories of what it was like working under them. It was his job to put in lights, so imagine if you can being moved miles in the dark, the unknown, tons of mountain all around you. Even the most un-claustrophobic persons would struggle in those conditions. And so it was with great interest I followed the story of the mining accident that occurred in Chile in 2010. A cave in trapped 39 men for 69 days.

To give you a sense of the situation, they were trapped approximately 2,300 feet below the surface. Three miles from the mine entrance. The mine had a history of instability, making rescue efforts even worse. The only light they had was from their mining hat lamps which they kept charged by truck batteries. They were trapped, 39 men in a shelter area of approximately 540 square feet. They rationed water and food, and so

every 48 hours they were given two small spoonful's of tuna, a sip of milk, a biscuit, and a morsel of peach. Most of them lost about 18 pounds during the ordeal.

Can you imagine 69 days in the dark, 69 days trapped under ground. Now, as you probably know, through some fantastic and heroic acts both by the miners and their rescuers, they survived.

Now, we won't go into the details of the rescue efforts, but there has been plenty written, even a movie about the ordeal so you can follow what happened. But I'd like you for a few moments to think about what that was like to have that moment, the moment when they were rescued. When someone came down into that darkness, into the hopelessness, in that place, the smell of desperation and death, and say to them *the time of being in the darkness is over. Now is the time to come into the light, now is the time to have hope, now is the time to be rescued. You don't have to be in the darkness any longer.*

Can you still hear those words this evening? We are so glad, overjoyed to see so many of you tonight and to know there are even more who are worshiping with us online, if not tonight then perhaps in the days to come. For all of you that may be new or a guest, I want to take just a second and catch you up. You'll notice a preponderance of angels throughout the church. That's because we have spent the Advent season looking specifically at the proclamations the Angels made about the birth of Jesus. We have looked in both the Old and the New Testament for these proclamations.

We made note that over and over again, the angels go out of their way to say the birth of Jesus, the incarnation that God, would be born as an infant was Good News. The greatest news ever pronounced. God news of a Great joy. The angels came to people in all sorts of circumstances good and bad and said to them *no matter what you are going through, the birth of Jesus is Good News.*

That's what the Angel says to Joseph in our Gospel Lesson. Joseph tries his best to figure a way to save Mary, send her away and keep from the embarrassment of being pregnant before they are married. And the Angel comes to Joseph in a dream and says *Joseph, I know it's difficult, I know this is hard and may be for many years. This is not going to make your life any easier. But I want you to know this. Do not be afraid, for this is God news. The Messiah will be born, Mary carries God in flesh, the one called Emmanuel meaning God is with us. Oh, Joseph, it won't be easy, but you have no idea just how good this news is. But you will. All of the world will know.*

But why is it Good News? Have you thought about that? We gather every year and celebrate the birth of Jesus. We sing beloved carols, we light candles, and somehow, even when we don't understand it, maybe some might even struggle to believe there is something here, something that makes our hearts beat quicker, makes our pulses race, a part of us that wants to believe and embrace the Good News. But why is it Good news?

Let's go back to our Scripture from Isaiah, this prophecy of the birth of Jesus 700 and some years before the birth of Christ. Isaiah says it's Good News because most of us live in the darkness. So many of us live like those miners in Chile. We live in darkness. Some of us here tonight are living with a certain darkness in their lives. Some of us live in the darkness of loneliness, we feel alone, and that feeling is particularly poignant at a time of year when we see others gather and celebrate.

Some of us live in the darkness of grief, maybe current grief or a grief of a loss in our lives that we carry in our hearts. And like those miners, we are buried under a mountain of grief and loss. Some of us live in the darkness of remorse. Look, we have all done things, made decisions in our lives of which we are ashamed. Wish we hadn't done. But for some of us, we can get buried under the mountain of remorse, self-blame and self-guilt.

Some of us are living in the darkness of sin. We are alienated from God, buried under the mountain of our sin and the consequences of our actions. We may feel like we are down in the tunnel separated from God by our sin, and even though we are dressed up, we feel as far away from God at this moment than we have ever felt. Like being in that mine.

Some may be caught up in the darkness of broken relationships. Now, that may be a marriage or a relationship that has ended. But it could be a place in our lives where we simply refuse to forgive someone. We have nursed, babied, even protected our hurt and anger, our resentment against someone. Oh, we do it because it feels justified, we have been wronged. But in the end, all that does is bury us under an avalanche of hatred, bitterness, and sadness.

But this is why the birth of Jesus is Good News. In this prophecy, we are reminded on the night of Jesus' birth we are rescued. God has come in flesh to say to us like the rescuers *you don't have to live in the darkness any longer.*

I want you to hear that, whatever darkness, whatever you have, Jesus says to you, *you don't have to live in the darkness any longer, you can come into the light of God.* If you have been buried in the darkness of alienation from God, Jesus has come not only to save you from your sin but to free you. You don't have to feel removed from the one called Emmanuel. If you are in the darkness of loneliness, God has come to say you are not alone. This is how much God loves you and we love you, as well. The wonderful counselor has come, you do not have to live in the darkness of remorse any longer. Jesus has come to take that remorse, that guilt, that self-doubt, away from you. It might seem too good to be true because you have lived in the darkness for too long. But the light has come.

Jesus has come, the one who is the healer of broken relationships. The one who can, if the relationship cannot be restored, at the least allow you to not carry that resentment any longer. You can forgive and be set free, you don't have to live in that darkness any longer.

The Good News of the angels is still Good News. The words of Isaiah, the One who is wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, has come. Can you imagine what it was like for those shepherds to have the sky filled with the glory of the angels, songs so loud and clear and pure that human ears almost couldn't stand it. And then they were gone. There was silence. And then they heard the cry of a baby. A cry that said the time of darkness is over. The light has come. They went to the light found in Jesus, and their lives were never the same. Will you come and experience that light? Come, the time of darkness is over. Amen.