

News Source
Luke 2:1-20

My father was a worker, from the time he was fairly new to walking to long after his retirement. He put great effort into his work, and accomplished a great deal through his work. Perhaps his first job, apart from sweeping the floors in his dad's barber shop, was working as a paperboy, an extinct childhood job now rendered to history books and Broadway musicals. *Extra! Extra! Read all about it!* Hot off the printing presses, stacks of daily newspapers would land with a thud on the concrete, and a gang of boys, big cotton bags in hand, would gather outside the offices of the Southeast Missourian, pick up their assigned stack, and prepare them for delivery to home throughout the college town of Cape Girardeau, MO.

That preparation included what today would be called a *hack* to make their deliveries quicker and more efficient, and maybe a tad more fun. First, a young Jerry Brown would fold each paper lengthwise twice, and then, almost like an origami artist, he would quickly fold the paper repeatedly until it took the shape of something like a pentagon, having tucked the ends in so that what was a paper, was now more like a frisbee he could throw from a bike, or since it was more likely that dad didn't own a bike, he could

throw it like a discus while running. Those who know me, know that someone else had to do this for me. I had to assign it to a committee, and even they struggled to replicate it, and yet, as an 8-year-old, Dad would fold scores of these in just a few minutes - from newspapers to frisbees.

So, as you might guess, the job became a test of athletic skill as the paperboys prided themselves on placing the flying disk on the porch or front stoop with pinpoint accuracy. And if some old geezer like me complained about the paper or its delivery, the paperboy could always throw it with just a bit more heat, allowing it to slap against the front door rousing the old crank from his nap. And you want to know something amazing? In his 91st year, his body and mind ravaged by Lewy body dementia, my father could still fold a newspaper into a flying disk.

Dad was born in 1931, which means his stint included delivering the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war. Tossed by my father onto many a front porch was the news of — Joe Dimaggio's 56 game hitting streak, Ted Williams .400 season, D-Day and the invasion of Normandy.

Paperboys and paper routes are almost extinct today along with the printed newspapers they delivered. Gone also, are the days when everyone turned to the same news sources to keep up with what was happening in the community, the region, the world. What's the word from the Battle of the Bulge? Did Bob Gibson pitch another shutout? What's the market say about soybean futures? Will the new Interstate have an exit to our town? Who had a wedding? Who hosted a May Day tea? Where will the funeral take place? There's a sale at Penney's.

The Globe Democrat; The Times Picayune; The Asheville Citizen Times; The Mexico Ledger; The Hickory Daily Record... Rich people could subscribe to the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal, but most folks relied on the local paper — Mourning the deaths on Belgium's Flanders Field; checking the box scores and the weather forecast; rejoicing with the local child who got her picture in the paper for winning the local spelling bee.

I am sure we have high school students here who have never handled an actual newspaper. Print journalists and legacy media are endangered species these days. The current generation tears its spleen in combat over

the term *mainstream media* and the landscape is no longer divided by faith denominations but by websites and podcast subscriptions.

Actually, though, the term, *mainstream media*, probably ought to be cast into the word dumpster with paperboy, newsprint, floppy disks, and Oldsmobile, because in a polarized world there is very little that can actually be called mainstream anything. Today you are as likely, or even more likely, to get your news from TikTok as you are from CBS. Anybody with a ring light and an iPhone can reach as many viewers or more than Walter Cronkite ever did. The source from which you get your news may have never been to Syria, but you may find yourself quoting them about what the U.S. should do there now. As far as the dissemination of news goes, there is no mainstream. The more fitting label would be *The Wild West*. There are folks you've never heard of, who couldn't find a journalism school on a map, and don't even pretend to know how to verify a story's claims, and yet, they are signing 9-figure contracts because of the legions of individuals entrusting them as their trusted news source.

Thus, the essential question before us now is — What is the filter through which you interpret the news no matter the source from which you hear it?

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’”

Good news. The Greek word here is — εὐαγγελίζομαι - good news, joyful tidings. John the Baptist may speak of winnowing forks and unquenchable fire, but Luke also reports of John — *“with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.”*

Describing his own purpose and job description, Jesus says — *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”* When the people of Capernaum pleaded with Jesus to stay longer with them, he said, *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.”*

When John the Baptist, languishing in Herod's prison, began to doubt his own belief, Jesus sent him this word — *"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."*

When the early church leader, Philip, stepped aside from his journey to speak to an Ethiopian eunuch, Luke tells us, *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus."*

And when Peter broke tradition to visit the home of the gentile Cornelius, Peter said, *"You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)."* The Apostle Paul would tell the new church in Rome, *"And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!"*

εὐαγγελίζομαι - good news, joyful tidings — it shares the same root word as gospel. Gospel is a word used liberally in the church, but most of the time there is little clarification about what it is. I preached a sermon in seminary for a class, and peppered the sermon with what I thought would be the optimal number of mentions of the word *gospel*. My professor

thought otherwise. She said, “You used the word *gospel* frequently, but you don’t tell us what it is. What is it?” I’m sweating, stuttering, and stammering, “Well uh ... mmm ... you know...” She wasn’t having any of that, so she asks, “But what if I don’t? What is it?” “Well ... uh ... you know ... gospel ... good news.”

“But what is the gospel, the good news?” Taking mercy on me, she didn’t wait for another wrong answer. She said, “How will people know what the good news is if you don’t tell them? Tell them what the good news is — the incarnation, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the means through which God reconciles the world to Godself.” At that point, about all I could utter was ... “Yeah, what she said.”

She was right. You can’t sell a newspaper if you don’t write the story. Good news — Incarnation, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Why do we call Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the Gospels? Because they are the primary, closest to the source, accounts of the story of Jesus.

What do the Gospels tell us about Christ’s coming into the world? What do they say about his ministry, how he encountered people? What was the context of the places and peoples he visited? What were his teachings?

How did he deal with conflict or handle those opposed to him? Who did he hang around with, and what can they tell us about his priorities, his compassion, his concept of mercy, his refusal to acquiesce to hate or violence?

The gospel isn't an idea. The gospel is merely the headline for a flesh and blood narrative of salvation — Incarnation, Life, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ; the means through which God redeems us. Each time we hear the word gospel, we should have something in mind that is very real — Life-death-resurrection-redemption-hope, and that hope is not an idea, it is a living, breathing reality, the self-giving love of God for all. This is the good news through which we as Christ followers should interpret all other news. This is the filter through which we should read the news, discern what is just, and evaluate opinions. Always remember, just using the name of Jesus does not validate the ideas of anyone with a microphone. Are they in keeping with the character of the Jesus revealed in the Gospels, the good news?

If the question comes up regularly, which it does, and legitimately, which it is — Why are Christians so mean? — then we have some serious

repair to do. In too many places and on too many platforms, there is more pridefulness about being right about Christ, than there is a humility borne from seeking to be like Christ. The earliest believers were sometimes referred to as *The Way* — the **Way** of Christ. The way Jesus lived; the way Jesus interacted with others, the way Jesus embodied and revealed God’s self-giving love, the kind of love intended to be a light to the world. If we stray outside of that ethos, are we bearing light or are we reflecting something else? Are we listening to the Gospel (incarnation, life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ) or are we following something else, representing someone else? Whenever the impression we give bears even a hint of contempt or cruelty, we may be reflecting something, but it sure isn’t Jesus.

*‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Good news. Great joy. This is who we represent. This is who we share with the world, **all** the world.*

When I began in ministry (*No, Seth, we did not write on stone tablets then*), but we did often use an image during this time of year, an image that

is now out of date, but was at the time a fitting image to help us focus our attention on what matters. The image echoed other depictions through history of the Holy couple trekking to Bethlehem, or was it the Wise Men, in either case they were heading to the place where time was split in two - the world before Jesus. The world with Jesus.

What is unique about this image is that the Judean hills they are traversing are made up of piles of newspaper headlines spreading the news about all the ways we miss the point of Christmas in the behaviors that expose our greed, hate, and violence, along with our misplaced priorities. *Shoppers crushed in discount store frenzy - Bus bomb in Tel Aviv - Thousands languish in Syrian refugee camp.* Of course, you could replace the print newspapers with smartphones without even changing the headlines and it would still be timely, but seriously, don't try to throw your phone like a frisbee.

The point here is the contrast, or the disconnect, between our ways and the good news revealed in the Bethlehem narrative. Our task this year and every year is to reduce the contrast, reduce the gap between our news and the good news. For what was it that drew Joseph and Mary, the

shepherds, and the wise men to the same place? The birth of Love. *“I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.* Good news indeed. Amidst this world’s chaos, may our lives bear good news. Amen.