

Glorious celebrations. We know them when we see them. Some are simple like those that happen at airports when loved ones reunite. Some of them are extravagant like those after a sports team wins a championship. Some pull at our heart strings, like soldiers come home from deployment and happy tears and tight embraces are the norm not the exception. Tickertape parades, Times Square at New Years.

The prophet Isaiah is celebrating, marking the end of a tumultuous time, destroying instruments of death & destruction. These words permeate our experience and expression of Christmas. Coupling these words with those from the Gospel of Luke, we can't help but feel good. And good news can change our mood. But the words alone cannot do it, how we say it also plays a large part in the experience. Take my friends from the Hundred Acre Woods for example. If I say, oh bother you know it's Winnie the Pooh. Oh d-d-dear, is Piglet. Ohhh-kaaay is Eeyore. Ta-ta-for now, Tigger. But what happens when I say, taaaa-taaaa-for now. We lose the exuberance of Tigger and instead of being excited for whatever great new adventure is waiting, we feel sadness.

The glory of the Lord that shone around the angels as they appeared to the shepherds was terrifying. The shepherds did not even have to say it, the angels could see it on their faces. God's glory for us individually is a scary proposition – the creator of the universe right there for us is overwhelming. In this kind of moment, we find ourselves channeling piglet wanting to hide. And yet, the angel, God's messenger sees the fear, calms it and gives us the good news. When we are scared, if we tell the story like piglet, it is not going to get very far is it? This is a moment when we need to be like Tigger.

Now I know this is kind of a silly way to explain sharing the glory of God but it makes sense. When we leave this time and place of worship, we hope to leave with the perfect peace of hearing the good news and seeing the light of Christ and hearing the words from Silent Night. How do we hold on to this moment – because this anchors us for the tumultuous times to come. When the world is overwhelming, we all long for peace. The peace that God gives us is not like the peace of the world – a moment without conflict. The Peace of God surpasses all understanding, it's being able to stand in the glory of God, hearing life changing news and not being terrified. It's hearing, we do not have to be afraid. It's hearing, you are enough. It's hearing you are loved no matter what you say or do. It's shining the light in the darkness, knowing that nothing will extinguish the light.

The good news of great joy that the angels share with us is not confined to an event more than 2000 years ago. The celebration that the Prophet Isaiah speaks is the end of war and the birth of the long awaited Messiah. It is not just the moment of his birth but the promise of what's to come, that of His *“authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore.”* We're in the in-between time, Jesus has come and we are waiting for him to return to complete this promise but we do not have to wait content with the ways of the world. We can continue to further the kingdom of God right now. We can work towards dispelling fear. We can work towards helping everyone know they are loved. We can encourage each other when times are tough. We can comfort each other when we are

scared. We can promise to walk through the darkness because we know the way out. This moment of Christmas is just beginning, it is not over in a few hours. It lasts even beyond the 12 days of Christmas that ends January 5. The gift we receive at Christmas is not anything that can be wrapped or decorated – it's the love of God, who gave up for a time to live our life, die our death and rose so that we may have life and life abundantly. May people know us as those who love in all that we say and do because the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.