

**ANCIENT WHISPERS #1**  
**CHRISTMAS CALLED, CHECK YOUR MESSAGE**  
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**Intro:** (thank the children's choir, stage décor team – it's beginning to feel like Christmas)

**Luke 2:8-11**

\*my daughter made us this advent bell – pull off one string each day leading up to Christmas...

\*there was no countdown to the lighting of the tree in Rockefeller Center; no paid holiday marked on the calendar → just a sudden Heavenly ordained “instant msg” ...announcing something incredibly profound!

→ but the MSG of that 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas began being whispered about long before that announcement rang out that evening...

*(interruption with different msgs)*

- stage hand brings out written msg
- person stands in audience with posterboard msg written on it (i'll write this one up – Jn 3:16)
- stage hand brings out laptop (with AOL slogan over speakers - you've got mail) - i'll tell them "not right now"
- Tech uses microphone to say: "attention please: we're paging jack schull, please pick up the white courtesy phone."
- finally someone calls my cell phone and i'll let it ring a bit then silence and say: "i'll check the msg later.."

**T** when you think about it - msgs are always coming at us...– think about all the messages that get sent this time of year...seems like there are so many ways to get a message out

*congregation conversation:*

→ talk to your neighbor – how have we in humanity communicated msgs thru history? (30 sec)

**T** Let's test our knowledge a bit on remembering some history of when different modes of communication were used...to send messages, get the word out – help people be ‘in the know’...

→ Q when did these different things begin:?

- **smoke signals** a long, long time ago
- **telegraph** British inventor (William Sturgeon 1825) – 1830 American Joseph Henry sends 1<sup>st</sup> msg along a wire – received 1 mile away
- **Carrier Pigeon** some indication that Egyptians/Persians used ‘em 3,000 yrs ago → we're more familiar with their service during WWI and WWII (600 miles – up to 1,000 miles)
- **Printing Press** (china in the 11<sup>th</sup> century) Johannes Gutenberg 1440– lasted well into 20<sup>th</sup> century
- **US Postal Service** 1639 – 1<sup>st</sup> postal service agency emerged among the Colonies
  - July 26, 1775 – 1<sup>st</sup> Postmaster General appointed (\$1,000 salary/yr)
  - **Bonus:** Pony Express – April 1860 – running b/t Missouri and CA
- **Telephone** March 10, 1876 (Alexander Graham Bell)
- **Email** early/mid 1960's (creation of ARPANET – shared info b/t major computer science labs through the country)
  - By 2005, 11.5 billion emails will be sent each day on average in the US and 26.1 billion worldwide. (This includes emails sent by individuals for business and personal purposes, but not mass emails sent to large lists.)
- **TEXT MSG** UK - December 1992 is when the 1<sup>st</sup> was sent
  - **Today:** 18.7 bln text messages sent in December 2006 by ZDNet's ZDNet Research -- According to CTIA, mobile users sent 18.7 bln text messages in the month of December 2006, up 92% from 9.7

bln messages in December 2005. Text messaging is the preferred channel for many teens and those in the 18 to 24 year-old demographic.

The pages of the Bible are filled with messages – God wants to communicate. He’s sending messages to his people – sending messengers to announce and foster relationship with his creation.

- Sent a msg to Abraham – I want you to follow me and I’ll bless you and your descendants – to make a covenant with you
- Sent a msg to Moses – I’ve seen my people suffering and I want to rescue and restore our relationship
- Sent a message to Joshua – take the promise land I’m providing you this way, I’ll lead you
- Sent a msg to Gideon – I want to rescue my people again, I choose you to lead out in that...

→ the story of Christmas is God sending a message of His Hope, Acceptance, inviting all toward reconciled relationship with Him...

→ it’s a msg that burst forth that night and God said “I keep my promises”!!!

The b/c this msg wasn’t sent for the 1<sup>st</sup> time – at that 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas – it was a promise that had been whispered about long before...

### Isaiah 40:3-5

History of Israel during the time of Isaiah

- Isaiah – whose name means = THE LORD SAVES
- Written in the 8<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century
- Israel falls and Judah’s fall is immanent
- The 1<sup>st</sup> 30 + chapters of Isaiah are his calling of people to return their hearts toward God, to not wander with their devotion and allegiance...

Scholars debate about some of the timing of writings in Isaiah – is there 2 author’s – mostly b/c of linguistic analyses and the references to later kingdoms of Babylon/Persia (exilic period in 550 BC – almost 150 yrs after Isaiah lived)– some have questioned the the unity of Isaiah...

- Isaiah’s fav title for God was “the holy one of Israel” – used 12 x in 1-39/14 x in 40-66 – only 7 other times in all the OT (*Tyndale bible dictionary, 2001*)
  - Interlude (decade(s) gap theory – not written in one setting) – give legitimacy to 1 author

→ I believe Isaiah wrote during the Assyrian conquest and the then looming Babylonian empire → foretold of that captivity and then the return of the remnant that God would bring out...

**→ the story of the bible is God’s constant rescue of his people who chose their own way, but His love for them leads him to rescue again and again**

The in Isaiah 40 we see perhaps Isaiah’s writings/prophecy’s in his retirement yrs as once again proclaiming God’s love, power and provision will be exercised for his people...

Describe some of the words used in this psg...ALL THESE WORDS OF WARNING, THEN ALL THE SUDDEN WORDS OF COMFORT.

- Comfort, comfort -- tenderness, inclined to help – moved to correct and ease and comfort
- ‘mouth of God has spoken’ – Hebrew God has answered, declared – promised!!

→ God is communicating tenderness to those acquainted w/ suffering, hurting

→ he's sending a message...

Illustration:

Some msgs we receive or hear in life don't carry a lot of weight – not that important

- “Sir, we just ran out of that dessert” – not really that big of deal
- Your cashier says she needs to get a price check – (inconvenience, but not end of the world)

Some messages are little harder...

- Dentist leans down and says: “we're going have to do a root canal (pause) – and a crown...”
- Teacher says: “did you actually study for this test” as she hands it back...

An elderly widow decided it was too much trouble to get all of her kids and grandkids Christmas presents, so she decided to send them a check with a card. A week after she mailed all the cards, she discovered she forgot to include the checks in the cards. Imagine all those kids opening a card from grandma with a note inside that says, “**Buy your own presents.**” (love Grandma) → can you imagine...?

Some messages are difficult to take in...

- Boss says: “we're having to readjust personnel, downsize – I'm sorry to tell ya”
- You get a msg from your doctor's office and it says to ‘call me, we need to talk’
- Your landlord stops by
- Your spouse says “it's not working any more”
- The phone call with news that leaves you speechless

T I know you've gotten a msg that might fall into that difficult category;  
(pause) but have you ever gotten a message that caught you off guard with joy, excitement, relief → one that just made your day

- Maybe your doctor called and said ‘it's not cancer’
- Get an email from an old friend – who is coming to town – wants to grab lunch
- Your mortgage company calls and says that they're working on company image – and you're the winner and they've decided to pay off your house and send your family on a vacation if you'll be in their commercial → *(that's too good to be true)*
- Get a card/note from your child – that say's they were thinking of you – love you
- Maybe your dad called and said let's go play golf @ pebble beach – wow!

Illust *one of the best msgs I ever got:*

I remember coming home from a youth trip while I was pastoring in Colorado, and seeing a big sign above the kitchen that read “welcome home, daddy” and realizing that we were pregnant with our fist child!

**Isa. 40: v. 3** (prepare the way)

→ this message from Isaiah was like a breath of fresh air – passed along to God's people...one to hold onto as they were going to be stuck in captivity – little hope, lot's of disappointment and wondering → this was to be a poetic fresh reminder that God was still in control and working toward hope and renewal...

Ch 1-39 was these msgs of warning, caution – msgs pleading for renewal of their hearts – they didn't listen and captivity awaits – Judah falls and life as they know it has been altered beyond recognition

Then in chapter 40 – God sends a new message. One laden with comfort, hope and full of promise and power that will prevail...

He prepares the way and will lead them back out of captivity → But there was more to that promise:

### **Isa 40:3, 5**

→ this msg was one of great importance – Isaiah is wanting God’s people to be comforted that all will be changing for the better... – God had a plan – He has a heart to comfort and restore and provide a rescuer!

Thru out the OT – msg that God was going to provide a savior for his people – once for all – a Messiah would bring his glory... – more was promised – more to the message and many were still anticipating, awaiting it to be realized...

→ Years of silence follow and their hopes are in this holding pattern...waiting with expectation

T then all of the sudden – the whispers of Christmas turn to chatter and begin to get louder and are suddenly shouting their proclamation on that 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas night – heralded by the Angels – and a few yrs later championed by a ‘voice calling in the desert – prepare the way’

Those words of Isaiah were ultimately fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist, and they’re not talking a road construction project, but rather - a preparation of the heart to welcome the Lord Jesus.

**(this Isaiah psg prophecy is mentioned in all 4 gospel writings) → pointing to John the Baptist**

→ John was in the mold of OT prophets – who were God’s voice – calling the nation/the people back into proper relationship with God

### **Matthew 3:1-3**

the gospel writers are saying with this Isaiah 40 reference: **don’t miss this messenger – he’s declaring a mighty message of Hope Straight from God!**

—“*Prepare the way of the Lord.*” – level the path – smooth it out

In ancient times – workmen would level the road, smooth it so a distinguished ruler/dignitary could travel to an area – **today: we’d say “roll out the red carpet” for their arrival!!!**

### **III**

When we were kids and we’d jump our bikes and skateboards – we’d grab a broom and sweep the sidewalk/driveway to prepare the way toward the ramps. Now that I think about it – maybe that’s why my parents would let me do this – they knew they’d get things swept up...

### **Matthew 3:1-3**

→ John is carrying on the preparation that every obstruction shall be removed – so to reveal to the whole world the salvation of God in Him whose name is the “Savior.”

Q did you ever stop to consider that God has been sending his message, messengers into your life, so to smooth the way – that obstacles might be overcome that are keeping you from experiencing him?  
→as you look over the landscape of your life – can you see those moments, people he's steered across your path to help:

- removing obstacles of loneliness
- removing obstacles of fear or disillusionment
- removing fatigue, rejection or shame
- Removing obstacles of doubt...

**There's been yrs of expectation, anticipation, = waiting for this messenger from God...  
what would be the signal of the Messiah's arrival?...**

Story of driving through reservation – no signal??

T the gospel writers are saying with this Isaiah psg – **FULL SIGNAL (at&t 'full bars') on this one guys** – this is the guy who the prophets wrote about – proclaiming that the Messiah was here...God's message of reconciliation was now available! **Don't miss it...Don't let it pass you by...**

→ God keeps his promises – is providing a way to truly live in relationship with him again...where his power, his presence is available, accessible to you -- it's a choice you have to seize – it's there before ya – but you could also let the chance pass you by – miss it ...

Q ever wondered about actors who star in major movies – who might have had that job? Did anyone have the opportunity right before 'em and let it go – got the message, but passed it up...?

#### ILLUSTRATION

##### Actors Turn Down Famous Roles

##### SHORTEN THIS ILLUSTRATION

For example, Burt Lancaster turned down the lead in *Ben-Hur* in 1959. The role of Judah Ben-Hur eventually went to Charlton Heston, who won an Academy Award Oops!

Sean Connery was a fan-favorite to play Gandalf, from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. However, Connery rejected the part in Peter Jackson's recent adaptation, in part because he did not want to spend 18 months filming in New Zealand. Instead, Sir Ian McKellen took up Gandalf's beard to wide acclaim.

The producers Albert Broccoli and Harry Saltzman, who had bought the film rights to Ian Fleming's James Bond novels, originally approached **Cary Grant** about playing the part of 007. Grant declined because he did not want to become involved in a film series. Instead, Sean Connery was cast as Bond, Oops!

Fifth, both Ewan McGregor and Will Smith declined the role of Neo in the blockbuster science fiction epic *The Matrix*. The part eventually went to Keanu Reeves, and turned into one of the most successful movie trilogies of all time.

Finally, Bette Davis turned down the role of Scarlett O'Hara in the 1939 classic, *Gone with the Wind*. Instead, the role went to Vivien Leigh. Davis thought that her co-star was going

to be Errol Flynn, with whom she refused to work after the two had just finished shooting *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*. Oops! Bad move, Betty! Clark Gable ended up as Leigh's co-star in what became one of the most beloved films in history.

*J. R. Love, Rushton, Louisiana; source: David Wallechinsky and Amy Wallace, The New Book of Lists (Cannongate, 2005), p. 40-43*

→ one of the choices you and I have this Christmas Season is this: **are we going to grab hold of the true message of Christmas? do we listen to all the other messages our world is sending and allow it to drown out the real msg of Christmas?**

→ The invitation to anchor your life to a Savior – who is still in the business of rescuing his people in the midst of everyday life – to lean into...

- His Hope in the midst of depression or despair
- His Peace in the middle of crisis
- His Presence in the midst of the breakdown
- His Joy in the midst of frustration or disappointment
- His Love that can overcome sorrow and heartache

**In a Season long past - Jesus was announced as the Savior– and He still is this Season... and if you'll listen closely to the whisper of Christmas, it's available for you to choose and act on**

The message of Christmas is that you and I can choose:

→ we can choose to live in the power, provision, hope and joy that God extends to us in the gift of Jesus...

→ to be in a constantly connected relationship with him to help us in life today and life forever...

God has prepared the way – right to your heart – to mine. We can choose to live with his Joy and embrace his message of : **his hope...his help...and his healing...**

He is the gift that came down and is given to you – that's the message of Christmas –

→ and you're allowed and encouraged to open it up again each day.

**“unto you a child is born – unto you a Son has been given – a savior has been born”**

**→ and this is GOOD NEWS FOR ALL PEOPLE...**

T this incredible message was whispered about in ancient times, it burst onto the scene 2000 yrs ago and today its message is still calling out to those with ears to hear...

- John the Baptist was sent to 'prepare the way'
- Jesus also sent his followers out to prepare the way for others to hear
- and the Holy Spirit still today is wanting to send you and I out to 'prepare the way' ...

→ IT IS STILL → I GOOD NEWS FOR ALL PEOPLE!

Look what Paul writes to God's people:

→ we've been enlisted into being today's messengers!

**2 Corinthians 5:19-20**

2 Corinthians 5:19-20

- God wants to use your life – your personality, your background, your brokenness, your gifting to communicate and herald the message of Christmas to those He is still calling out too.

Maybe Christmas isn't all about the gifts – those are okay..

Maybe Christmas is about showing people the greatest gift that has already been given...already available - helping them discover it again or for the 1<sup>st</sup> time

**CONCLUSION:****we started this morning in Luke 2**

When the msg of Christmas gripped the hearts of these shepherds – watch what happened...

**Luke 2:16-18**

→ as the shepherds went – they prepared the way for people to hear the message of Christmas  
-all who heard it were amazed...

the message is calling out to you this season – maybe you're here and you're realizing that you've lived you're whole life missing the true messages of Christmas –

Friends – we've been invited to spread the news – to prepare the way –

→ to embrace the reality of what the Christmas message means to your everyday life and living...

T I want us to launch into this Season – embracing and proclaiming the message of Christmas, much like those shepherds → b/c the message is still today **GOOD NEWS FOR ALL PEOPLE...**

**→ we're going to close with singing what we started with today:** Joy to the World –

**It's a song you know – may it become a song you are known by...**

Blessing:

Friends:

- may the msg of Christmas grip your heart
- may it fully surround you this season and
- may you hear it's whispers everyday...in new ways...

**Final Worship Song – Joy To The World**

