



**OFFICE OF THE BISHOP**

NEW JERSEY SYNOD

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*God's work. Our hands.*

*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." (Luke 2:10-11)*

December 20, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

The angel's message to the shepherds so long ago is the same message to us today – don't be afraid, for the birth of Jesus is good news for all people!

Sometimes we forget this simple reality; this simple proclamation which changes us and those around us. Our joy gets overshadowed by fear and worry while the good news dims to become a ho-hum footnote. We want to blame outside forces for offering competing narratives or more attractive options than the same old story of Jesus' birth.

Pastor I.J. Lansing of Scranton preached a sermon in which he said parishioners had become "so absorbed in their machines that they spend their whole time on Sundays enjoying their pleasures and devoting no time to the church." He delivered his sermon in 1910 and was expressing concern that automobiles were siphoning churchgoers' time, money, and energy away from ecclesiastical pursuits, according to a New York Times report of September 13, 1910. We are not the first people to worry that the latest thing will somehow diminish the reality of the most important thing that has happened!

But the truth is, nothing can diminish the reality that in Jesus, God has chosen to come to us – not a new technology, the latest political headlines, or personal hardships. The "good news of great joy" re-orientes our lives and turns us toward God and neighbor. With the birth of the Messiah, we are saved from all that distracts us from an abundant life – our selfish ambitions, our addictions, our distrust of each other, our fears, our isolation, our unwillingness to welcome the stranger, and even death.

This Christmas, hear the words of the angel spoken to **you** – "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." Take these words to heart and lean on them. Let this personal word embrace you with a healing balm that soothes your fears and worries. Receive this promise from the God of love and mercy so that great joy lives in you every day. Let that joy overflow as the angel's words become your words for this weary world.

In great joy and thanksgiving for you,

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew