

Messengers

“The Greatest Story Ever Told,” the story of the life of Jesus, began as series of 30-minute radio broadcasts in 1947. Almost 20 years later, it was made into a full-length Hollywood production, playing in movie theaters around the world. The film featured an amazing cast of actors and actresses, including John Wayne who had a very small role as the Centurion at the Cross with the greatest line in the entire film, “Truly, this man was God’s son!” Over the years, I’ve seen bits and pieces of the film on television.

Early in the greatest story, the angel Gabriel visited Mary, according to Luke. We heard the story in this morning’s Gospel for the last Sunday in Advent. We call the story the “Annunciation,” the angel “announcing” to Mary this incredible news. Tonight, we celebrate the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem where Jesus is born.

An angel of the Lord brings the message to shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem. This angel is followed by a multitude of angels, “the heavenly host” who sing the message of great glory. The shepherds overcome their amazement and they go to the place where Jesus is born. They see Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus lying in the manger. And then the shepherds become messengers; they go and tell everything they have seen and heard. Those who hear this story are “amazed.”

The angels begin the story. The shepherds continue to tell the story. Later the wise men, 3 kings will also become messengers, telling the story of the newborn King, the Messiah. But the wise men don’t tell Herod. They know Herod doesn’t want to hear this story, this message. He might kill the messengers; he certainly wants to destroy any threat to his authority.

The Christmas story comes to us from the messengers we know as Luke and Matthew. The other two evangelists, Mark and John, want to share a different message, a different story about Jesus. We will hear from John later tonight and, again, tomorrow and next Sunday.

Christmas is about the start of the greatest story ever told. We know the rest of the story. We know that we could not be celebrating Jesus’ birth without knowing about his death and resurrection. There is really only one message. This is God’s son, the babe in the manger; the rabbi, teacher – the young man on the cross; the risen Jesus back from physical death. This is God’s son.

Into this great story comes the story of our lives. How do we come to know Jesus? How is he Our Lord and Savior? How do we follow and obey him? How do we share his love with others? Are we messengers of God’s love?

What message will we share in the days, weeks ahead? We know that we can share the message more effectively with our actions than with our words. Tonight, we celebrate the start of the greatest story ever told. It’s the story of Jesus; it’s the story of the messengers of Jesus; it’s our story.