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Luke 2:[1-7]8-20

- As a driver,
 - when you see a red, eight sided sign with white letters,
 - you know you are supposed to stop your car.
- As a parent or grandparent,
 - when you see your child or grandchild's shoulders droop,-
 - you know they are having a tough time.
- As a reader,
 - when you see a small dot at the end of a string of words,
 - you know that the sentence you are reading has come to an end.
- As a teacher,
 - when you see eyes cast downward and looks of confusion,
 - you know the connection isn't being made. -
- In our world today,
 - signs are all around us.
 - Some signs are obvious and intentional, - -
 - a stop sign, -
 - a period at the end of a sentence.
 - the billboards on the side of a highway.
 - Some of signs are subtle and require interpretation, -
 - the body language of a child -
 - the lack of eye contact by a group of students - -

- the grey, heavy sky before a winter storm. - -
- We count on signs to give us warnings
 - and to provide permission.
- We count on signs to point us in the right direction -
 - and to keep us from harm. -
- We count on signs to offer us instructions
 - and to clarify situations that might otherwise be confusing.
- And at the first Christmas so long ago in Bethlehem,
 - the signs were everywhere, - -
 - pointing the world toward the good news that
 - the Savior would soon arrive, -
 - pointing the world toward the good news that
 - that the promise was being fulfilled -
 - pointing the world toward the good news that
 - God was coming to be with us -
 - in a new and powerful way. - -
 - Some of the signs were subtle -
 - and required interpretation. -
 - a sympathetic inn keeper providing a stable, -
 - a bright shining star, -
 - the knowing smile of a new mother. - -
 - Other signs were clear and obvious -
 - inviting a response - -

- An angelic pronouncement, -
- A multitude of the heavenly hosts
- in the skies, -
- excited shepherds
- leaving their fields -
- and crowding around a manger. - -
- Each of these signs by themselves -
- might have left room for uncertainty, -
- might have left room to wonder if Mary's son really was -
- the long awaited Messiah, - -
- but taken together -
- these signs point us quite clearly -
- to the good news that -
- on that quiet night -
- in that little town, -
- a Savior was born -
- born to deliver God's people
- from the power of sin and death. -

Taken together,

- these signs point us quite clearly -
- to the good news that -
- on that quiet night -
- in that little town, -

- a long awaited promise was fulfilled -

- just as God had fulfilled promises -

- to Abraham and Sarah -

- Noah -

- and David -

- in the past -

Taken together,

these signs point us quite clearly -

- to the good news that -

- on that quiet night -

- in that little town -

- a gift was given -

- that would bring -

- generosity and compassion,

- joy and hope,

- caring and peace

- to a hurting world. -

- Now many years have passed,

- since the star shown,

- and the Angel and the heavenly hosts appeared -

- and the shepherds left their fields, -

- but the signs that our Savior -

- came into the world -

- on that holy night -
- are still all around us.
- Oh, some of those signs have taken on a different shape -
- a different sound -
- than they did when Mary held Jesus in her arms, - - -
- and the multitude of heavenly hosts filled the sky, - -
- but I am convinced that
- the signs are no less powerful -
- if we,
- like Mary, Joseph and the shepherds,
- open our hearts to God's presence
- in our midst. -
- So instead of an angel appearing in the sky,
- we might hear God's generous love for the world -
- announced through the ways that this church,
- and others provide for people in need not only during the holidays,
- but throughout the year.
- Instead of a multitude of heavenly hosts,
- we might see God's compassion for the world demonstrated through the family
- who cares for their aging mother around the clock -
- and cares for her friends as well. -
- Instead of listening to Mary's song,
- we might connect to God's joyous gift through the sound of carols -

- sung on doorsteps, -
- around pianos,
- and in sanctuaries -
- celebrating and honoring this newborn king.
- Instead of looking to the skies for a sign of a promised future,
- we might discover hope through the friends and loved ones -
- who surround the grieving widow -
- and through the knowing smile that creeps across her facing
- thanks to her confidence that -
- she and her beloved will be reunited someday. -
- Instead of focusing on the caring of the innkeeper who makes room in the stable,
- we might witness caring through the nurse who
- stands by the bed -
- of one who is struggling and -
- gently wiping their brow -
- with a cool cloth.
- And while I know, -
- it would have been kind of cool -
- to have shared in the signs and wonders -
- that Mary, Joseph and the shepherds experienced -
- in and around Bethlehem that night,
- the good news for you and for me is that
- thanks to the events of that first Christmas -

- thanks to the love God for God's people,
- thanks to the presence of Jesus in the world,
- thanks to the moving and blowing of the Holy Spirit, -
- we can see, share and experience
- the signs of the Savior's mission
- to love and bless the world -
- all around us -
- not merely on one night,
- but each and every day
- through the hearts and hands and voices of God's people -
- who have been transformed by the
- generosity and compassion,
- joy and hope,
- caring and peace
- that Jesus brought into the world
- on a silent,
- holy night in Bethlehem.