Look in the manger. What do you see there beyond the wood, beyond the straw? There is where we see comfort - the comfort only God can give.

Look in the manger. What do you see there beyond the wood, beyond the straw? There is where we see joy - the joy only God can give.

Look in the manger. What do you see there beyond the wood, beyond the straw? There is where we see the comfort and joy only God can give - the comfort and joy proclaimed that first Christmas Eve from the mouth of an angel to lowly and lonely shepherds fearing for their very lives.

Imagine you are one of those shepherds. You are lying on your back, keeping one eye open for predators while the other eye catches a wink or two of restless sleep. The dark sky is pierced with the pinholes of a million tiny stars. Every now and then there is a noise that startles you awake. The hard ground is littered with stones that poke your back as you try to rest. Comfort and joy are not really part of the picture.

Suddenly there is light like you have never seen and a sound like you have never heard. Here is a heavenly being, an angel, coming out of the once dark sky and filling it with beams of glory. You thought a wolf was scary. This speaking angel from another realm makes all other fear pale in comparison.

But out of the angel's mouth come words like you have never heard: Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

They may seem to be only words, but they are words that deliver comfort and joy because they point to the Person who occupies that manger. He is the one that provides the comfort and joy we see beyond the wood and beyond the straw. He is the one who gave voice to the angel who spoke words of comfort and joy. He is the one who filled the sky that glorious night with a song that brought comfort and joy to a world filled with the discomfort of sin and the sorrow of death.

You may not be a shepherd, but I am certain you have experienced your fair share of fear and sorrow. Fear comes in many forms: worry about the future or finances; dread of demons or death; panic that stems from guilt or fear of the grave. In a sinful world, fear is all around. So is sorrow, which comes in its own many forms: the faithless life of a son or daughter, the diagnosis that you did not expect, the death of a father or mother, spouse or child.

Our own sin causes the things that make life uncomfortable. It takes the joy out of our hearts and souls. It creates strained and broken relationships with family and friends, and especially with God. It takes away the perfect kind of life God originally intended for us.

But follow the shepherds and look in the manger. What do you see there beyond the wood, beyond the straw? There is where we see the comfort and joy only God can give. There is where we see comfort and joy in the form of a Baby lying in a manger. There is where we see comfort and joy personified. There is where we see Jesus.

Listen to the words of the angel as you look into the manger: Do not be afraid. Are you worried about the future or finances? This Child is born to know your future and walk there with you. He is born to pay the debt of all your sin with his holy and precious blood. Do you
dread demons or death? This child is born to overcome all the assaults of the devil through the weapon of his Word. He is born to die on the cross the damning death you deserved. Do you feel the panic that stems from guilt or fear of the grave? Do not be afraid. This child is born to wipe away your guilt and to conquer the grave through his own suffering, death and resurrection for you.

Listen to the words of the angel as you look into the manger: **I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people.** Does the faithless life of a son or daughter cause you sorrow? This child is born to bring faith to the faithless and to answer the prayers of his people. Does the diagnosis that you did not expect cause you sorrow? This child is born to bring health and healing of body, soul and spirit. Does the death of a father or mother, spouse or child cause you to sorrow? This child is born to go all the way through death and the grave to provide the certain hope of eternal life for all those who believe in him.

Listen to the words of the angel as you look into the manger: **Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord.** Love was born that night to cast out all fear and bring eternal comfort. Love was born that night to pierce through all the darkness of our lives, bringing the heavenly light of joy that will never end.

Look in the manger. What do you see there beyond the wood, beyond the straw? There is where we see the comfort and joy only God can give - the comfort and joy proclaimed that first Christmas Eve from the mouth of an angel to lowly and lonely shepherds fearing for their very lives. There is comfort and joy in the manger, and it is the heavenly Father’s perfect gift to you. Look in the manger. There is comfort and joy for you. Look in the manger. There is Jesus for you. Amen.

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