

# “They Were Astonished!”

A Christmas Eve 2021 Meditation for Three Voices  
from the Pulpit of  
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign  
The Family Service, 4:00

Matt Matthews

Matt: The birth of Jesus took place a long time ago.

Rachel: And we love celebrating Jesus’ birthday every year at Christmas. A lot of people were curious and excited about his birth—and they still are. People are astonished. (“Astonished” is a big word that means happy and surprised and amazed.)

Judy: The angel Gabriel came to Zechariah and said his wife Elizabeth would have a baby, and that baby, named John, would get people ready for Jesus. Zechariah and Elizabeth said:

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

R: Later, the angel Gabriel came to Mary. He told Mary that she would be Jesus’ mom. Mary was excited and happy and confused. Gabriel helped Mary understand. God’s Holy Spirit was an amazing thing and Mary would make a great mother. Mary went to visit her older relative Elizabeth, and Mary and Elizabeth were happy together. Mary was so happy, she sang a song praising God.

Mary said,

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

M: Joseph and Mary were engaged, and when he found out Mary was going to have a baby, he was confused. An angel came to Joseph in a dream and said, “Don’t be confused. Get married. And when Mary has her baby, name him “JESUS!” Joseph did what the angel said.

Joseph said,

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

J: Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to have their baby. (We won't mention Emperor Augustus, or Quirinius, or the registration. Nor will we mention the donkey that carried Mary and Joseph, or the other travelers, or what it felt like to travel all that way.) But we will mention the housing shortage: None of the hotels had room for Mary and Joseph, so they went to a barn where the animals were, and Jesus was born there. And if the animals could talk, they would have said,

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

M: Mary laid Jesus in a manger. A manger is a box filled with hay. That's what the animals in the stable used for their table, the manger. The straw was soft and Mary wrapped Jesus up in warm clothes and she pondered, and pondered, and pondered, saying over and over again:

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

R: Angels were so excited about Jesus' birth they had to tell somebody—and whom did they tell? Not Emperor Augustus. Not Quirinius. Not even Mary's cousins or Joseph's barber. The angels flew out into the night and they told a bunch of shepherds who were out in the fields taking care of their sheep. The angels said,

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

J: And the Shepherds went to Bethlehem, and when they saw baby Jesus, they were excited. He was the Messiah, and this was good news; but he was also just a little baby. They were astonished. The shepherds said to each other:

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

R: The Shepherds left the manger and started telling the whole wide world about Jesus. They said:

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

M: Wise men (or “magi”) came from the east, following a big star that led them to Bethlehem. They brought presents, special gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They were astonished, too.

God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

R: There’s more to the story than just shepherds and angels, and Mary and Joseph, and wisemen and baby Jesus.

J: Right, there’s John the Baptist. And there’s that story about Zechariah that we didn’t even talk about, which is a great story.

M: And don’t forget Herod.

R: And there’s lots of singing. In Luke’s gospel Zechariah sings, Mary sings, angels sing, and Simeon sings.

M/J: Who’s Simeon?

R: He’s part of the story. We can’t tell the whole thing tonight, but the point is, there was lots and lots of singing.

J: Because everyone was so glad.

R: Because everyone was so glad.

M: And...because... God is good/**All the time.**  
All the time/**God is good.**

Help me to sing our song:

(with motions)

Away in a manger/

No crib for a bed/

The little LORD Jesus/

Lay down his sweet head/

The stars in the sky/

Look down where he lay/

The little LORD Jesus/

Asleep on the hay.