The fire alarm went off on Sunday morning this past fall and tested our safety team preparedness. Actually, it rather looked like F-Troop attempting to exit the building. I gave very express instructions how to exit the Covenant Center. I noticed that roughly 90% of the folks headed my advice but the other 10% headed for the other doors. I noticed the women in the kitchen refused to budge because they were cooking food for the event in the Commons Area. I noticed a group of men standing around the fire alarm self-appointedly trying to turn it off. I had to send Pastor Scott back into the kitchen to herd the women from potential danger. The Wise Men and Magi gathered at the fire alarm would not budge because they were official and above-the-law. And I had to stand in the doorway of the Commons Area to make sure people wouldn’t return back into the potentially burning church prior to the arrival of the fire department. By contrast, the children in the Sunday School were all lined up in neat rows exactly where they were supposed to be and had exited promptly. Ah, a little child shall lead them... Now I knew one piece of information that others perhaps did not possess. I knew that our wonderful building superintendent, Ralph Farabee, had been in early that morning because there was a gas leak in the kitchen. So to my mind this was potentially VERY serious and an errant hotplate in the kitchen could have set off Armageddon on Sunday morning. But everyone else had an excuse why the fire drill didn’t apply to them. “I know its not real; Its just a fire drill” See, maybe not. “I’m on the committee, I don’t have to exit like everyone else.” See, maybe you do. “The hors d-ouvres will burn if I don’t stand here and watch them.” I’m sorry I don’t have time to debate this with you and convince you of why it is important to follow the fire alarm protocols. If you don’t listen, maybe you will burn. Many people convinced themselves they didn’t have to listen to instruction. They could be disobedient. But what if it really was a gas leak and they were in mortal danger? Why do we think we don’t need to follow orders, listen to what the Word of God says, harken to the voice of the Lord, do what the angel says, be obedient?

I’ve studied the birth stories of Jesus lo these many years and I have never seen before how much obedience surrounds the manger at Christmas. Mary listens to what the angel says and bears a son and calls His name Jesus. Joseph harkens to what is revealed to him and becomes the earthly Father of the Son of God. They travel to Bethlehem when they could have argued they shouldn’t travel because Mary was great with child. The shepherds leave their sheep, a thing that shepherds never do, and make haste to go over to Bethlehem to see this thing which the Lord God has made known to them. In obedience, the wise men follow a star to find the Christ Child and then return home another way to protect Him from the murderous Herod. The Holy Family takes flight into Egypt, “Why ever would you send us to Egypt, Lord?”, in order to save the Christ Child from Herod’s murderous plot to eliminate his competition. Obedience, obedience, obedience surrounds the manger in Bethlehem that first Christmas. Maybe it takes obedience, something that we’re not very good at as human beings, to get to Bethlehem? Maybe we need to listen to what God says? Maybe we need to do what God says? Maybe we need to harken and heed His Word? Maybe we need to stop dialogueing and just stop and listen? Maybe we need to give up our rights to debate and disagree and have our own opinions and endlessly promote our own perspectives and just give up and listen to what God says?

And then there was the greatest act of obedience ever. Christ was perfectly obedient to the plan of God. God had a plan for the salvation of the earth and it was very specific and very precise and very exact. There is what Jesus has done for us at Christmas. He’s not born in a palace; He’s born in a manger. He’s not born the son of earthly kings; He’s born Mary and Joseph’s child. He’s not surrounded
by a royal court; He’s surrounded by shepherds. As the New Testament Book of Philippians notes: “Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient…” (Philippians 2: 6-8) He humbled Himself in Bethlehem. He took on human form and humbled Himself in a manger. He was OBEDIENT. He did according to God’s plan, God’s will, God’s way, God’s timing, God’s place. He above us all had every right to debate, discuss and disagree. But He chose to humble Himself and be born in a manger in Bethlehem in obedience to a Sovereign Plan for the salvation of the world. When in obedience to God we actually come to the manger at Christmas and we look in to see what is held there what we see is OBEDIENCE wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

“O, I like to celebrate Christmas at home with a sumptuous meal, the Christmas Tree aglow, and eggnog, watching television, surrounded by my family; that’s Christmas to me.” No. We celebrate Christmas the way the Bible tells us. We make haste to go over to Bethlehem to see this thing which the Lord has made known to us. We bring our gifts of heart and self and life to give to Him this night. We bow down and worship HIM. We go to church and we worship in obedience to what the angels say, “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2: 10) Obedience is how we get to Bethlehem. Obedience is how we experience Christmas. And it is the little Babe of Bethlehem we find there surrounded by obedience when we do...

Maybe Christmas Eve is a Fire Drill when you think about it. Coming to Jesus over and over again when the world would bid us stay away. Worshipping and holding candles and singing Carols until at last we get it right...

Some of you have come to Christmas Eve with a question bouncing around your mind and soul. You are pondering what the Lord might say to you tonight. God always speaks at Christmas. God always opens human hearts and minds and speaks into their existence in Bethlehem. So what have you brought with you tonight? What is the murmuring in your heart? The question you would pose to the Almighty? In the quiet He will speak and tell you what you must do. In His still, small voice He will speak His Word through the Word made flesh this night. He is always speaking through the manger, through the birth of His only begotten Son. And if He would nudge your heart, what would you do? And if He would speak how would you act? Would you be obedient? Ask Him in the quiet now. Silence all voices but His. You have come to the manger to ask Him the question burning in your heart. Come now, to the silence of Bethlehem and Word made flesh in Jesus... (SILENCE)

Speak, Lord. Your obedient servants are listening. Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!