

# GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY



## Luke 2:8-20

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The First Scene: The Unspectacular Life (Lu 2:8)

The Second Scene: The Angel's Proclamation (Lu 2:9-12)

The Third Scene: The Angels' Declaration (Lu 2:13-14)

Their Response and Ours (Lu 2:15-20)

*"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this [shall be] a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:10-14).*

### Introduction

Christmas is a season of many traditions from many lands. It is true that the businesses have through advertising glamorized the purchasing of gifts. They have somehow given people an obligation to buy things for others. If their motives were pure, this might not be bad. But their motives have not been pure. Christmas is the biggest buying time of the year and many a business succeeds or fails along with their Christmas sales. Their first disguise of the true meaning of Christmas came with the increasing emphasis of Santa Claus. It later developed into open dislike of Christmas in which they have virtually eliminated the true message of Christmas for their own purposes. Even Pittsburgh no longer calls this the Christmas season which still includes the word 'Christ' in it but replaced it with 'Sparkle Season.' I am glad we have this Christmas Eve together. This is where we should be with the onset of Christmas, meditating on one of the most fantastic events in history if not the greatest.

Some would say the miracles that Jesus did as the most significant thing in His life; others suggest His teaching. Yet others would place the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as the most wonderful and marvelous significant event that ever took place. But I would suggest the coming of Christ into this world, the incarnation of God, as one of the most significant things in Jesus' life and throughout time.

We forget what God did during Christmas; we have forgotten or overlooked the real meaning of Christmas. We can't say Jesus did this or that during Christmas. Modern man likes new images flashing on the screen every 3-5 seconds. But the first Christmas took place in a no-name out of the way place. I like the way the angels proclaimed what was happening to the shepherds in the nearby field to where Jesus was born of Mary. Let's turn to Luke 2:8-20 and look at Christmas from the perspective of the shepherds. We will see that Christmas is one of the clearest expression of God's purpose and love for mankind. Let's use this passage to answer three questions.

## \* **First Scene: The Unspectacular Life {Luke 2:8}**

I suppose there couldn't have been a more unusual night for the shepherds than this. Who would have expected that anyone would pay any special attention to these shepherds. Shepherds weren't important people. They were poor. They do remind us of David of the Old Testament who had become king. Bethlehem was the humble home of David. He was out on the hills, maybe the same hills as these shepherds. But it wasn't a popular place for important affairs of man to go on. Maybe in Jerusalem or even outside Jerusalem 10 miles away, but Bethlehem probably had only a thousand residents.

This small town didn't have much room for any visitors for small towns only have a few hundred homes with only a few shops. But it was symbolic that the angels made their proclamation to these people who lived out life in the hard environment. The Lord chose to reveal His great plan not to the great and mighty but to the lowly and needy. What a fitting description of Jesus' later ministry!

## \* **Second Scene: The Angel's Proclamation {Luke 2:9-12}**

Before I answer what the angels said, I must quickly say who angels are. Angels are created spiritual beings, some being good and some being evil. The good are really good; the bad are very bad. There is no "kind of good" angel. God created them all perfect, but the head angel, the greatest and most beautiful, got proud and led a rebellion thinking he was greater or able to be greater than God Himself. God judged this angel as we know Lucifer meaning light, and thus got the name Satan, the evil one, or the devil. He is real and not to be taken lightly. The other angels that rebelled with the evil one were also cast out of God's presence and named demons. There is much talk of angels today, and we need to be aware that even Satan can appear as an angel of light. But these angels were undoubtedly messengers of God. What did they say? Let's firstly notice that there were two different scenes.

In the first scene an angel of the Lord spoke and the glory of the Lord shown about the shepherds. The glory of the Lord undoubtedly was displayed in a radiant glorious light which the angel reflected. We notice this was nothing they were used to. We might be used to lights out in the countryside because of electricity and battery powered lights, but not they. Not only do we have the contrast of it being nighttime and the brightness of God's glory but also of the piercing brightness of the light. Saul of Tarsus at the point of his conversion during the daytime as he was approaching Damascus suddenly saw "a light from heaven flashed around him" (Acts 9:3).

*"And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-13)*

### **Good news of a great joy**

First of all notice the spirit of the message. It was good news of great joy. Something special was happening. It might be like a special announcement from the President. We aren't sure whether the news is going to be very good or very bad. In this case the news from God was very very good.

### **Shall be for all the people**

Notice who the joyous news is for. It shall be for all the people. Usually the effect of news is limited to those within ones own social status or society. Not here. It is not just for the Jews but even for the people around the world. Today we are here meditating on the meaning of Christmas because this news was for "all the people."

## *Born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*

We must notice that before baby Jesus said anything, much was said about Him. Before Jesus did anything, much was done regarding Him. The announcement is that He was to be our savior. He of course was Lord and always would be Christ the Lord. The whole creation was made through Jesus Christ. But He was not Savior until He actually came and became a man so He could identify with us, and die for us. The first Adam brought us into sin; the second Adam Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection brought us into reconciliation with God out of the power of sin and death. Jesus was truly "born to die." We all are born in sin and die because of our sin. Only Jesus came to die. He was righteous and didn't have to die. When He took our penalty of death upon His body, He then died on the cross taking our penalty and God's wrath upon Himself. "Born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

### **This will be a sign**

The angels delivered a sign signifying the accuracy of their message. They were assuring them of long term expectancies with short term prophecies. I know some of us would with a wonderful introduction like that expect to hear of some splendid and glorious sign signifying what the angels were saying was true. But the sign is simple, at least outwardly. A baby wrapped in rags laying in a manger. The sign is surprising on two accounts; I suppose this is the image that no one would expect.

- 1) Why would an important baby be born in such a place?
- 2) Why would any baby be born in such a place?

For if one owned a stable where the animals could be kept, then they certainly would have a home. The baby would be in the home and not in the stable. The rich would stay in a stable. What guests would stay in a stable unless some dire emergency? Nor would the poor have access to a stable. The word was simple but profound and today still touches the heart of His people today.

Let me explain how it is that Jesus was born in a stable. During the time of Mary's delivery date, there suddenly was an edict that everyone in the Roman empire had to register in their hometown and pay taxes. No one was excepted; they had to travel the long trip without trains, buses and cars. So Joseph and Mary along with everyone else set out to their hometown. Their town was Bethlehem, the town of their ancestors. When they got there, there was no room, but they finally managed to find a place of protection in this stable. Thus Christ was born in a stable and placed in rags in a manger, a trough where animals eat from. In verses 15-16, we see that the shepherds ran to Bethlehem and discovered the Child to be found just as the angel had spoken.

There were other signs too. Far too many regarding His birth to go into in any detail, but let me share 5 other signs briefly. Both the books of Matthew and Luke record the birth of Jesus. The italics in some Bible versions indicate that they were quotes taken from the Old Testament; most of them being fulfillment of prophecies from the Old Testament, the most recent about 400-500 years old.

### **1) Born of a Virgin (Mat 1:23; Is 7:14)**

*"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*

### **2) Born in Bethlehem(Mat 2:6; Micah 5:2)**

*"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."*

### 3) Born from Lineage of Jesse and David (Mat 1:5; Is 11:1)

*"Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.*

*And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;*

*But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist."*

### 4) Gifts Given at His Birth (Mat 2:11; Is 60:6)

*"A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD.*

### 5) The Timing of His Birth (Mat 1:23; Genesis 49:10; Malachi 3:1)

*Rule of Judah (Gen 49:10)*

*"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*

*Presence of Temple (Mal 3:1)*

*"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.*

### A Summary

We are talking about prophecies just regarding the birth of Jesus Christ. These are things written hundreds of years before His birth to confirm that we should believe and follow Him. Jesus was born in an isolated spot but God was intent in bringing the message to all of us throughout the world.

### \* Third Scene: The Angels' Declaration {Luke 2:13-14}

This scene differed radically from the former and even more from the first. During the first, the shepherds were minding their own business working a late shift. Dark and quiet; lonely and hard. The second was where one angel appeared telling them what was happening. Then all of a sudden in this scene a multitude of the heavenly host appeared praising God.

Something great was happening. Something special was occurring. Now either these shepherds were hallucinating or something outside their normal sphere of life was revealing itself. They were not hallucinating. People don't hallucinate together unless they take drugs together. Even then they won't hallucinate the same thing. Besides, didn't they have a sign to check out?! Sure they did. It is often said in American that if you don't know if you are dreaming, just pinch yourself. Furthermore, we find in verse 15 that they were not doubtful about what they had seen even if it was surprising. They didn't say, "Let's go see if it had happened." They said, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made know to us." No room for doubt there.

How many angels were there? We don't know. A multitude is at least many thousands. If there were this many at His birth, then no doubt it would had been at least as many that he said

that He could summon to deliver from dying. Jesus said in Mat 26.53, “Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels.” “A legion, a body of soldiers whose number differed at different times, and in the time of Augustus seems to have consisted of 6826 men (i.e. 6100 foot soldiers, and 726 horsemen).”<sup>1</sup> This means 6826 times 12 as a minimum at His summoning which totals to 81,912 angels. We can expect at least this number at His birth. This reminds us that because we cannot angels does not mean we should forget their presence. The Lord helps us out through angels.

What did these angels say? They declared God’s praise. They were echoing forth the greatness of God. The angels were beholding what made the incarnation so wonderfully special: God became man. If God would display such effort and concern for mankind, mankind was surely to be blessed. God’s glory was being shown through Jesus the infant even before He could walk or talk. This peace of God would indeed touch mankind. And today, we find that man and the world is changed through Jesus Christ. Where men and nations respect the Lord and follow Him, we see changed men and nations. Where we see men forget His rule and love, then we see those same men and nations decay.

### Summary

This was not a private revelation to make them feel better about themselves. They were being summoned to join the angels in witnessing and proclaiming this birth to all around. God’s purpose has always been to proclaim God’s truth to others; man’s problem is always to hold God’s truth in for themselves. Let’s join the angels in adoring this great and marvelous God!

## \* Their Response and Ours {Luke 2:15–20}

The shepherds were changed men. After seeing the sign just as the angel had said, they started declaring this to everyone around. The message is very clear:

### • We need a Savior

A Savior came because we needed one. Why else would He have come? He was Lord. He was Lord when He came except He restrained His glory so He could live among men. The only thing he wanted to do was to save us from sin and isolation from our great Creator God. He wants us to share with Him the glories of what He has planned.

### • He cared so He became the Savior

You and I were born with sin. We would die. Will we not let the One who was born to die to indeed become our Savior. Will we not begin to recognize that the Ruler of this world is being patient not willing that any should perish. Believe in Jesus now and the light of his glory will shine in your life. And He will rule through your life.

<sup>1</sup> Online Bible reference on ‘legion’ from Matthew 26:53.

### Special reference on Luke 2:14

There is internal and external evidence that the translation “peace with whom he is pleased” is more accurate than the “peace and good will to men.”

“The meaning of the saying. The Messianic acclamation of the angels’ song is not a wish (ειη) but proclamation of the divine event (εστιν). God is glorified in the sending of Christ. Doesn’t mean that peace comes to those who are of good will, implying legalism. “Hence this rendering has often been taken to mean that the act of salvation is only for those who open themselves to it and willingly accept the grace of God. ... On the other hand, ευδοκια never bears this meaning in Sir., the LXX or the Rabbis. For this reason, we can hardly expect it here.”

Another possibility is that it refers to those who give pleasure to God. ... As used of men (OT, Sir.), ευδοκια does not mean “good” will, but volition. But this would give an even more serious contradiction to the thought of grace. ... We have thus to understand by ευδοκια the unfathomably gracious and sovereign good-pleasure of God in the sense of His decree as a decree of free grace an favour.” (TDNT, Vol II., pp. 747-750).

