

Luke 2:8-14 Christmas Grace 12/24/17

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

*¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!
(Pastor prays)*

Many of you are familiar with the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. It's a mythical retelling of Christ and His beautiful power to bring life. Written by C.S. Lewis, it's the story that captivates the imagination while feeding the soul. In the story, Christ is depicted as the lion Aslan and, wherever he goes, life abounds. He rules in a place called Narnia. It is said in Narnia without Aslan, it's always winter but never Christmas. Never Christmas – think of it. What would this cursed world be like if it were never Christmas? If it were always winter and never Christmas? If there were never any real hope or never any strong forgiveness? If there were no love given and no joy received? What if we didn't have the message of Christmas? What if God never rescued sinners? What if all we ever really knew was all this world has to offer with its dirty brokenness?

Today is the eve of salvation. Today is about God's children doing our part to read, hear, understand and celebrate the message of Christmas: That God the Son, who was in the form of God but did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, made Himself nothing. He took the form of a man, servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form.

That's the story of Luke Chapter 2: the birth of Jesus and all around that story are beautiful messages of grace, messages that give us hope in sorrow, strength in difficulty and joy in the future. We find ourselves in Luke's Gospel. I love Luke's Gospel because

it's a Gospel to the poor and lowly. In this Gospel, the angels don't appear in a temple high and holy. They show up at a farm – in a field. It's God letting us know there is a new world coming, a new world where the last is first and the weak are made strong, a world where Christ is Lord. This is Grace.

There is No Grace Like Christmas Grace

Christmas Grace Means Hope

Let me show you what I mean. You'll see it in verse 8. That's where the action starts. *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.* The key word here is "shepherds." Shepherds? Are you kidding me? Anybody but shepherds! Why not priests or scribes or Pharisees? Even the Sadducees would've been better than shepherds! Anybody but shepherds. By this time in history, they were socially outcast, ceremonially unclean and morally suspect. They were not – by anyone's definition – solid citizens. And of all the millions of people on the planet at that time, of all the religious people in Israel, God chose the outcast, the unclean and the reprobate – bottom dwellers. He did that for a reason. It's grace. There's a principle in there somewhere.

When thinking of the shepherds, it's good to remember what Jesus said in James 2:5: *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?* Think about how God works in grace.

Think about some of the people God used in the Bible. Moses was farming for his father-in-law. Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press. Elijah was plowing. David was a shepherd. I point those out because they show us it's God's grace, no merit of your own. If you are a Christian, you are saved by God's grace, faith in Christ in spite of your sin. Think about the story. Shepherds were outcasts in Israel. Their work not only made them ceremonially unclean, it kept them away from worship for weeks on end. And here's the message in the text, the message of grace. God doesn't call the perfect, the upright and the religious. God calls sinners, adulterers, and liars. He calls atheists and unbelievers. He calls homosexuals. God calls women who have had abortions and the men who drove them to it. God calls hypocrites and the materialistic. He calls sinners. That's who He comes to. Listen to what it says in 1 Corinthians 1:28-29. *God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*

Listen, God came to shepherds, and the message of Christmas is clear. God has come to you this morning with all of your issues and hang-ups. With your sin and your pride and He offers you life. A life in Christ. Born of a virgin. A perfect life. Death on a cross. It's grace. Christmas Grace means hope. A hope in Christ. Let me show you something else.

Christmas Grace Means Joy

When I say *joy*, I mean a deep and abiding joy. A foundational joy. A sustaining joy. A forgiving, healing kind of joy. A joy that is found in the Gospel. In verse 9 of the text, the shepherds were minding their own business. Watching their flocks by night. Notice what verse 9 tells us. *And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.* Filled with great fear. I love how the King James Version of the Bible says it. *They were sore afraid.* The Greek literally says, “they feared a great fear.” It scared them to death and then in verse 10, the angel starts giving them the Gospel. Don't let it get lost. They gave Good News of Great Joy that will be for All people, regardless of race or stature or past or background.

This good news is important to put into perspective. Let's look back up a moment. The Bible is about a Holy God who created man and woman in His image. But that image of God has been disfigured by sin – that means you. You have sinned and that sin, if left unchecked, will cause you to live life on Earth in fear, insecurity, with hang-ups and addictions and nothing to hold on to, nothing to help or save you. And that's really bad news.

But this story is about Good News. Grace. This story is about Jesus, the second person of the trinity, God the Son, taking on flesh and doing what you and I cannot do: live perfectly and die in the place of sinners as a substitute, taking God's punishment and giving us forgiveness.

Now to get the full weight of this news, you need to read verses 11-14 together and get a feel for the sequence of events. *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* ¹² *And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”* ¹³ *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*

Now go back and look at the titles. Savior, Christ, Lord. Last week it was “Wonderful Counselor” who is the Savior... “Mighty God” who is Christ... “Everlasting Father” who is the Lord...and “Prince of Peace” who is the baby in the manger.

And when this news was announced, watch what happened in verse 13. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.* A multitude. Not 50 or 150 or 1,500 or even 15,000...But heavenly hosts beyond the ability to count. Possibly every one of God’s angels was there because this was the most amazing thing that had ever happened.

John Milton wrote,

The Stars with deep amaze
Stand fix'd in steadfast gaze,

The helmed Cherubim
And sworded Seraphim

Here is an army of angels announcing peace. The bishop J.C. Ryle had theories on why the angels rejoiced so. The way of pardon and peace with God was about to be open to all mankind. The head of Satan was about to be bruised. Liberty was about to be proclaimed. The blind were about to receive sight. The captives were about to be set free. The truth was about to be proclaimed that God could be just and also be the justifier. The first stone of God’s kingdom fortress was about to be set and it would be the chief cornerstone. And these were good tidings of great joy.

And look at their song in verse 14. *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”* Glory goes up to God and peace comes down to men. And that peace, that grace, is found only in Christ. And that verse 14 song, that’s what you do when you come to Christ. Giving glory to God means your life honors Him. That peace comes from you being reconciled to God through the cross. There is no grace like Christmas grace through Christ alone.

(Pastor prays)