

The Gospel of Christmas
December 19, 2021
Luke 2:8-14
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***8****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)*

Luke chapter 2 is a classic, pervasive and well-known Christmas story. Even Charlie Brown knows that story. This has a certain patina and softness that makes it accessible and acceptable for a while anyway. But if you pull off the veneer and look at it closely, it's astounding! Luke’s detail is scary as he presupposes a sovereign God controlling the events of history.

Verses 1-7 are prompted by a Roman Caesar who takes a worldwide census that will lead to Joseph and Mary leaving Nazareth and going to Bethlehem so that Jesus would be from Nazareth and born in Bethlehem in the fullness of time, thus fulfilling all the scriptures. So at the very heart and beginning of the Christmas story you have God working through the events of history to bring about his will to redeem people in Christ. God not only has a plan for your life, it is a good plan. It is etched out in the granite of His good grace. After Luke lays the foundation of the incarnation in verses 1-7, God becoming man, he turns our attention to the very first gospel proclamation in verses 8-14. And today that's where we are going to see the Christmas gospel as experienced by the shepherds. And therein is a picture of joy. Joy. Something that is missing from far too many believers. Brothers and sisters, that must not be so. A joyless faith in Jesus is a contradiction in terms. We must keep pressing on this gospel until we can join the people that Peter wrote to in 1 Peter 1:8. *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.* In six days, Christmas will be here but let’s keep our focus until then.

**Christmas is About the Power of Gospel Joy**

It is woven throughout this passage. I hope when you walk out of here today you do so with a clear picture and path to joy in Christ. Let's see what this story tells us about the gospel of Jesus and the joy found there.

**The Gospel makes outsiders into insiders**

Let's pick up the story in verse 8 as Luke changes the scene from the baby Jesus laid in a manger to the shepherds. ***8****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.*

*S*hepherds. Anybody but shepherds! Scribes or Pharisees or Sadducees or priests, fishermen, even the tax collectors would have been better than the shepherds. At least they didn't smell bad. Shepherds were outcast in high society and not trusted in court. They were too foul to really worship and besides that they smell like farm animals. And yet in verse 9 we see the Angel of the Lord appeared and the glory of the Lord shone. And the gospel will first be shared with shepherds. Look, here's the cure for classism or racism or sexism. It's the Gospel. It's a reminder that we were all outsiders and the only way any of us become insiders was through the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross.

We see it in Ephesians 2: 12-14. ***12****remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.****13****But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.****14****For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.* One new man. And if the Gospel is enough to save shepherds, it's enough to save you! It's enough to turn outsiders into insiders. It's what the Gospel does. It's what the church should do. Veteran Christians and churchgoers, how are you making sure to help those who feel like outsiders *insiders*? There has to be effort and fellowship. It's interacting with D-groups and in your home. It's making an investment in people. To those of you who don't feel connected, who have you told? What have you done? Do you call or incite a conversation? Are you on mission or in service? The Gospel makes outsiders into insiders.

**The Gospel turns fear into joy**

Let's go back to the narrative and read verses 8-10. ***8****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.* The shepherds are filled with great fear. The Greek translation says “mega fear.” The King James version says they were “sore afraid”!

You would be too. If an angel appears out of nowhere in the dark and is blazing like 10,000 suns, you would have great fear. And the very first thing the angel says is “fear not, we bring great news, there will be great joy for all people.” Good news. That's where we get the word “gospel.” This term, “good news,” is one of Luke's favorite terms. He uses it more than any other of the New Testament writers. The reason this good news is of great joy is because our God is a saving, redeeming, loving God. That's what He does. That's His nature.

Part of our reading plan for this month took us into Jonah where he flees from the Lord. A great fish swallows him and takes him to Nineveh where he finally preaches. God was going to destroy Nineveh but when He relented, Jonah was mad because God didn't strike them. He even claims that's why he ran from God. Jonah says, “I know that you are a gracious God, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.” That's the gospel of grace. It is applied to everything we dread. It's applied to our sin, hurt, sexual desires. It's applied to homosexuality, lust, coldness and judgment. It's applied to pride and selfishness. The Gospel comes up against every bit of that and says “this is the good news.” It brings great joy to all people.

Why aren’t you experiencing great joy? Do you have unclaimed forgiveness? Do you have unconfessed sin? Do you have unrecognized blessings or undealt with bitterness? The Gospel makes outsiders into insiders. The Gospel turns fear into joy.

**The Gospel is to be announced**

I don't remember who said it, John Piper, MacArthur, Knox or Owen. But this is basically a birth announcement: unto you, for you, this child is born for you. The incarnation leads to the fulfillment; the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and session (seated), and finally consummation. “At the appointed time” means *this* day. “At the appointed place” is the city of David. Here is the pattern for the Gospel. And it’s part of the motivation for preaching, to stand and herald the hope of the Gospel.

The Gospel is that God is holy. Man, because of sin, is separated from God in such a way that there is nothing we can do; there is no trail you can go down to get to God. And God, in His love, has given us Christ. Here is the Gospel. Unto YOU the child is born. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And Paul said, “I am the very worst.” And the way He saved sinners was to go to the cross as the substitute. He took the wrath of God. Here is the good news of great joy. The wrath of God has been turned upon Jesus, all the punishment for every sin you have ever committed has been put on Jesus. And then, He gives you His righteousness. And the way you appropriate that is to believe. Turn from your sin and believe.

Have you received? Have you announced? In our missions of disaster relief do we herald the Gospel? At the food pantry do we herald? At the clothes closet, One Heart Ecuador, in Mozambique or to the fishermen in Bulgaria, do we herald?

**The Gospel is to be centered on Christ**

Read the titles given to Jesus and soak it in. Luke does something really special for us here. He records what the angel says and it's the only time in the Bible we see all the titles brought together. Look at the words, “a savior, Christ, the Lord.” “Savior” means “the deliverer.” He has come to rescue His people from the wrath To calm. Period. That’s His purpose and it began with teaching and leading and being example, but first He is savior.

Christ is the Messiah, the anointed one. Since Genesis 3 when God promised there is one coming to crush Satan. As Christ He operates in a threefold office of prophet, priest and king. As a prophet, the writer of Hebrews tells us that in these last days God has spoken to us through Christ His son. As the prophet He is the Word.

Hebrews 3 tells us as the priest that He is the great high priest.

1 Timothy 2:5 says,*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* He is priest and mediator.

He is the king. Gabriel told Mary in Luke 1:33, *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”* Verse 11 says He is a savior who is Christ.

As the Lord He is sovereign. To say that He is Lord is to say that He is God. The most fundamental and basic confession of Christianity is, Jesus Christ is Lord! Are you willing to see and say that? Are you willing to claim and live that and to turn from your sin and turn to the cross and resurrection and say Jesus Christ is Lord!?

The Gospel makes outsiders into insiders. The Gospel turns fear into joy. The Gospel is an announcement. The Gospel is centered on Christ.

**The Gospel results in glory to God**

Go back to the scene. Let me read it with comment in verses 11 through 14. ***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!”* Why did the multitude of angels break out? Because they realized…

The spiritual darkness since the fall is being rolled away. The way to pardon in peace with God was about to be thrown open. The head of Satan was about to be crushed. The captives are about to be set free. Those dead and sin are about to be made alive. Liberty is going to be preached to prisoners. The eyes of the blind are about to be opened. The truth that God could be just and also justify the ungodly was about to be shown. Salvation will no longer be seen as through a glass dimly but now face to face. The first stone of God Kingdom is about to be laid and it's the chief cornerstone. His name is Jesus and He will save you, too. And if that isn't good news, then there never has been good news! And for that we can join the angels and say, “Glory to God in the highest!” There is joy in life because Jesus has come.

*(Pastor prays)*