

*The Christmas Choir*  
Luke 2:8-20  
Reading: Luke 2:1-7

December 23, 2018 (Christmas service)  
Bethany Baptist Church

*...pray...*

**Luke, ch.2:** *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

This is one of the *best know scenes* in the Christmas Story!

The *Angel of the Lord* appears at night to a band of *Bethlehem shepherds*. The men are “*sore afraid*” (*filled w/ great fear*) but the angel is *comforting*: *good news...great joy!*

That *encounter* has been the *stuff of story & song* for **20** centuries. Have you ever considered how many *hymns* were inspired by angel’s greeting?

*Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come!*

*The First Noel*

*It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*

*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*

*Angels from the Realms of Glory;*

*Angels We Have Heard on High*

*Go Tell it on the Mountain!* - *While shepherds kept their watching, o’er silent flocks by night, behold thru-out the heavens there shone a holy light. The shepherds feared & trembled, when lo! above the earth rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior’s birth.*

Which takes us back to Luke 2... (you might **turn there** in your **NT**)

Because, of course, the *best* of all of these hymns was that *first* worship song, sung by a *Celestial choir*:

**V.13** – *And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”*

Christmas is *upon* us! Let’s not let it *blow past us* w/o considering how *wonderful & life changing* Christmas should be:

**Five reasons the angels’ song is such good news! Their Christmas carol:**

1. **Fulfills promises.**
2. **Saves sinners.**
3. **Changes lives.**
4. **Glorifies God.**
5. **Invites everyone.**

**The angel's song is good news because it reminds us that *God keeps His promises.***

1. When you read the Christmas accounts in *Luke & Matthew*, one thing that should *catch* your attention are all the *careful* references to the **OT!** Some are *subtle* but many are in *bold print!*
  - a. You can see **OT history** in the important *genealogy* that introduces Matt 1 (establish Jesus' ties to *David* & to *Abraham*).
  - b. You can find **OT prophecy** in the words of the angel to the priest *Zacharias*, to the virgin *Mary*, & to the carpenter *Joseph*.
  - c. *Mary's Magnificat* & *Zacharias' Prophecy* (both Lk 1) are *saturated w/OT promises.*
  - d. The Gospel writers' very deliberate intent was to *convince* you that everything about the *birth* of Jesus *fulfilled* centuries of God's promises that He would send Israel, & the nations, a *Savior*.
    - i. **All** of those promises have/will be *kept* in the Baby in Bethlehem!
  
2. Did you hear me say: "**centuries of God's promises**"...? God's *promises* to send humankind a *Savior* go all the way back to the *Garden* and stretch across every *section* & *period* of your Bible!
  - a. In **Gen 3** – God warned the woman about the *serpent's seed* but then promised to *crush the tempter* through the *woman's seed*: Jesus!
  - b. In **Gen 12** (15, 17, 22, etc.) – God promised childless Abraham a *Seed that would bless the nations.*
  - c. **OT History (2 Sam 7)** records God's covenant w/David to *establish David's throne, forever!*
  - d. The **Psalms** are filled w/*prophecies* & *promises* pointing forward to the *suffering*, the *victory*, the *rule*, the *priesthood* & the *deity* of God's Anointed.

- e. The **OT Prophetic** books, of course, are *permeated* w/God's promises to *send His Son*, which the *Gospels* take great care to *connect* to our *Christmas account* (e.g.):
- i. The Child would be born to a *virgin* (Isa 7).
  - ii. He would be born in *Bethlehem* (Mic 5).
  - iii. He would be heralded by a *voice crying in the wilderness* (Isa 40).
  - iv. He would be *Almighty God* (Isa 9) yet *suffering servant* (Is 53).
  - v. And Bethlehem's Baby would be *pierced through for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities*.
- f. Now, in Lk 2, the angel *ties all* of that together as He *announces* (11) *today (!) in the City of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ (Messiah) the Lord*.
3. If you **FF** a few verses to the end of the Shepherd story, you find this important conclusion in **v.20 (read)** – ?did you *catch* the very end: “*just as had been told them.*”
- a. The shepherds found that everything in Bethlehem was *just as advertised* back on that hillside...! Which means that it is *just as advertised*, across the *centuries* and all over your *Bible*!
  - b. The *encouragement* for you this morning is that God is *faithful*.
  - c. He will be *faithful* to the rest of the **big promises** in the Bible (*prophecies* yet to unfold).
  - d. And God will be faithful to the “*personal*” promises He makes to you in His Word: *for peace, for wisdom, for grace, for forgiveness, for eternal life ...* all through **faith** in the Child, *Immanuel: God with us*.

**Friends, Christmas proves that God is faithful to His promises &to His people!**

**Here is the *best news possible* this Christmas: *God saves sinners so that sinners can have peace w/ God!***

1. “*God saves sinners*” is the *heart* of the angels’ anthem – it’s the *Hallelujah Chorus* of their *Gospel Song*. Christmas is all about “*God saves sinners!*”  
**Read vv.11-14.**
2. “*Savior*” is anchored in the idea of *delivering* or *rescuing*. In fact, that’s exactly what the Baby’s name means: “*Jesus*” → “*Jehovah saves*” and the angel had ordered Joseph (Matt 1) “*You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.*”
3. Every *shepherd* on that hillside, every *character* in the Christmas Story (from *Mary* to the *magi*), every man & woman & boy & girl in this place today, *needs the Savior*. Beloved, **you** need a *Savior* from the *penalty*, the *power*, & the *presence* of your sin. **Only Jesus offers that!**
  - a. Jesus came to *redeem* – His ransom buys us out of the *slave market of sin*.
  - b. Jesus came to *rescue* – He *sets captives free*.
  - c. Jesus, alone, secures *forgiveness* – He *justifies the many as He bears their iniquities*.
  - d. Jesus came to *reconcile sinful men to the Holy God* – in **v.14** the entire *angelic choir* sang of God’s *peace*; the Apostle Paul would write (**Rm 5:1**): *therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace w/God thru our Lord Jesus Christ*.
  - e. Friend, your most important need is to *be at peace w/ God*. Jesus came to *provide that peace*.

4. *God saves sinners because God is gracious. “Grace” is simply the undeserved pleasure of God!*
  - a. The *high note of our text* is the *choir’s doxology* of **v.14**, which *sounds out* that *God sent His Son* because *God is well pleased* w/men. **“Well pleased”** is another way of saying “God’s grace!”
  - b. God’s *grace* is the power behind these Bible *promises* we know & love so well; *promises* that are *right at home* at Christmas: *God so loved the world that He gave His Son*, and so, *God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

**Beloved, the *best* news of the *greatest* joy of all eternity is that our *gracious* God is *pleased* with men, so He *sent* His Son to *die* in the place of sinners – and you can have *peace* w/ God!**

**And so, the angels' song is good news because it will *change your life!***

1. This Baby *changes lives!* He will change ***your*** life!
  - a. The *good news of great joy* began to *transform* the shepherds as soon as they *believed it*.
  - b. Let's **read vv.15-20**. You can see at least **three** responses to the angel's promise from these men; they made: an *immediate* response, a *testifying* response, and a *worshiping* response.
  
2. It's kind of like *church*: the first angel *preached* the gospel, the choir angels *sang* the gospel, and the shepherds *drank it all in*. The big question is, what will the *congregation of shepherds* do next?
  - a. Go back to the *flocks? Business as usual? Let the sermon simmer on the back burner?*
  - b. Not a *chance!* These men *heard* the good news (*Savior*), they *believed* the good news (*unto you*), they *understood* the instructions (look for *the sign*; find the *Child*), and they *encouraged* one another to ***go...***
  - c. ...as in (15) "*Let us go **straight** to Bethlehem...*"
  - d. ...as in (16) "*they came **in a hurry** and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the Baby as He lay in the manger.*"
  - e. *Believing* resulted in an *immediate, urgent response!*



3. When I get *good news* I like to *share* it! The shepherds **did** find the *Child*, they **did** confirm the *sign* (growing stronger in *faith*), and they **didn't** keep it to themselves! ☺
  - a. **V.17** - They found Mary & Joseph and told them *everything...!*
  - b. ... → the *first angel*, the *Shekinah glory*, the *angel's announcement*, the *heavenly choir*, the *choir's doxology*, and of course, **the sign**: *Baby, cloths, & manger!*
  - c. But, it seems to me, their testimony **didn't** stop w/*Holy Family*; they must have stopped to tell *everyone* that crossed their paths! Do you see it here in **v.18** – *And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.*
  - d. When you *find Jesus* you get *changed* & you just gotta **tell** *someone!*
4. And when you *find Jesus*, you just can't help but *worship* - **read v.20.**
  - a. They worshiped at the *manger*, thru the *starlit streets* of Bethlehem, across the *hills*, and back to their *sleepy sheepfolds*.
  - b. They *glorified & praised* God. They *worshiped* in response to the message of the angels. They *worshiped* the *Baby* in the manger.
  - c. These *shepherds*, who watched over their *flocks* day & night, had found the *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*
  - d. These ordinary *herdsman*, who raised flocks for temple sacrifices, had bowed before the *once and for all sacrifice* Who's death on the cross would finally provide what **no** other sacrifice ever could!
  - e. ...*forgiveness...a clear conscience...eternal life.*
5. The Gospel offers *new life* and the only condition is your *faith*. The Bible **also** teaches the *proof* of real faith is *change* – *new life* means *changed life*. These men *believed* the good news & responded *immediately*.
  - a. *How about you?* Are you a *Christian...?* Has your *faith* in the Lord Jesus *changed your life?*

**But back to the angels; *choir's* song is a *worship* song: its theme is *God's glory*.**

1. Commentators point out that the *mountain top* of the *shepherd story* is **v.14**, and I want to draw your attention to the anthem's initial declaration: "***Glory to God in the highest.***"
  - a. We need to understand that everything *God does* is ultimately for ***God's glory***.
  - b. ...Even those things which also bring you & me *good, & great joy*.
  - c. So it shouldn't surprise us that the Christmas Story is *saturated* with *God's glory*!
  
2. Let's *find* God's glory here:
  - a. The angel who brings *good news* (9) is the *Angel of the Lord*. God created him for the sole purpose of *doing God's bidding*.
  - b. The supernatural *spotlight* on the Palestinian *hillside* (9) was nothing less than the *glory of the Lord*. The *light* that surrounded the herdsmen was the *Shekinah Glory* of God...
    - i. ... the same *glory* that ***led Moses & rested on Sinai & filled the Holy of Holies & guided the Magi & would settle on the Mt of Transfiguration.***
  - c. The name of the *angel choir* was the "*heavenly host*" – as in *God's heaven* and *God's choir*. And the *theme* of their *concert* was *praising God*: "***Glory to God in the highest!***"
  - d. The *message* of the angel **wasn't** about angels, it was about *God's plan*. The angels were *heralding* God's *glorious, grace-motivated plan* to *rescue sinners* thru Bethlehem's Baby, "*who is Christ the Lord.*"
  - e. And God is *glorified* at Christmas because the entire story is *His initiative*. No one *prodded* or *pressured* God to *send His Son to be Savior of the world*.

- f. God is glorified because this is *His Son*. **FF 30** years from *Bethlehem* to *Gethsemane* and you will hear Jesus pray (Jn 17): “*Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You. ... I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work which you have given Me to do.*”
  
- g. **Do the math – add ‘em up:** *God’s angels, God’s light, God’s music, God’s initiative, God’s plan, God’s Son!* ... What does it all *add up to...*? Christmas is all about “*Glory to God in the highest!*”

**And finally, the angels' anthem invites *everyone*.**

1. The *little baby* has come to offer joy to a **big world**!
  - a. It's so clear from the *angel's nighttime greeting*, this *good news of great joy is for...: v.10 – all the people* (Israel); and at the same time its joy is offered, **v.11 – for you**. The Savior has come for *mankind*, & for *every woman & man & boy & girl*!
  - b. Jesus has come to offer *joy to Israel*, *joy to the nations*, and *joy to every individual*, unnamed *shepherd* standing wide-eyed on that *Bethlehem hillside*. And to us....
  - c. After all, it is *mankind* (14) that has come under God's *favor*. One day, because of God's *favor*, men & women from every *tribe & tongue & people & nation* will *worship* this Child – *born in a manger, crucified in the place of sinners, raised to conquer death, enthroned to honor & power, interceding to secure His people, & returning to rescue, conquer & judge*.
  
2. Just think of all the *different* people the *Good News* came to, in the few familiar chapters of Matthew & Luke's *Advent accounts*:
  - a. An *aging, melancholy couple*, named Zacharias & Elizabeth.
  - b. A *village carpenter* named Joseph.
  - c. His *teenage fiancé* Mary.
  - d. A *distant* group of *magi* – *Gentile scholars & astronomers*.
  - e. A *nearby* group of *aging Jewish "Messiah watchers"* in Jerusalem – faithful people like *Simeon* & the widow *Anna* who spent their days watching for Jesus, *the Consolation of Israel & Hope of the World*.
  - f. And, of course, the *Good News* came to *some shepherds, staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flocks by night*.
  - g. The *Good News of great joy* is offered to **everyone**: *young & old, scholar & shepherd, watching & careless, near & far, Jew & Gentile*.

3. So let me draw your attention to the *angel's promise* again: *there has been born **for you**...a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!*
- a. The *angel's good news* – the *Christmas Gospel* – is **for you!**
  - b. You can't say "*I'm too young*" – Mary was a *teen*. You can't say "*I'm too old* – *it's too late* – Zacharias/Eliz were *advanced in years*."
  - c. You can't say "*I'm too smart for all of this, I've got too many **cynical questions***" – bring your questions! to the *Word of Christ* and remember: *Eastern Scholars studied the constellations & journeyed for months & outsmarted kings simply to bow & worship this Child*.
  - d. You *might* say "*I'm too sinful to find joy and comfort in Christ....*"
    - i. You **are** sinful. The Gospel says so: *none is righteous; no, not one. ... There is none who does good, not even one.*"
    - ii. Neither were those *shepherds*. The *backstory* on those guys is that while they had *financial ties* to the Temple (*selling thousands of sheep for sacrifices*), **1<sup>st</sup>** century *shepherds* were often considered *untrustworthy*, & often judged *unqualified* to join in daily Jewish worship.
    - iii. So you **don't** *deserve* to come to Jesus...but the Gospel *invites* you to *come* (**grace!**). In place of "*deserving*," the Gospel simply *demand*s that you *believe* the story, *embrace* the invitation, & *make haste to find Jesus*. You must simply *turn & trust Christ*.
    - iv. "*Let us go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made know **to us** (**to us**).*" So they came in a hurry & found their way....

**The Good News of great joy is for everyone...it can be joy for you!**

***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men w/ whom He is pleased.”***

The *choir’s anthem* tells the ***true purpose*** of Christmas: *God’s glory*.

It offers the ***best gift*** at Christmas: *peace among men*, thru a *Savior, who is Christ the Lord*.

And Christmas calls for a ***faithful response*** from *each of us*; let’s find that response in this (15): *“Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”*

**...pray...**