

“THE FIRST CHRISTMAS MESSAGE”

Luke 2:8-14



Theme: The proper response to the news of Jesus' coming is to glorify God.

I. THE INTRUSION BY THE MESSENGER – 2:8-9

A. *THE DISPIRITED RELIGIOUS PRACTICES – v. 8*

1. Again, we observe that when one of the most significant events in the history of the world occurs, it can be without immediate impact – the world continues unaware and seemingly unaffected.
2. We are told, *“In the same region, there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.”*
3. Rabbinic writings speak of sheep being pastured between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in February¹
4. The spiritual lethargy, formalism, and heartlessness that prevailed throughout Israel was entrenched even as God's provision for salvation was provided quietly in a manger in Bethlehem.
5. The outward sign of one's faith that God had required from the first day that sin entered the world – the sacrifice of a substitute lamb – continued as the central religious “ritual” in the culture of Israel.
6. Hundreds of thousands of sheep were offered in sacrifice annually – thus, in this “region,” a vast number of sheep were required to sustain the sacrificial system.
7. Because of the proximity to Jerusalem and the rabbinic description of sheep destined for sacrifice being tended in this region at certain times of the year, it is possible that these sheep were used in the sacrificial system.
8. However, it had become a religious obligation without a life-changing impact, as the temple had become a place of legalism, spiritual deadness, and profiteering.
9. Everything continued as dispirited and formal, lifeless and legalistic.

¹ MacArthur, Luke 1-5, p. 156

B. ***THE DISRUPTION OF RELIGIOUS PESSIMISM – v. 9***

1. However, as life as usual rolled along in lifelessness and obligation, pessimism and hopelessness prevailed throughout Israel.
2. It had been a long time since God had manifested His glory in Israel.
3. Because of Israel's repeated idolatrous rebellion against God, God had judged Israel by ceremoniously and definitively removing His glory from Israel:
 - a. The glory of the Lord ascended from the cherub in the temple to the threshold of the temple – ***Ezekiel 10:4***
 - b. It then departed the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim and stood over the east gate of Jerusalem – ***Ezekiel 10:18-19.***
 - c. It then went from the city gate to the mountain on the city's east side – ***Ezekiel 11:23.***
4. But without warning, God disrupted the air and magnified Himself in the unprecedented manifestation of His glory – ***“And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.”***
5. Suddenly, God's silence broke, and the ***“glory of the Lord”*** was again seen in Israel – signifying that God's presence once again had entered the world through the birth of Jesus Christ.
6. The typical reaction to the encounter of the glory of God is an overwhelming sense of unworthiness and doom – even as demonstrated by the shepherds who ***“were terribly frightened.”***
7. However, the occasion for this appearance was not one of judgment but of “gospel” (good news).

II. **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MESSAGE – 2:10-12**

A. ***THE DESCRIPTION OF THE MESSAGE – v. 10***

1. Thus, ***“the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.’”***
2. The “good news” [εὐαγγελίζω] means “good message” – coming from the same root as the word “angel” – messenger.

3. Instead of being cursed because of sin in the presence of God and His glory, these shepherds were informed that they were the recipients of “good news!”
4. It has been questioned: *“Why did God choose these men for such an occasion?”*
 - a. Shepherds were considered outcasts from Jewish religious virtue – they were “unsavory” and dishonest – so much so that their testimony wasn’t even permitted in Jewish courts.
 - b. They were perpetually ceremonially unclean and barred from temple participation.
5. However, these particular shepherds may have been tending the sheep destined for sacrifice – and as such, they were perfect recipients of the news that the One who was the “Lamb of God” had been born – cp. *John 1:29*.
 - a. Although neither the Scriptures nor extra-biblical references exist for these sheep being destined for temple sacrifice, it is reasonable to believe they were.
 - b. First, Bethlehem was renowned for its fertile fields.
 - c. Second, Bethlehem’s proximity to Jerusalem would have made it most convenient (a bit over 5 miles).
 - d. Third, sheep destined for sacrifice had to be carefully tended to as their presentation must be without defect or blemish, which argues against driving them any distance to sacrifice.
6. The emphasis on the fact that the Gospel was *“for all the people”* was also emphasized by the delivery of the news to those who were outcasts from the legalistic system of the Jews.

B. *THE DETAILS OF THE MESSAGE – vv. 11-12*

1. The angel declared: *“... for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*
2. *“today”* [σήμερον] – “this very day” - the fullness of time had come when God determined that the Savior should come – cp. *Galatians 4:4*
3. *“in the city of David”* – a corroborative proof that the promises of God stand sure and that this child was indeed the Messiah promised beforehand – cp. *Micah 5:2*

4. *“... born for you”* – a statement that indicates that the child that has been born would engage in a role that takes the place of fallen men – vicarious suffering is implicated here as He came to take our place – cp. [Hebrews 2:17](#)
5. *“a Savior”* – the Deliverer who would fulfill the promise of God anticipated from the day that sin entered the world – cp. [Genesis 3:15](#); [Luke 19:10](#)
6. *“... who is Christ”* - refers to the fact that this child was the “Messiah” who would not merely save his people from their sins but also rule the Kingdom of God.
7. *“... the Lord”* - refers to the absolute authority that this child possesses – a term used of **Yahweh** – that all-powerful, self-existent One.
8. The angel directs them by giving them a sign as to how to identify that child – *“This will be a sign for you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”* – without note by anyone to whom He is not revealed.

III. **THE INVOCATION BY THE MULTITUDE – 2:13-14**

A. *THE ANTICIPATION OF PEACE – v. 13*

1. It is as if heaven couldn't hold it any longer – the excitement of those oriented to what God was doing was revealed.
2. *“And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying ...”*
3. The appearance of so many worshiping angels is unprecedented in Scripture.
4. They were *“praising God”* – knowing that the Christ-child was God Himself, becoming flesh to save men.
5. This causes a similar joy in heaven when a sinner repents – cp. [Luke 15:10](#)
6. Angels do not have the privilege of personally experiencing this work of redemption – cp. [Hebrews 2:16](#) and therefore are careful students of redemption because of the glory of God manifested thereby – cp. [Ephesians 3:10](#); [1 Peter 1:12](#).
7. They knew what this birth meant and anticipated the work of redemption consummated by His sacrifice for the sins of men.

B. ***THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PEACE – v. 14***

1. They declared: ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”***
2. The only appropriate response by those in heaven is to worship God ***“in the highest.”***
3. The reason is the ***“peace”*** the child would bring between God and men through salvation – cp. ***Romans 5:1***
4. The idea of ***“among men with whom He is pleased”*** does not refer to men who, through their efforts, have pleased God, but rather that God gives this peace to whomever He pleases.
5. “Salvation peace belongs to those to whom God is pleased to give it; it is not a reward for those who have goodwill, but a gracious gift to those who are the objects of God’s goodwill.”²

So What?

1. **Am I struggling under the pessimism of the futility of life and ineffective efforts to be “right?”**
2. **In what ways does the phrase “... for you ...” inform my understanding of Jesus’ birth?**
3. **What happened that caused Jesus to become *my* Savior and Lord?**
4. **How do I know that the peace I have is because God is pleased with me?**

² MacArthur, p. 161