

Sunday School Lesson for December 14, 2025  
Luke 2:8-20 and Romans 10:14-15

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this second Sunday of December and the third Sunday of Advent, we're preparing for the celebration of Christmas by focusing our attention on the reason for the season--that moment when God sovereignly intervened in human history to present us with a Gift--the greatest gift ever given, the most important Gift we could ever receive--and the most important Gift we could ever share.

It all began in a manger in a little town called Bethlehem--just as God said it would--as we learned from our study last week from the first seven verses of Luke, chapter two. Today, we follow Luke's story of the angel's announcement to the shepherds and their spreading the news wherever they went in verses eight through twenty and Paul's reminder to the followers of Christ in Rome of the privilege they and we have to share that same story in verses fourteen and fifteen of the tenth chapter of his letter to them.

With the barest of details, Luke tells us about the birth of the Lord Jesus. In verse eight of the second chapter of his gospel, his attention turns to a totally unexpected scene that begins with the rather dull and routine explanation that there were shepherds nearby, doing what they had always done for years and years, just like David had done a thousand years before when nothing interesting or exciting ever happened. "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." Just another sleepy night like thousands of others before / under that black-velveted, star-studded Palestinian sky. But something was about to happen.

Verse nine: "And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that

will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’”

In Luke’s record of the last two appearances of an angel, the angel had made himself visible in simple form. We don’t read of any particular description about Gabriel being accompanied by some celestial, supernatural display, but both Zacharias and Mary knew it was an angel. Here, the appearance of an angel--whose name is not mentioned, by the way--was accompanied by a magnificent display of the majesty of God.

The glory of the Lord surrounded this angel. The word “glory” is often used in the Bible to refer to a brilliant light, so it’s very likely that an intense, dazzling, radiant light flooded the area where they were standing, not unlike the light that came upon Paul as he traveled to Damascus, or the light that surrounded Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Here on a dark hillside where nothing ever happened, the entire landscape is suddenly ablaze with light, and this handful of shepherds, some taking their watch, others sleeping and quietly awaiting their turn, are torn out of their dreams to face an angel standing before them.

And Luke says they were sore afraid. I would imagine so. Not only were they totally caught off guard, they might have also experienced the fear that came with the sense of being in the presence of God Himself as we find in so many places in our Old Testaments, for example, in Judges chapter 13, verse 22, where Manoah, the father of Samson, was visited by an angel who announced the birth of his son, and Manoah said, “We shall surely die because we have seen God.”

So, the first word out of the angel’s mouth was “Don’t be afraid,” but he immediately followed it with, “I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all people.” The great announcement, the mightiest, most wonderful

word that had ever come from an angels' lips, is described as "great joy" to "all the people."

Though the angel speaks to the shepherds alone, he plainly announces that the message of salvation that he brings will be of immense benefit to so many more. These good tidings of great joy would be to all people because these tidings would be graciously offered to everyone. God didn't promise to send His Son to one group or kind or one class of people, but to all the people. While the angel's message came first to the children of Abraham, / now that the wall of separation between people and between us and God has been broken down, as Paul writes in Ephesians chapter two and verse fourteen, / everyone has equal access to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We would think it odd if God had **not** announced the birth of the Messiah to the world, but why were a few, lonely shepherds to be the first to hear the news in the middle of the night? Even though God had an infinite number of ways He could have chosen to proclaim the Lord's birth, He chose these shepherds, persons of humble rank and of no great importance in the world of that day. One commentator writes, "It will not seem without significance, to any who appreciate the symbolic element of the Scriptures, that the first announcement was made to shepherds. Jehovah had Himself borne the name of the shepherd of Israel, and the Messiah had been announced under this designation by the prophets .... David had pastured his flocks in this very neighborhood; and, since the rich and mighty in Jerusalem were looking only for an earthly deliverer, it was undoubtedly among these humble shepherds that the poor in spirit and the mourners would be found, to whom the Lord Himself afterwards addressed His own preaching. There is something indescribably divine and touching in the care of God to satisfy the secret yearnings of individuals, at the same time when He is occupying Himself with the eternal salvation of millions. Man overlooks the masses in the individual, or neglects the individual in the masses; God equally comprehends the interests of both in His arrangements."

Alexander MacLaren adds this note: “No longer within the secret shrine, but out in the open field, the symbol of the Divine Presence glowed through the darkness; for that birth hallowed common life, and brought the glory of God into familiar [conversation] with its secularities and smallnesses. The appearance to these humble men as they sat simply chatting in a rustic row symbolised the destination of the Gospel for all ranks and classes.”

Based on a passage in the Mishnah, a collection of the oldest legal interpretations of the first five books of the Old Testament, some have suggested that these shepherds were the first to hear because the sheep they tended were raised specifically for the Temple sacrifices. In spite of their holy purpose, the shepherds who watched over them were not held in high esteem among their own people. In the Jewish Talmud, made up of the Mishnah and later commentaries, we read that these shepherds were not to be allowed to be witnesses in courts of law, and that no help was to be given to the heathen or to shepherds. Perhaps their semi-sacred occupation specially prepared them to be the recipients of these first glad tidings.

And what was the message the angel brought to these few, startled shepherds? “Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Just as God had promised through the prophets of old, so it came to be. Micah had written down the words of God when He said, “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.”

And who was this promised ruler? It was the Savior, Christ, the Lord. It’s an angel who first proclaims the gospel, telling these shepherds that the One Who would take away the sins of the world has come. To us, this Name might appear as insignificant as the name of any other person. But the words “Christ, the Lord,” are much more than names. “Christ, the Lord” is a title. This is the only time that this word combination appears in our New Testaments and it means, “the Anointed Lord” or “the Messiah, the Lord”--

the One Who is both the Promised Savior of the world and God Himself. God's promises foretold by the prophets and longed for by the people were finally being fulfilled!

MacLaren writes, "The titles of the Infant tell something of the wonder of the birth, but do not unfold its overwhelming mystery. ... They keep within the circle of Jewish expectation, and announce that the hopes of centuries are fulfilled. There is something very grand in the accumulation of titles, each greater than the preceding, and all culminating in that final 'Lord.' ... 'Saviour' means far more than the shepherds knew; for it declares the Child to be the deliverer from all evil, both of sin and sorrow, and the endower with all good, both of righteousness and blessedness. [As] The 'Christ' ... He is the fulfiller of prophecy, perfectly endowed by divine anointing for His office of prophet, priest, and king--the consummate flower of ancient revelation, greater than Moses the law-giver, than Solomon the king, than Jonah the prophet. 'The Lord' is scarcely to be taken as the [designation] of divinity, but rather as a prophecy of authority and dominion, implying reverence, but not unveiling the deepest secret of the entrance of the divine Son into humanity."

As the shepherds marvel and quake in fear before this angelic messenger, the angel tells them, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Even though they didn't ask for a sign as Zacharias did, they were given one, nevertheless. Note that this was not a set of directions to the manger, but a confirmation that they had to seek out themselves to verify the authenticity of the angel's announcement.

They could approach this new-born King without having to request prior permission or get a background check or wait for an invitation. They had just received the invitation in the words, "You will find." How they would know where to look / we don't know. It's likely that there would have been few newborn children in a little place like Bethlehem, and certainly only one lying in a manger, but how they would find the manger, we can only leave to the providential leading of the Holy Spirit.

Then, just when the shepherds might have thought the moment was over and they could begin their quest, as if to celebrate an event as only God could, the entire night sky was set ablaze with the glory of all heaven's angels. It was as if each and every star in the sky exploded with the brilliance of a supernova. Like a great heavenly choir, the angels sang out with all they had, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased."

As if the first angel's word wasn't enough, his words unleashed the anticipation and excitement of all creation that looked forward in such longing expectation to the birth of the Redeemer of fallen humanity and the redemption of all of creation itself, and so the host of heaven now joins the chorus. Not only would there be the testimony of a single angel, but a countless throng of witnesses, all in one accord and one voice bearing testimony to the wondrous birth of Christ, the Lord.

The heavenly host sang because the coming of this Savior glorified God. The angels had seen God do so many wonderful things since they were first created. They were there when God said, "Let there be light," and it was so. They had seen planets formed simply by a spoken word from God; they had seen God sprinkle the heavens with starlight; they had seen God breathe life into the first man and give life to the first woman. But that first family had sinned and come under the judgment of God. Not only did they sin, but sin came upon all of us because of their example and our own choice. And the angels had seen it all.

But now, God does something so unusual and so unexpected. He steps down from His throne and becomes a little Baby. God identifies with us so that when His mission on earth would be complete, Jesus Christ might suffer in our place for our sins. Wondrous love! Matchless grace! Infinite mercy! Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! No wonder the sky was filled with angels singing "Glory to God in the highest!"

D-Day has come. The long-awaited first shot to ultimately destroy Satan's dominion and his power--even death itself--had been fired. "Glory to God in the highest"--look what God has done--this is the pinnacle event in God's plan for humanity--the most consequential visitation of God in human history since Adam and Eve rejected God's plan for them and the consequences changed the trajectory of our relationship with God to this very day.

God's plan of redemption will bring glory to God as He both fulfills the Law and its righteousness by satisfying His justice while at the very same time demonstrating the height and depth and breadth of His unfailing love. Nowhere, so far as we could think or imagine, would His glory be more strikingly exhibited than in giving His only-begotten Son to bear the eternal punishment for the sins of the world.

The heavenly host proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased," "peace among those who please God," "peace on earth among those in whom He finds pleasure," "peace on earth to those who are God's friends," as various translations render these words. The angels declared that it's our salvation that gives glory to God because of what makes our salvation possible.

As we said earlier, the angels had been present for so many special occasions in history, but none so special or so important as the moment that God's salvation was brought forth in the birth of Jesus Christ. The angels were there at creation when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy, but here outside Bethlehem, they were shouting the praises of God. Surely there were many times when they sang, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" "Blessing and glory and honor and majesty and power and dominion and might be unto Him Who sits on the throne." But now these angels who once sang creation's story now proclaim Messiah's birth.

Salvation, then, is God's highest glory. It's that triumph of God that honors Him and magnifies Him more than anything else. It was in salvation that God demonstrated His love, His justice, and His mercy. His love in desiring a relationship with us in spite of our sin; His justice in condemning and punishing sin; and His mercy for making a way for all those who place their trust in Him to be fully forgiven of their sin and completely restored back to a right relationship with Him.

Surely for millennia the angels had sung, "Glory to God in the highest," but, there above the fields of Judea, they added another phrase: "On earth, peace among those with whom he is pleased." Oh, how the world needs peace today. Peace in our nation, peace in our world, peace in our homes, peace in our hearts. The opportunity for that peace came on that night when the angel announced the birth of the Savior Who is Christ, the Lord, and it still comes to those who find His favor through faith in Him and what He has done.

What is this peace among those with whom he is pleased that the angels announced? What is meant by this simple phrase that, if we could grasp it, would bring a sense of restoration, wholeness, contentment, and stability to our lives that you won't find anywhere else?

All too often, we hear this verse of scripture and think of a quiet, cuddly scene by the fireplace, or maybe a quiet, snow-covered landscape. But peace is so much more than the absence of conflict. The word, shalom, that we have translated as "peace" in the Old Testament, occurs some 236 times, but only infrequently is its meaning limited to "freedom from conflict." Its primary meanings include completeness, soundness, health, contentment, and friendship, both in terms of human relationships but also with God especially in covenant relationship.

So the biblical meaning of peace that's the centerpiece of the yearning of the human heart isn't a "don't worry, be happy" kind of passive resignation to the demands and challenges of my life, but an active and authentic

engagement, grappling with all those things that cause us to have terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days. In First Peter, chapter three verse ten, Peter, quoting Psalm 34 says, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace” and what? “Pursue it.”

So, if I’m going to rediscover biblical peace in my life or if I’m going to discover for the first time that sense of wholeness and completeness, I’m going to have to engage with God’s redemption, His reconciliation, His restoration, and His rule.

First, “peace among those with whom he is pleased” comes to those who engage with His redemption, when we finally deal with the root cause of our broken relationship with God. Jesus came to deal with our sin--our actions, our attitudes, our behaviors that say “I don’t need God to live a perfectly normal life.” He did that by taking upon Himself the punishment for our sin, dying in our place to be the sacrificial offering, to pay the penalty for our sin.

Isaiah, in chapter 53 and verse five of the book that bears his name, tells about the substitutionary atonement that the Messiah would make for us when he says, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Now, because of what Jesus has done, Paul is able to declare in Romans chapter five, verse one “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”

But that’s not all that the angels had in mind when they announced, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” Not only must I engage with His redemption, I also have to engage with His restoration--the rebuilding of my relationship with Him and the original purpose for my life.

Every one of us can tell about broken things in our lives--hopes, dreams, relationships, finances, job failures, disappointments of one kind or another. As we look back at what could have / would have / should have been, those memories often leave us bitter or broken because we can't undo what's happened.

When Jesus first announced His purpose for coming, he read to the congregation at the synagogue in Nazareth that passage from Isaiah, chapter 61: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke then tells us in chapter four of his gospel, "Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"

Jesus came with a restorative agenda. The prophetic passage from Isaiah went on to say, "I will comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion--to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

To experience His peace, we need to engage with His redemption and His restoration, but we also have to engage with His resources--His boundless provision for every need in my life rather than trust in ourselves. Experiencing God's peace is all about confidence in His adequacy--His enoughness. Engaging with the peace of God means discovering contentment with His faithful and consistent provision for all our needs. The problem is, we don't always trust Him for what He provides.

As Jesus taught the multitudes who came to see Him, Matthew tells us in chapter six that the Lord said, "I tell you, do not worry about your life, what

you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

In Philippians chapter four and verse six, Paul writes, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Do you want to experience freedom from worry--freedom from the fear of not having enough of what it takes to experience the abundant life Jesus came to give? Engage with His peace that you find in His provision, and that peace will guard your heart and keep it from failing, it will guard your mind and keep it from fear.

In order to experience the peace the angel proclaimed, we have to engage with the Lord's redemption, His restoration, His resources, and, also, His rule. This fourth provision for the deepest needs in our lives vitally connect the other three together. One of the things that brings the most discontentment, the most misery, the most grief in my life and your life is the idea that we can run our own lives without God's help. When we make the decision **not** to submit to God's Lordship--His unchallenged rule in our lives--it's then that we find ourselves in the most dangerous place we could ever be in--a place outside the will of God.

In Isaiah chapter nine, beginning in verse six, we hear a very familiar announcement about the character of God's promised Messiah: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.” It’s not an accident that both those words appear together--of the increase of His government and His peace. The more God governs your life, the more of His peace you experience. The more peace you long to enjoy, the more you place yourself under His loving guidance. The less you and I allow God to guide us and direct our paths, the less peace there is in our lives because we’re trying to live outside the plans and boundaries God designed for us. It’s God’s loving rule that brings peace both on a universal scale and on a personal scale, but you and I must engage with His rule and allow Him to be the unchallenged Lord of every aspect of our lives.

When you and I engage with the peace that Jesus came to bring, it’s not that everything is somehow magically transformed into happiness, unicorns, and rainbows, it’s that our lives are realigned with God’s purpose for us, the trajectory of our lives is reset according to His priorities, and we’re reminded once again that God is working all things together for good--somehow, in ways that we may not be able to see or understand, but, because He has restored the beat of our hearts to the tempo of His eternal plan, we can trust Him and rest in the confidence that only He can give. Redeemed, restored, resting in His resources and under His rule to a path of peace, we can rest in the peace and favor that only He can give--even as He leads us through the valleys of the shadows of death.

The peace that the angels proclaimed at Jesus’ birth is real, not sentimental; the favor that God has for those who place their trust in Him is constant and not conditional. It’s not just for Christmas cards or holiday greetings. It’s an abiding relationship that’s offered to me and to you not only on the worst days of our lives but every day and every moment of our lives. No sin is too great, no failure is too final to keep you from rediscovering or maybe discovering for the very first time His constant and abiding peace and His unceasing, unmerited favor. And there’s so much more we could add, but we must return to the rest of our story.

With the praise of the angelic host ringing in their ears, the shepherds find themselves alone once again, on the same hillside where they had been tending their sheep. But life for them would never be the same, and there was much to do before the sun rose, for they had been given an assignment from heaven itself. Here's how Luke tells us what happened next in verse 15: "When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them."

Unfortunately, most of our translations miss the emotional urgency when they read that the shepherds said, "Let us go." Luke wrote two words here, the first of which is translated "let us go," but the second, provides the emphasis: "now!" So it was more like they said, "Let's go right now!" or "Last one to the manger's a rotten egg!"

Soon enough, they found the manger and Mary and Joseph and the baby. How exactly they got there, we don't know. Luke leaves it to our imagination to picture the wonder and joy that surely filled the hearts of these simple shepherds, and what strength Mary's and Joseph's faith must have drawn from their unexpected and wonderful visit. But it was there, in the lowly manger of Bethlehem, that they found the One of whom the angels had spoken, the One Moses and the prophets had foretold; and the word of the angel was confirmed. They knew.

Convinced of the truth of the angel's words, assured that they could not have been mistaken in the appearance of the angels, and now having seen this "baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger," they naturally felt compelled to let the world know. So they went throughout the town, telling the people, "Come and see, come and see." And now, the second preachers of the gospel began their ministry of proclaiming the advent of the Messiah.

As you would expect, the response was immediate: “All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” “Everyone who heard this news was amazed.” At last, after thousands of years, God has fulfilled His promise made in the Garden of Eden to finally and fatally crush Satan’s head and redeem fallen mankind! And the lowly shepherds were the ones to carry the message of the gospel to everyone they could find.

The apostle Paul had personally experienced the Lord’s peace and His pleasure so wondrously announced by the angels and proclaimed throughout Bethlehem. He knew what it offered to those who were struggling with trying to find peace in their own hearts and peace with God. So, he tells those followers of Christ in Rome who had also experienced the redemption, restoration, resources, and rule of God in their own lives that this was a message the world needed to hear, which led him to ask in chapter ten, verse fourteen of his letter to them: “But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?”

His unspoken answer to all four of his “how” questions is, “They can’t.” In order to hear the gospel, someone has to share it with them. In order for someone to share it with them, someone has to be sent. The questions were specifically directed toward his Jewish readers in Rome who might have still held to their exclusive status with God. But Paul has made it abundantly clear that everyone who calls upon the Lord will be saved, so everyone needs to hear the gospel, and he challenges his Jewish audience to understand the full importance of their commission to take the gospel into all the world.

But his challenged is not limited to his Jewish readers then--it also applies to his readers today, including you and me. The lost people around us and across the globe will not call on someone they have not believed in, they won’t believe in someone they’ve not heard about, and they won’t hear about this Person they could believe in / unless and until they can hear the gospel, and

they won't hear and they won't believe and they won't call / until someone goes to tell them. Here are the marching orders for the Church; in fact, for every person who has responded to the call to salvation and experienced the peace of God, for this is the work that Jesus Himself began and commissioned us to continue.

The greatest need of the world today is not stopping climate change or creating an imaginary, equitable utopia. It's not the end of homelessness or famine or disease unless it's the end of the disease of sin that affects every one of us--none of us is immune, and we've all been infected by it. So, what the world needs more than anything else is salvation, forgiveness, righteousness, holiness, heaven--peace with God--the "peace among those with whom the Lord is pleased" that the angels announced. What the world needs is Christ--Isaiah's Prince of Peace. No government policy can provide it, no world organization for peace and brotherhood can offer it, and no good wishes for health and happiness can bring it about. For the world to know Christ, those who know Christ must tell the world about Christ.

And "how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." Paul confirms the importance and necessity of being faithful messengers of God's salvation. This image from Isaiah chapter 52, verse seven, is of a herald seen at a distance, sprinting with news--and it's good news--a favorable report from a field of battle or pleasant news from a distant land. The appearance of someone bringing good news to those in captivity, as the people of the northern tribes of Israel were in Isaiah's day, would be an image that brought gladness and joy. And it wasn't the feet themselves that were beautiful, but the coming of the news brought by running feet that created a joyful desire to hear the good news they longed to receive. The gospel is good news, and it's good news the world needs to hear!

The writer of our advent booklet concludes his comments on our texts with this: "As soon as they heard news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds felt compelled to act. They went with haste, leaving their flocks behind, to find

Mary and Joseph and the Savior Child lying in a manger. And once they beheld the One through Whom salvation would come, they spread the word of [everything] that had taken place.”

“We are like these men,” he goes on to say, “unlikely recipients of an unbelievable reality. Just as God called the shepherds to witness and testify to Christ’s birth, so we are called to herald the saving work of His death and resurrection. As believers, we have been invited into His story, sent out as heralds of both Jesus’ first coming and His second. As we consider the shepherds, let us respond as they did to this good news of great joy--with amazement, belief, and action.”

Thank you for preparing your heart and your mind to engage with the wonder of Christmas and the Lord’s promises about His greatest gift--the One Who would save us from our sin and grant us eternal life. Trey will be speaking about that salvation in this week’s advent sermon from Isaiah, chapter 61, verses ten and eleven. Next week, we continue with the story of Jesus’ birth as we join the wise men from the east as they followed the star to place where Jesus was, as Matthew records for us in the first twelve verses of the second chapter of his gospel.

As always, as it’s still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!