

Evangelism from Heaven, Part 2

Luke 2:8-14

Look at Luke 2 verse 10, "The angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of 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.'" Look at the contrast there from verse 9 to verse 10. It hits us immediately. The shepherds feared a great fear; that's the most literal translation of the Greek. And the angel says, Fear not, or Stop fearing because I don't want you to fear a great fear because I'm bringing you good news of great joy. There's a contrast there between great fear on the one hand, but let's put that aside because there is a great joy that eclipses it. The first command here is for calm. Isn't that kind of God? Fear not: It's a indication of the tender mercy of our God, like it says in verse 78, in Chapter 1 verse 78 or, as Mary said in Chapter 1 verse 50, "His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." Listen, it doesn't matter who you are, for those who fear the Lord, God will draw near to calm your fear. He'll draw

near to overcome inherent weakness; to overcome blinding, confusing sinfulness; and he'll communicate with us. This is yet again a dramatic indication of the heart of our God. He cares.

That verb, "I bring good news," single word in the Greek, just one word, *euangelidzo*, which means, I preach the Gospel. I proclaim good news. This here, like I said, is a record of the first evangelism encounter in the New Testament, and it's coming from Heaven, evangelizing common shepherds. The Gospel is for all people, great and small. And we see that because God, when he first preached the Gospel, God himself manifesting his glory, his Shekinah glory, returning to Israel and by the way, it wasn't to the temple in Jerusalem, it was to the true city of David, Bethlehem, a no-name town by that time. He came to lowly, common, uninfluential shepherds, who were in the insignificant, the low-population village of Bethlehem. Why? Because God absolutely delights to glorify himself, to put his own power on display by working through what men consider weak, insignificant, base, lowly. Kind of like working through all of us, right?

In fact, notice that very connection between verse 10 and verse 11. There in verse 10, “Good news of great joy for” whom? “all people.” And indicated most immediately in verse 11 by, “For unto you.” That is, even unto you lowly, common shepherds. Shepherds aren’t family. They aren’t influential, they’re not related to Joseph and Mary. They’re not significant. They’re not influential friends. They’re not even named in this text. They have no claim whatsoever on God. They have no claim on this baby. They have no claim on the news about him. And yet, God tells them such a gracious message: This Savior was born for them.

Don’t miss the personal element here; personal element featured in the previous two birth announcements, as well. Zechariah learned about his son, that he’d be named John. And then Mary learned about her son. He’d be named Jesus. Here, the shepherds don’t learn his name. They’ll get to that in time. Here, they learn about the significance of who he is. And then they go to visit him. Then they go to see him. Then they go to meet him and to see him personally. But the entire focus of God’s Gospel announcement, to them anyway, is on the significance of this baby. Look at verse 11, First he’s born, which means what? He’s

human like everybody else, he comes into the world, everybody else since Adam and Eve. He's comes into the world through a womb, he's swaddled in bands of cloth and he's lying helplessly there in a manger. It's the way we're all brought into this world, all of us dependent, all of us human, all of us weak.

But secondly, he's born this day. The shepherds would not have known this, but the word there, today, or this day, it's *semeron* in the Greek. That word shows up as a motif in Luke's Gospel to indicate fulfillment. The next time, I won't go through all of them, but the next time the word shows up is in Luke 4:21, and Jesus had just read in that context from Isaiah 61 verses 1 and 2. And he refers to himself in that passage and then he says this, "He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue focused on him. And he began to say to them," today, 'today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

The significance of this birth that God is preaching to the shepherds is in his humanity, first of all; also his prophetic fulfillment and then third, in his connection to David. This is

the city of David, after all. These shepherds recognized the difference. David was the local boy, the hometown hero, so they didn't ascribe the city of David to Jerusalem; they knew it was Bethlehem. That was Bethlehem's claim to fame. This is the city of David. So, when they said, verse 15, "Let's go see," you know where they didn't go? Jerusalem. They didn't go to Jerusalem. They went to Bethlehem, directly there to find the child. He's connected to David.

Fourthly, in this announcement in verse 11, he is born for them as a Savior. Which what? Indicates the grace of God. It indicates his tender mercy, and it also means, by implication, if he is a Savior and it's a Savior sent to them, guess what? They're in some sort of danger. The shepherds need to be saved from something. They require saving, but what's out in front? God has made provision for them in this child with his birth.

Fifth, he's born as the Christ. That means anointed one. He's been anointed. He is the Messiah. Again, that connects him with prophecy. Again, it connects him with David, but it also points to something in his essence. This is a royal person. This is no

ordinary baby. This is the promised king of Israel. This is one who ushers in renewal, ushers in all the restoration promises, all the prophecies about the millennial age of Israel. This is the one before whom the entire world will bow and pay homage. This is the one who commands the allegiance of every king and every subject from every corner of the earth from every kingdom on the globe. This is the significance of this great news of great joy.

The humanity, the fulfilled prophecy, the Davidic Dynasty, the tender mercy, the Messianic prophecy and finally, sixth, his sovereignty. He is Lord. He is Lord: The Lord. Now, it's the glory of the Lord that appeared to the shepherds, verse 9, and the shepherds, when they went away in verse 15, they acknowledged the Lord is one who had revealed something to them. Here the Savior is the Lord. This here is at least a subtle emphasis on the Savior's divinity, but definitely an emphasis on his sovereignty. This is no ordinary man. What started with normal humanity has escalated with each subsequent term to reveal his full divinity. In fact, the bookends are his essence. Human nature, divine nature start to finish, this is the person of Christ. Absolutely remarkable. But listen, none of the

significance of this newborn person would matter at all to them without the addition of those first two words at the beginning of verse 11, "To you." To you, this proclamation of good news of great joy is for all people, rich and poor, great and small, white collar, blue collar, shepherds and princes, all kinds of people. But for these Bethlehem shepherds, they got the message. This Savior was born for them, and he was born for them personally. It's the Gospel that we need to be sharing to everybody without discrimination, without favoritism. God has set an example here for us. God gave these shepherds an incredible announcement about something new, something unprecedented. The Son of God, the fulfillment of Davidic promises, the hope of Israel, the entire world, this person has come in human flesh.

The next verse anticipates the shepherds' eager desire because they want to meet him. So point number three: a didactic verification. This verification, this sign is instructive to them. This sign has something further to teach the shepherds. Verse 12, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Again, notice the tender mercy of God in the kindness of his

condescension and his grace. Not only has a Savior been born for you, but, verse 11 there's a sign for you. Another thing to notice, this announcement anticipates a believing response. "You will find a baby," future tense. That prediction would be fulfilled in just minutes as the shepherds immediately decided to leave the sheep behind, find the child in Bethlehem. Sheep? What sheep? What do I do for a living? I don't even know. What's my name? I don't know, it's not in the text. After what the shepherds just heard, this human baby who fulfills prophecy, who saves sinners, who descends from David, who's anointed by God to be Israel's king, who's incarnated as the sovereign Lord, one question: What in the world is he doing in a feeding trough? An animal's feeding trough, really? That the best we could do?

As the shepherds go, they find a baby swaddled, lying in a manger. A strange enough predicament for any human baby, but as they find that strange predicament, they can be assured that this baby is the very one of whom the angel spoke. It's such a stark contrast, isn't it, to how a king should enter the world? He identifies with the lowly. Being born in a feeding trough, and he identifies at the end of his life with sinners being crucified between two thieves.



Notice verses 13 and 14, our fourth point: An angelic affirmation. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’” It’s difficult to see how this scene could be any more dramatic even up to this point, but something happens here that takes it even beyond all pale of comparison. It’s something that’s both paradoxical and at the same time prophetic and prayerful.

First the paradox. Our translations call this company of angels “a multitude of the heavenly host and that’s accurate, it’s dead-on accurate biblically, but it’s a bit misleading for us if we’re unfamiliar with the term and the significance of the word, host. Folks, let me tell you, these are the ranks of an angelic army. That’s what the hosts of heaven are, they’re soldiers who carry out divine orders, executing the will of the commander of the heavenly host. The Greek word there is *stratia*, which is a military unit. And it’s one massive regiment of the armies of the living God. As one commentator put it, “this army is huge, it’s regimented and it’s marshaled for the praise and purposes of

God.” Therein lies the paradox. When is the last time you heard of an army, assembling, lining up for muster to declare peace instead of going to war? Look at verse 14 again, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

This is prophetic also. Not necessarily in the predictive sense, a foretelling sense, even though there will come a day when this verse is consummated completely, fulfilled completely. But rather, it’s prophetic in an exhortative sense. This is a prophetic, exhortative call for men to praise God on the one hand and on the other hand, it’s a prayer for God to grant peace on earth. Notice two stanzas in verse 14, they’re not exactly parallel, but in those stanzas, several pairs that correspond to one another. Notice the terms, glory and peace; God and men, and in the highest on the one hand, and on the earth. So, there’s glory to God, there’s peace to men, there’s glory in the highest and then there’s peace on earth.

The angelic armies of heaven are first calling for these shepherds and by extension, all of mankind to join them in

giving glory to God. There needs to be a verb understood there. Basically, it's the verb, let it be, as in "let there be glory to God in the highest." It's an imperative; it's assumed and it's calling people to praise God. Let glory be to God in the highest. "The heavens," already, "declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim his handiwork." The created order is already doing exactly what it's designed to do in giving glory to God. The angels in heaven, they give glory to God.

Jesus said we should pray this way, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The will of God, the glory of God is already being proclaimed faithfully in heaven, but needs to be done so here on earth as well. We need to be drawn into that. He's already glorified by all the angels in heaven, Revelation 7:11 to 12. "All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.'"

So the angels here in Luke 2:14, they are calling on us, calling on these shepherds, and by extension all of mankind, to give glory to God. Give glory to God in the highest. Ascribe to him the glory due his name. Let your praise arise to God. That's exhortative, that's prophetic. It's calling men to give glory to God, the glory due his name. But it's also prayerful, invoking God for the blessing of peace to descend, to come down from heaven and descend on all mankind, and the peace starts with the cessation of hostility between God and man. It's a hostility that the angels have observed among us, since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden. Listen, these angels are warriors, right? They're soldiers, they're ranks of the heavenly host. No one like soldiers can comprehend the longing for peace. No one like soldiers can really appreciate the reality of peace. No one like soldiers can really appreciate what it takes to accomplish peace and keep peace and maintain peace, none like a soldier. These angelic warriors know what peace demands. It'll come in the most profound form of warfare, overcoming the greatest opponents; it will win the greatest victory, and it will win it permanently forever. Paradoxically, that peace will be won on a cross. The cessation of hostility, the laying down of arms, that's only the beginning of peace. Peace on earth indicates the fullness, the fulfillment of divine blessing showered down from heaven to

communicate all the grace, all the mercy, every provision of joy on mankind. That's what the angelic *stratia* pray for; that's what they entreat God to accomplish. That's their prayer.

But they defer, here, notice, to his sovereign will. They acknowledge his peace is upon not all, but upon those whom he chooses. It's that final term in the text. In the Greek text it's *eudokia*. In our translation it's, "Peace among those with whom he is pleased." Another way to translate that term, "Peace upon those to whom he is pleased to grant it." Whenever this term is used in Luke's Gospel, 2:14 here, 3:22, 10:21, 12:32, term's always referring to God's pleasure; his pleasure. The idea here is that God's peace rests upon those whom he has chosen in accordance with his good pleasure, which is exactly what Ephesians 1 tells us. This is a strong, strong affirmation from the angels, from whom you'd expect it, on the absolute sovereign prerogative of God. It's a reality they experience themselves personally and rejoice in, every single moment in Heaven and they want that peace to come to earth.

Well, the sovereign will works through, as we know, individual choices of human beings. We've already seen that in our text in Quirinius, in Caesar, in Joseph and Mary. We're about to see it in the shepherds as they decide to go, leave their flocks and seek the sign they've been given. There's a lot more to unpack in this amazing section, as well. We've only scratched the surface of these verses, but we'll have more to say about these truths over the next few weeks because we get to celebrate Christmas together.

But that, folks, that's how God evangelized these shepherds. This is how he preached the Gospel to them, and guess what? It worked. What's the message for us? These shepherds, you know who they represent? They represent us. At this point in the story, they haven't seen Christ for themselves. They haven't met him personally. And even when they do, they have to take it on faith that this baby is indeed going to grow up into the one that's described in verse 11. That he's going to grow up to be the Savior, who is Christ, who is Lord. He didn't look like that now, though. For now, they must simply believe the report. They must believe the message of the Gospel. That's us, isn't it? That's the position we're in, as well. We've put our faith in a message. We

trust these words that are printed in our Bibles. We believe these words to be the words of an eternal, living God. It's a holy Bible. It's a book like no other book, written by an author like no other author, a divine perfect author with no error; revealing a message from heaven itself. Yes, this message is imbedded in real history. It involves real facts, real people, actual places, historical events, a socio-cultural circumstance and setting for every story. There are physical geography marks of personal history, imperial history. But at the end of the day, we haven't seen any of this for ourselves, have we? Our hope is anchored to the report. It's anchored to the divine revelation. It's anchored to the account that we believe has come directly from God about how all this happened. This provokes us to ask questions of: Do we believe or do we not believe? If we believe, do we demonstrate that by obedience, by passionate, zealous obedience and worship of God? Do we believe it or not?

That's why Peter opened his epistle this way, this is how we'll close. As you listen to this, think about all we've learned this morning in what Peter has said here. He says at the beginning of his epistle, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Because, "According to his great mercy, he

has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. And this though you have not seen him," just like the shepherds, "you love him. Though you do not see him now," like the shepherds, "you believe in him and you rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory," just as was announced to the shepherds, good news of great joy for all the people, "rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible, filled with glory obtaining as the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." You see, we're in the same situation as the shepherds. So the question is, will you believe the report you've just heard? Blessed on those who do. Let's bow in prayer.



We give thanks to you, Father, for such a beautiful text of Scripture, an amazing condescension on your part to come down to shepherds in a pasture among some sheep to announce to them good news of great joy, which will be for all the people, but particularly, "for you a Savior is born this day in the city of David who is Christ the Lord." That, for you, is such a precious promise coming from you because we belong in that category, unnamed, unknown, no claim on you, no right, strangers from the covenants of promise, and yet you bring us in through Jesus Christ.

We're grateful to you because you have become our Savior through Christ; you've delivered us from all of our sin and forgiven it. You've set us free from tyranny of sin and Satan. We're so grateful for that. And as we celebrate this Christmas season, let us not forget that message. Let us proclaim that message of salvation from sin, salvation of judgment, salvation from your wrath, that people could come to know Jesus Christ, that they could go, like these shepherds longed to do, go and see him personally. We are thankful that you have drawn us into a personal relationship with you, Father, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's in his name that we pray. Amen.