

## "GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY"

Luke 2:8-20

Intro: We are turning aside from our studies in 2 Peter to consider the Christmas message, which is the message concerning the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ some 2,000 years ago in the city of Bethlehem. It could not be summed up in any better words than those which the angel spoke to the shepherds: "Behold, I bring you **GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY.**" You will find these in verse 10 of Luke 2.

This probably was Gabriel who appeared to Zacharias in 1:19. (Read.)

This same angel appeared to Mary in 1:26, 27. (Read.)

In both of these instances it was to cause great joy that the Messiah, the Christ, was coming. When the angel spoke to the shepherds, Christ had been born. So everything, really, in chapters 1 and 2 of Luke's Gospel speaks not only of "joy," but of "great joy" concerning the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The words which the angel used could be literally translated as Wycliffe did so long ago, "I evangelize to you great joy." The Gospel was here being proclaimed by an angel, and the primary result of the message was that it would bring great joy to, lit., all the people. The Gospel is good news which produces great joy!

I want to examine that familiar expression with you today, to help you to see, if the Lord will enable me to do so, why it is a message of such "great joy." "Great" is used of its intensity and magnitude. Cf. Thayer, p. 394. Intensity has to do with the high degree of joy. It has to do with its strength, its ability to endure. Magnitude points to its quantity, being greater than all other joys. Many joys are short-lived, and eventually amount to nothing. This joy about which the angel spoke is the greatest of all joys, and it never can be exhausted, it never will come to an end.

The big question is, WHY? Why was it that the message which the angel came to bring to the shepherds was a message of such great joy? This is the question that I want to try to answer for you today, and to do it from the Word of God--in fact, to do it from our text here in Luke 2.

It was a message of "great joy," first of all, because . . .

## I. A LONG-AWAITED PROPHECY HAD BEEN FULFILLED.

The message of the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, was

the very heart of Old Testament Scripture. There was nothing else that could compare with it in importance. If this prophecy had not been fulfilled, it would have rendered all of the rest meaningless and impossible. This was the key to all of the Scriptures that had been given at that time.

To add to their encouragement that this was true was the fact that "Christ the Lord" had been born in "the city of David," which was Bethlehem! In Micah 5:2 we read these words:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

For many generations, hundreds of them, the people of God within the nation Israel had looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. It is said that countless numbers of young women in Israel had hoped that they might be the mother of the anointed One.

These shepherds were among those who were living on the earth at the time that those great Messianic prophecies became an actuality.

We often talk, do we not, about hoping to live until the Lord comes again! That is the way believers felt in OT times about His first coming. Thus, the joy of the shepherds would have been greater than any other joy, a joy that they could not contain. It is no wonder that they did what is said in 2:17. (Read.) We talk about the things that delight us. And so they had to spread the message everywhere. At that time they had been to see the baby Jesus (v. 16), and so they had learned for themselves that this was true.

But I want you to see that this meant something else to them, and it should mean the same to us.

The fulfillment of this great prophecy confirmed the OT as being the very Word of God! This is one of the greatest proofs that we have of the truth of Scripture. This should strengthen our faith. This should encourage us to believe the promises of the Word. This should help us to understand, as Peter has told us, that, in putting our trust in Christ, "we have not followed cunningly devised fables" (2 Pet. 1:16). Can you not still remember the joy that you experienced when it was first impressed upon your heart that this Book is the Word of God, and that it is absolutely dependable because it is the Word of God?

In the midst of all of his trials and sufferings, the prophet Jeremiah said,

Thy words were found, and I did eat them;  
and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing  
of my heart: for I am called by thy name,  
O Lord God of hosts.

"But," you might say, "that does not particularly thrill me." The only answer that I can give to you if that is your case is that it may be that you cannot say what Jeremiah was able to say. He said that this gave him such great joy because he was called by the Lord's Name. That is, he belonged to the Lord. It is when we know the Lord that we have such joy in delight in His Word. That is the reason that true Christians read it, believe it, and love to hear it when it is taught and preached.

If you do not know the Lord in salvation, there could be no better time than now for you to come to Him. The message of the Gospel will become clearer to you as we go on in our consideration of these verses.

But there is a second reason why this would give the shepherds such great joy.

## II. IT WAS THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, THE LORD.

This was a truth that obviously brought great and genuine excitement to the shepherds.

Note what the angel was saying. He was saying that this was not an ordinary birth. This was not like the birth of John the Baptist, as wonderful as that was. In fact, there never had been a birth like this, and there never has been another like it since.

The birth of a child, whether it be a boy or a girl, usually gives great joy. That is one of the wonderful times of our lives, when our children are born. That child is a part of his father and a part of his mother. Those happy parents say, "This baby is ours." That is a wonderful experience for both parents. But the child about whom the angel was speaking was not the result of a union between Joseph and Mary, but He was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, making Him both God and man--a Person which is beyond our ability to understand or explain, but we know that it is true. He was a real man, and He was very God. He was "Christ the Lord."

That is an occasion for real joy.

But, as in the case of what I said about the Scriptures, let

me add another word about the birth of Jesus Christ, and tell you why, in addition to this, it was an exciting and joyous occasion to the shepherds.

### III. THEY KNEW THE REASON FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST.

The angel said, "For unto you is born this day . . . a Saviour . . ."

Most of our carols include this explanation of the coming of Christ, but how few there are who really understand it and believe it! How few there are who are really acquainted with Jesus Christ as their Saviour!

But look at that title, "Saviour." Surely we need to ask, "What does He save us from?" If He is a Saviour, then He must save us from something!

Let me take you back to the announcement of the birth of Christ which was given to Joseph, the man to whom Mary was engaged to be married. Probably it was this same angel, the angel Gabriel, who said these words to Joseph, recorded for us in Matt. 1:21:

And she shall bring forth a son,  
and thou shalt call his name JESUS:  
for he shall save his people from their sins.

Jesus Christ as a Saviour. He came to save sinners. He came to "save his people from their sins." He came to save them from the eternal consequences of their sins. He came to save them from divine judgment. He came to save them from going to hell. But in addition, He came to save them from the awesome power of their sins. He came to set sinners free from the bondage of sin. He came to set sinners free. But more than that, He came that He might eventually deliver His people from even the possibility of sinning. That will never be possible as long as we are in these bodies as we are now. But the day is coming when all who know Christ as Saviour will be perfected, and they will never again be able to think anything sinful, or say anything sinful, or do anything sinful.

TAKE ALL OF THIS TOGETHER AND YOU WILL BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE ANGEL MEANT WHEN HE SAID, "HE SHALL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS."

You see, if Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became a man became a man for this purpose, then it means that you and I could never do enough for God to pay for our own sins. No man is his own Savior. If Christ has not saved us, we are not saved. He is the only Saviour there is, and He is the only Saviour that there ever has been!

Now, since I have said that He is the only Saviour that there ever has been, let me say this as an added reason why the shepherds would find this coming of Christ such "great joy" for themselves.

I am going to speculate on something now, but I believe it is true. The Bible does not specifically teach what I am going to say, but I believe that it implies it, and I am going to suggest that such was the case.

I believe that these shepherds had already trusted in Christ before Christ was born--just like Abraham did; just like Moses did; just like David did; just like Isaiah did; and just like hundreds and hundreds of others in OT times had done. You see, Christ is the Saviour of the people of God in the OT as well as being the Saviour of all who have trusted Him since He came. All of the people of God look to the Cross of Christ for their salvation. It was there that He provided for our salvation. He accomplished it there. AND SO THE SHEPHERDS WOULD REJOICE AT THE PROSPECT OF SEEING THEIR LORD, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS ONLY A NEWBORN BABE IN A MANGER.

But some might say, "That is ridiculous. How could thinking men look to an infant and rejoice in Him as a Saviour?"

Well, that is not as ridiculous as you might think!

Tonight I am going to be speaking from the verses that follow our text for this morning, and we are going to consider just some of the words of a man named, Simeon. Look down to verse 25 of this chapter, Luke 2, and notice what Luke said that Simeon said. (Read down through verse 30.)

Can you think of any joy that would be comparable to actually seeing the Lord Jesus Christ? Does that not bring joy to your heart--the prospect of actually seeing the Lord?

"But," you might say, "there were those who were not glad to see the Lord. How do you explain that?"

I explain it by pointing you back to that title, "Saviour." Only those who know Him as Saviour, or those who will know Him, are glad to see Him. Some day we will all see Him. If we do not see Him as our Saviour and Lord and Friend, we will see Him as Judge. Which is it with you?

One more word. The shepherds were filled with great joy

because . . .

V. THEY WERE AMONG THOSE WHO ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

I see in this passage evidence of the grace of God.

If it were up to you to arrange for the coming of the Son of God into the world as the God-man, would you have announced it to lowly shepherds. They were nobodies! We do not even have their names. We do not know how many of them there were. We do not hear anything about them after this particular time.

You see, the Lord does not save us because of who we are. Paul taught the Corinthians that in 1 Cor. 1:26-31. Most of you will remember that passage. God saves us by His grace. He does not give us what we have earned; He gives us what we could never earn, but it was purchased for us as the price of the precious blood of Jesus Christ. You see, God became a man in order to die for men. And He saves those whom He chooses to save, and He saves men and women and children from every strata of society.

Look at v. 10 again. The original says this: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people." What did Luke mean, the people? Surely not all people rejoiced at His coming. Some wanted to kill Him, and did kill Him. What, then, does it mean?

It means that God has a chosen people whom He has chosen for salvation. He has ordained it, and He will accomplish it. So the shepherds knew that they were not saved because they had been smart enough to figure things out, but because God in His grace had shown them their need, and had made known the truth of salvation to their hearts, and had even enable them to believe in this Saviour.

Do you say that it was foolishness that they rejoiced in the coming of the baby Jesus? No, it was not foolishness; it was grace--the grace of God! And that is the only reason that you and I have believed, the only reason that anyone ever believes. We would never chose Him, but He has chosen us. We would never call upon Him, but He has called us. We may be inclined to turn away from Him, but He can so work in our hearts that we will turn back to Him and cry out to Him for salvation.

Concl: This is a marvelous passage, is it not? What truth is to be found in a few short verses! Is this truth that is precious to you? Then you know what "great joy" this is. There is no joy that can compare with it. If I could give you a million dollars this morning, your joy in receiving that

would be nothing compared with the joy a sinner experiences when he comes to Christ.

How God is going to see fit to bless and use His Word, we do not know. But I do know this: It is my responsibility to tell you about Jesus Christ, and it is your responsibility to listen and to believe in Him. And the promise is that, if you come to Him, He will save you. He will not turn you away. And so I plead with you this morning, cry out to God for His mercy upon you, mercy provided not just by the advent of Jesus Christ, but mercy provided by His death which could only be possible as a result of His birth. Come to Christ, trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will know in your own heart this "great joy" over the forgiveness of your sins and over God's gift of eternal life through His Son.