

**THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE**

Luke 2:8-20

**Intro:** This morning I am concluding the short series of messages on the birth of Christ that I have been giving to you each Sunday morning since Thanksgiving. And my emphasis has been on the names and titles given to our Lord in five specific events. Four out of the five have involved angels.

The first was the time when the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias to tell him that his wife Elisabeth would conceive and bear a son whose name was to be John. Fourteen times their son is called, "John the Baptist" in Matthew (6 times), Mark (4 times), and Luke (4 times), but not at all in John. He got this title because baptism was a major part of his ministry. He even baptized the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord entered into His public ministry. Anyway, we considered the angel Gabriel's message to Zacharias in the first message.

In the second message we considered Gabriel's message to Mary, telling her that before she was married should would conceive and bear a son, whose Name would be Jesus. Her child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, and would be called "the Son of God."

Next, on the third Sunday, we took up the passage in Matthew 1 where Mary's pregnancy was explained to Joseph. He had thought that he would break his engagement with her because he could only assume that she had been unfaithful to him. But after the angel explained what was happening (we assume that this was also the angel Gabriel), Joseph believed the angel, married Mary, but did not treat her as his wife until after the baby Jesus was born.

On the fourth Sunday, which was last Sunday, we took up the prophecy of Zacharias after his son, John, was born. Those of you who were here will agree with me when I say that his prophecy contained some marvelous titles which he gave by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we come to the familiar story of the angel who appeared to the shepherds who were taking care of their sheep, and the angel's purpose was to tell them about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. This particular angel is not named, but I think that we are safe in assuming that it was again the angel Gabriel who earlier had spoken to Zacharias and to Mary, and, we assume, to Joseph.

My purpose this morning is to focus attention on verses 8 through 20 of

Luke 1, but as we begin I want to point out one very interesting fact about the circumstances under which our Lord was born into this world. And in this we must recognize:

## **I. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD (Luke 2:1-7).**

Most of you will remember that God the Holy Spirit had revealed to the OT prophet Micah that Christ, the Messiah, would be born in Bethlehem. We find that prediction in Micah 5:2. Let me read it for you.

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

But the problem was that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth which was some 75 or 80 miles north of Bethlehem. Bethlehem was and is located about five miles south of Jerusalem. And so what did God do to stand behind His promise that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem?

He did this: *He moved upon the heart of Caesar Augustus, the ruler of the Roman Empire, at the time of its greatest expansion, to decide at that very time to have the people throughout the Empire to return to the place of their birth to register for the purpose of being taxed.*

It was almost 1,000 years before our Lord was born that the Holy Spirit directed Solomon to write these words:

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will (Prov. 21:1).

Our Lord was born when the Roman Empire was at its zenith. And to fulfill a 700 year old prophecy, the Lord moved upon the heart of Caesar Augustus to give a decree that would bring Joseph and Mary to the city of David, and all of the time Caesar thought he was doing this "on his own."

Now this ought to be for our encouragement. If the Lord moved upon the heart of the greatest monarch on earth in those days, and He is unchanging, then He is able to do the same today. We are only conscious of how that decree affected Joseph and Mary, and ultimately the birth of our Lord, but it undoubtedly true that what God did then was the working out of His plans in countless other people. So God is working out His plans in Washington, D. C. in these days. It is not in the hands of the Republicans, nor of the Democrats, nor of the President, nor of the President's friends. God is working all things out according to His own will. So it will do a lot more good to be praying to our God in the matchless Name of our Lord Jesus Christ than it will to be writing our senators, or anyone else. Let us place our hope in the Lord. He is working all things out according to His

own will. He is not concerned about poles, nor about the will of the people. He is concerned about His own will, His own glory, and the fulfillment of His own purposes.

And so the Lord was born in Bethlehem in the lowliest of circumstances. Both she and Joseph were of the royal family of Israel, but no place of honor was given to them. They had to make their bed among the animals. And notice that Mary had no help in the birth of her Baby because “she... wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.” She was the mother of the Baby Jesus, and she immediately had to care for all of His needs. Talk about sanitation! There was none there where the Lord Jesus was born *except that which the Father in heaven sovereignly provided for His Son.*

Now let us go on with the Scripture passage which is before us.

## **II. THE SHEPHERDS (Luke 2:8).**

Suddenly the scene changes, and we are transported outside of the city into what is called, “the field.” And we find a group of shepherds “keeping watch over their flock by night.” They were guarding their flock just as the Father in heaven was guarding His flock. How fitting it was that shepherds, lowly shepherds, all unnoticed by the world, would be the first to view the infant Jesus Who would declare Himself to be “the good Shepherd. We will learn more about these shepherds as we come to the message of the angels who appeared to them.

## **III. THE ANGEL AND HIS MESSAGE (Luke 2:9-12).**

Accustomed to the total quiet of the night, it must have been even that much more startling to the shepherds for the angel of the Lord to appear before them, and to begin speaking. It is very apparent that this angel was sent specifically and directly to these particular shepherds.

The words “came upon them” shows how suddenly all of this began to take place. And the suddenness of the angel’s appearance was intensified by the fact that “the glory of the Lord shone round about them.” This speaks of the very presence of the Father. No one has ever been able to see the Father, but many have looked upon His glory, for example, as it appeared to the children of Israel in the wilderness. The light around the shepherds on that night was greater than a million halogen lights lighting up the sky. It must have been almost blinding to the shepherds. This was the most important moment that those shepherds had ever experienced! It was their appointment with God Himself. We can understand why it

caused the shepherds to be afraid.

Gabriel's first words to Zacharias had been, "Fear not." His first words to the virgin Mary had been, "Fear not." His first words to Joseph had been, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not." And now he speaks the same words to the shepherds: "Fear not." But in each case, instead of producing fear, the angel of the Lord carried the news that the believers in Israel had been waiting for for hundreds of years. The prophetic clock which seemed to have stopped, was ticking again and bringing to the people of God the news which they had waited for, and which they were expecting to see fulfilled.

The message of the angel was described as "good tidings of great joy." The words "I bring...good tidings" is the translation of the verb which means *to preach the Gospel*. It is the verb which is associated in the NT to *the good news of salvation*. And that good news would produce in the hearts of those shepherd, "great joy." Wherever the good news about Jesus Christ has gone, it has produced "great joy" in the hearts of those who have received it. In fact, there is no joy comparable to the joy of salvation!

But the angel did not say that everybody would be happy about it. We know that the scribes and Pharisees and the Sadducees hated it—at least most of them did. The angel said, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." And then he added, not "which shall be to all people," but which shall be added to all the people."

We have been learning in our study of Ephesians in the Tuesday Bible Class that the doctrine of election was to the Apostle Paul, not a subject for controversy, and certainly not a subject for debate, *but a subject for praise!* And once you see it in the Word of God, as many of you have said, *you begin to see it everywhere in Scripture! And here it is in the message of the angel.* The Gospel has not been a message of "great joy to all people," unless you translate that the word "all" so often means, *all kinds of*. But the definite article "the" means *a particular group of people, those who have been appointed by God for salvation*. Herod certainly did not rejoice in it. When the wise men did not return to tell him where they

had found the baby Jesus, we read this in Matt. 2:16-18,

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Concerning the wise men, on the other hand, we are told that “when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy”(Matt. 2:10)..

You see, when we speak of *the elect* we are talking about people like Zacharias and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary, the shepherds and the wise men. And that is confirmed in the case of the shepherds because the angel went on to say in Luke 2:11, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

In spite of the fact that the religion of the Jews had deteriorated terribly by the time the Lord Jesus Christ was born, God had His elect people who were waiting for “the consolation of Israel,” as we are told Simeon was in Luke 2:25.

So, if you were to ask, “Why did the angel of the Lord appear to the shepherds we are reading about in this passage?”, the answer is, “Because they were shepherds chosen of God to inherit by faith the salvation that was to come through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, as most of you know, my purpose in going through the passages I have chosen for the five Sundays we have been considering events which led up to and followed the birth of Jesus Christ – my purpose has been to pay particular attention to the Names and Titles that were given to our Lord. In this passage we have three, and they are all here in verse 11:

- 1) A Savior.
- 2) Christ.
- 3) The Lord.

In some ways this will be a review of what we have already learned, but perhaps we will see some added light on the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **A. “A Savior” (Luke 2:11).**

This is the great work for which the Lord Jesus Christ came. The fathers of Israel were given the promise of a Savior. The prophets of the OT gave many details concerning the Savior. But none could save except God, the Son. He alone was without sin, and therefore He alone had not sins for which He must die. But He died to “save His people from their sins,” as

the angel told Joseph.

Adam Clarke, in his commentary, describes this word as meaning “to make safe, to deliver, preserve, to make alive.” And he quoted another writer who added, “The word properly denotes such a Saviour as perfectly frees us from all evil and danger, and is the author of perpetual salvation.”

This word sets before us the primary reason for the coming of the Son of God into the world. Man, because of his sin, is under divine judgment, and unable to do anything about it. There is nothing worse than to fall under the judgment of God, and yet man is so defiled and ruined and trapped by his sin, that he will never, apart from the grace of God, turn to God for help. And so it is in the hands of God as to who will be saved. We all know that. None of us who knows the Lord would dare to take credit for our own salvation. We say that the Lord showed us our need. He showed us our utter helplessness. But He also showed us the Savior, and He gave us the faith to put our trust in the Savior. He is the One Who has delivered us from divine judgment. And He is the One Who keeps us after He saves us, preserving us and protecting us from every form of evil. And, coming to the earth as a Man, and by His death, He “became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb. 5:9).

As our Savior, He did not do part of the work of salvation, and then leave the rest for us to do. He is the Savior. I trust that you can say today, “He is my Savior.” He saves us from the terrible judgment awaiting all who do not look to Christ, and to Him alone, for their salvation. As people used to say so often, “Jesus saves, and He keeps, and He satisfies.” He saves us and He keeps us saves, and He brings into our lives a satisfaction, a joy, a peace which no one else can possibly give us.

But He is also:

### **B. “Christ” (Luke 2:11).**

This means the same is *Messiah*. Christ is from the Greek, and Messiah is from the Hebrew. Unger called this “the official title of our Lord. He is *the Anointed One*. Who anointed Him? God did. God anointed Him to do what He has done. He came to do the will of the Father. He is the One spoken of prophetically all through the OT as the coming Redeemer. He alone could satisfactorily carry on the work of salvation.

We hear various ideas from different people as to how people can get right with God. But the important thing is to find out what God thinks about all of those other ways. And it can truthfully be said that there is only one

way to be sure that our sins are forgiven, and that is through the One Whom the Father appointed to do that work. It is only of Jesus Christ that the Father has ever said, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Therefore, don't look for salvation in any other place. It is not in a church. It is not in good works. It is only in the One Whom God has anointed to do the work of a Savior. Cf. John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. Jesus Christ is the complete Savior, and the only Savior.

But we also have here in our text that Jesus Christ is:

### C. "The Lord" (Luke 2:11).

As I have pointed out before, this means that the Lord continued to be the Lord in every sense of the word after He became Man just as He had been Lord before He became a Man. And with this title comes the idea that He is a *Sovereign Lord*. He is a Lord Who is all-powerful. He is omnipotent! He is greater than any of His creatures; He is greater than all of His creatures combined. He is the One with supreme authority. In Psalm 2:2-5 we read these words:

- 2       The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,
- 3       Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.
- 4       He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.
- 5       Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

And it is because Jesus is the Lord that He will save all whom He intends to save. When He calls, we come. His work at Calvary's Cross was not in vain. He purchased us at the Cross, and resist though we may, ultimately the Lord wins our hearts, and we joyfully come to Him.

The affairs of the world are not in the hands of the Clintons, nor the House of Representatives, nor the Senate, nor the Supreme Court, nor the Blairs, nor the Husseins, nor the leaders of any of the other nations of the earth. Only Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord right now. And some day He will make that very clear to every person who has ever lived.

In Isa. 40, verses 15 and 17 we read these words:

- 15       Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.

17 All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

King David of Israel prayed long ago this prayer found at the end of Psalm 19:

19 Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight.

20 Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah (Psa. 9:19-20).

How that is needed today! Instead, we deify man, and ignore the Lord. How thankful to God you and I should be if we understand that Jesus is the Savior, and the Christ, and the Lord!

**Concl:** What is the conclusion to this wonderful and true story?

Suddenly there were many angels who appeared praising God, and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

We are not told at this point that the shepherds were afraid and fearful. But when the angels had departed, they determined that they would go to Bethlehem to see what had come to pass, which the Lord had made known to them. They went, and they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus Who was lying in a manger.

After that they could not keep quiet about what they had seen and heard. People marveled at what they said, and even dear Mary, who was also still learning, “kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, “glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.”

This was not fantasy, but true history. Make sure that you know that Jesus is the Savior, Christ, and the Lord. If you do, worship Him.