

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE FOR THE SHEPHERDS

Luke 2:8-12

Intro: Today I have planned to speak both morning and evening from the same passage: Luke 2:8-14. This morning we will look at the message which the angel of the Lord gave to the shepherds which is found in verses 8 through 12. Tonight, the Lord willing, we will consider verses 13 and 14 where we are given the song which the heavenly host of angels sang after the angel of the Lord had delivered his message.

If my memory serves me correctly (and I believe it does) verses 8 through 14 were the first passage of Scripture that I committed to memory as a child. It has always been the first passage that I think about when I think about the birth of our Lord. I asked Kelly to read the first twenty verses of this second chapter of Luke so we would have the context fresh in our minds as we look today at verses 8 through 14.

In preparation for this I would like to remind you of the sequence of events which led up to this appearance of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds as they were taking care of their sheep.

Probably most of you know that between the conclusion of the OT and the beginning of the NT there was a period of approximately four hundred years during which time there was no fresh revelation from God – at least none that was to be a part of the written Word of God. God was certainly taking care of His people all of that time, and His people would have gained support and understanding from the OT Scriptures, but there was no prophet during that time, and so no new prophetic writing.

The silence was broken one day when, according to Luke 1 the angel Gabriel appeared to the priest Zacharias, to tell him that his wife Elisabeth would bear him a son who was to be named John.

This was followed six months later when the same angel, Gabriel, appeared to a virgin in Nazareth to tell her that she would have a Son. She was not married at the time, and so she asked the angel how such a thing could possibly be. He told her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her so that the Child which would be born would be called “the Son of God.” This also is given to us in Luke 1.

At the time Mary was engaged to a man by the name of Joseph. When he

discovered that Mary was going to have a baby, he was amazed and saddened, and could only come to the conclusion that she had been unfaithful to him. He was preparing to break the engagement when the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and told him what really was going on. He believed the angel, married Mary, but did not fulfill the marriage relationship until after the baby Jesus was born. All of that, as we saw last Sunday morning is in the latter part of Matthew, chapter 1.

As we come to Luke 2, we see how Joseph and Mary were compelled by a government regulation to leave their home in Nazareth, and to go down to Bethlehem to be taxed. While they were there, the baby Jesus was born. Then following verse 7 we are suddenly told about the shepherds and the appearance of the angel of the Lord to them. They were frightened by the angel's appearance because nothing like this had ever happened to them before. They obviously were men of faith, men who held on to the hope that the Messiah would come. The angel appeared to tell them that their hope had been fulfilled. That brings us to the message of the angel which I want to consider with you today.

But before we get to what the angel said, let me point out to you how this appearance to the shepherds was an indication of:

I. THE STRANGE WAYS OF THE LORD.

If there had been a group of men who believed that this event was the fulfillment of a promise given by God before Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden of Eden, and repeated from time to time with more and more details by different prophets, do you think that we would read concerning Joseph and Mary that "there was no room for them in the inn"? And if you had been planning how the announcement would have been made to the people of Israel in that day, would you have chosen to reveal it first to a group of shepherds whose names we do not even know? It almost seems like God was trying to conceal this truth from the world instead of letting people know that prophecy had been fulfilled, and that the Messiah had been born. How humbling for our Lord and for Mary His mother, and for Joseph, that our Lord was born among cows and His precious body laid in a manger! Doesn't this strike you as being very, very strange?

Yes, it was, but not if you remember some of the passages that were written especially by Isaiah the prophet. For example, we read in Isa. 55:8-9,

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Earlier in his prophecy Isaiah had written this about our Lord in later life:

1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Isa. 53:1-3).

I don't believe for a moment that there was anything unpleasant or offensive about our Lord's appearance, but Isaiah said that people were not attracted to the Lord by His physical appearance. He said, "And when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." The Lord Jesus had a body prepared for Him by the Father. If you had been in the Father's place, wouldn't you have made the Lord the handsomest, the most physically attractive Man Who ever lived?

But the Lord was born in obscurity. Raised in Nazareth in the home of a carpenter. And He really had no public life until He was thirty years of age. It all seems very strange, doesn't it? When a son in the royal family of England is born, especially if he is in line to become a king, everything about him day after day that the press can learn is fed not only to the people of England, but for people all over the world. Do you think that the Lord's birth and His early life would have been different if he had been born in our day? I can assure you that it would have been just the same way that it was two thousand years ago! One thing every Christian has to learn, and keep learning year after year, is that God's ways are not like ours. His ways are perfect, said David in Psalm 18; our ways are anything but perfect.

Our Lord humbled Himself to become a baby and to grow into manhood. He lived a humble life. Instead of coming to be served, He came to serve. Most people never thought of Him as any more than a man, although from His miracles they considered Him a very unusual man. And the Lord's humility did not stop with His birth and His life, but His humility extended to His death, and such a death as death by crucifixion. Even after He

was raised from the dead, He did not appear to anybody but to His own people, those who believed on Him. We would have organized a parade, and had Him ride through every street in Jerusalem to show that He was alive. But instead He spent forty days with His own disciples, and then He ascended back to His Father in heaven without the world knowing anything about it. Very strange, isn't it? And yet, those of us who know the Lord will say that it was all amazingly wonderful. According to Scripture these lowly shepherds were among the first, if not the very first, to know about the birth of our Lord!

Think about this often when you read the Gospel records, as well as when you have questions about the Lord's dealings in your life. And I will do the same.

But let us go on to the message of the angel of the Lord, which very likely was Gabriel.

II. THE NATURE OF THE MESSAGE (Luke 2:10).

"I bring . . . good tidings" – all four words are the translation of one word in the Greek, and it amounts to *I bring good news!* It is the familiar word for preaching the Gospel. That is what the Gospel is; it is good news. And we will see why in just a moment.

But notice another word that we can easily read over. It is the word "you." Actually it would be better translated, *to you*, and the *you* is plural, meaning that the angel was including all of the shepherds.

Then the angel went on to say that this good news would bring to them "great joy." There is very little in this world to bring us real, lasting joy. But the angel assured these lowly shepherds that the message they were about to hear would bring them "great joy."

But was it to be just for them? No. The angel went on to say, "which shall be for all people." The KJ translators overlooked one word here that is in the Greek text. It is the little word "the." So it should read, "which shall be to all the people." This means a particular group of people.

I pointed out a moment ago that the angel said that he was bringing this message *to them*, "to you." And now we come to the expression "to all the people."

Knowing what we do about the teaching of Scripture in other places, we can say that the angel came to these shepherds because they were among those chosen by God for salvation. And that “all the people” meant that this good news was for all others, Jews and Gentiles alike, wherever they might be in the whole world, who were chosen by God for salvation. You and I call it good news, but the world doesn’t consider it that way. The world puts the Gospel on the same level as the teaching of Mohammed, or Buddha, or any other religious leader. They are all alike to most men. But to those of us who know the Lord it is not only “good news,” but it is *the only* “good news.”

But we are not through. The angel just kept adding good words to the good news. He said it would bring “great joy.” Not just “joy,” but “great joy”!

Now anyone who was reading the angel’s message with any understanding at all would ask, “What is this good news?” Verse 11 gives the message itself.

III. THE MAIN MESSAGE (Luke 2:11).

(Read v. 11.)

“Unto you” – there is that word again, to you and to all others who like you have been chosen by God.

What had happened that very day in Bethlehem directly involved them. This is the closest we can come to as the reason why the angel of the Lord appeared to these shepherds. They were the elect of God.

What did the Lord choose them for? Let’s let the Apostle Paul answer that question for us. You will find his answer in 2 Thess. 2:13 and 14, which tell us this:

13 But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

Now if these shepherds had been chosen for salvation, and if you and I

have been chosen for salvation, what do we need? We need a Savior! We need a savior because we are sinners, and being sinners we are under the judgment of God. Furthermore, we can't save ourselves. We know that. No church can save us. No other person or group of people can save us because we are all in the same condition. So God sent His Son Who has no sin, that we might be saved by Him.

Interestingly the only other time the word Savior appears in the Gospel of Luke is in Luke 1:47. And do you know who used it there? It was none other than the one whose by God to be the mother of our Lord, the virgin Mary. This is what she said (and you can see it for yourself). "And my Spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior." Mary did not believe that she had been immaculately conceived. She knew herself to be a sinner in need of a Savior.

The angel told the shepherds who the Savior was: "which is Christ the Lord." Jesus was still the Lord even though He had become a human being. And as the Christ, the Anointed One, He had been chosen by the Father to come into this world to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all of those who would believe on Him, all of "the people."

When a person realizes that he, or she, is a sinner, there is no better news that he or she can hear than that Jesus Who was born in a stable in Bethlehem, laid in a manger, was the Son of God in human flesh Who came to die for sinners. And there is no other Savior! Nobody can do enough good to atone for their sins. No amount of money can buy salvation. No amount of penance or repentance can remove a single sin. But the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin. See 1 John 1:7.

But there is still another part to the message:

IV. THE ANGEL TOLD THE SHEPHERD'S WHERE THEY COULD FIND THE SAVIOR (Luke 1:12).

Isn't it interesting that the angel told the shepherds where they could find the Lord even before they had time to ask for the directions? (Read verse 12.)

The Holy Spirit is still doing that today. We don't seek the Lord until He seeks us. Then the Holy Spirit brings us into contact with people who can tell us about the Lord, or, in many cases, the Spirit leads us to the Word,

and there we find the Savior.

Read from verse 15 on to verse 20 and you will see what the shepherds did. They “came with haste,” Luke tells us, and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus in the manger where Mary had laid Him. And once they had seen the Lord, they told everybody they could about this child and why He had come into the world.

Concl: As you have listened to this message today, the message of the angel of the Lord, you have had one of three reactions:

1) Many of you, in fact, most of you, find your hearts overflowing with praise that God in His grace sent His Son to be your Savior, and you can say with the mother of our Lord, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.”

2) Some of you, I fear, may be able to leave this building today, and completely forget everything that you have heard. I do fear for you because you are making the worst, the most tragic decision it is possible for anyone to make.

Three of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) tell us about a Jewish tax collector by the name of Levi, or Matthew, who was saved. He wrote the first Gospel. After he was saved, he prepared a feast and invited a lot of unsaved publicans to have dinner with the Lord. The Pharisees were very critical of the Lord for eating with publicans and sinners. But the Lord explained His reason for eating with them in these words:

31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31-32).

What did the Lord mean by that? He meant that the Pharisees did not know that they were sick with sin, sick unto death, eternal death. The publicans knew they had needs, and so they had come to the Lord. They had come to the Savior Who could heal their sick souls.

3) But perhaps some of you who have listening to the Word today, have found your heart drawn to the Lord. And perhaps even before I ask you to, you have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. I trust that is true of any of you who came here today not knowing Jesus Christ as your Savior. If you have trusted the Lord, I hope that you will tell me you have as you leave today. If you find your heart drawn to the Lord, but you haven't trusted in Him, I trust that the Lord will bring you to Himself before this day ends. May the will of God be done in all of us, is my prayer as I close this service today.

Luke 2:8-12 (8)