

GOD'S ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE SHEPHERDS

Luke 2:8-20

Intro: This is the third and final Christmas Message I am giving this year. The first of the three was, “God’s Announcement to Mary,” who was told that she was to be the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. My second message was, “God’s Announcement to Joseph,” who, at the time, was what we would call, engaged to be married to Joseph. Joseph had discovered that she was pregnant, and the only conclusion that he could come to was that she had been unfaithful to him. But he loved her so much that he could not think of embarrassing her publicly, and so he was going to break the engagement privately. But at that moment the angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him that Mary had not been unfaithful, but that the child she was carrying had been conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. At that moment Joseph seemed to remember an ancient prophecy which predicted that a virgin would conceive a son by the Holy Spirit, and that the child who would be born would be called, Immanuel, which means *God with us*. So Joseph proceeded with the marriage, but had no marital relationship with her until her child was born. Both Mary and Joseph had been told by the angel that His Name was to be, Jesus, which means, *Savior*.

The angel’s appearance to Mary is recorded for us in Luke, chapter 1. His appearance to Joseph is in Matthew, chapter 1. The record of Jesus’ birth is given at the beginning of Luke 2, and then is followed by the angel’s appearance to the shepherds. This is the part of this whole series of events with which most people are familiar. One of our Christmas carols was written about this. But I wonder how many people have sung the carol who have no idea that the history of the event they have sung about, is recorded in the Bible as a true event in history.

Now let us look at this passage and seek to glean from it some lessons that will provoke us into thinking these events which took place a little over 2,000 year ago.

First, I want you to notice in this passage the evidence of the sovereignty of God. This great truth is not only clearly taught in Scripture, but we have numerous illustrations of it in the Word. But I want to concentrate on this great truth as we see it concerning the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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One well-known prophecy of the coming of the Messiah whom we now know is Jesus, the Son of Mary, is that He was to be born in Bethlehem. But Joseph and Mary lived in northern Israel in the town of Nazareth, and Bethlehem was just five miles from Jerusalem. The Scripture that tells us that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, is found in the OT prophecy of Micah, chapter 5, and verse 2. Listen to what it tells us:

2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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).

How were Mary and Joseph to get to Bethlehem. Well, just at that time, as we are told in the opening words of Luke 2 a decree was issued by the most powerful leader of the world in those days, that all within his Empire, the Roman Empire, had to return to the city where they were born. We can be sure that Caesar had no idea that his decree was going to cause Joseph and Mary to leave Nazareth, about the time that our Lord was to be born, to leave Nazareth, and make the trip down to Bethlehem where he had been born. It came at a time when it would have been the most difficult for Mary to travel because she was about to give birth to her baby. But there is was! God moved on the heart of Pharaoh just about the time that Mary was to give birth, and told them to return, to what in their case was Bethlehem. Now this was no accident. It did not just happen that Caesar gave this decree at this time. It was the hand of Almighty God moving to confirm a prophecy which had been given to Micah about 700 years before this event. The Emperor had no idea that he was being used by God to bring about conditions in the lives of Joseph and Mary which would make it necessary for them to go by law to the very place where Micah had predicted that the Messiah would be born. How this should cause us to marvel at the power, the authority, of the Lord God in moving upon all of the people of his Empire so that Joseph and Mary would be in Bethlehem, not Nazareth, when the baby Jesus was to be born. What encouragement this should be for us to see that even Caesar Augustus was moved to make a decree that would lead directly to the fulfillment of the Word of God! That is why many have been led to recognize the history is His Story. God has moved in all history to assure that His will is ultimately going to be accomplished, and those of us who know the Lord, should add, that it is all to be for the glory of God.

This is the first thing that I want you to see in this passage. Now let me move on to another amazing fact about the birth of the Lord Jesus which I spent some time on in my first message.

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It has to do with the social standing of those who were involved in the coming of our Lord to the earth, and also the very circumstances of the Lord's birth. We have seen that although royal blood was in the family of Joseph and Mary, yet at this time in history that amounted to nothing. Israel was in captivity. Joseph evidently was a carpenter because that was the trade that our Lord practiced. Nazareth was one of the least desirable places in which to live. In John 1 when Philip told Nathanael that they had found the Messiah, Nathanael responded by saying, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? (John 1:46). There was a large contingent of the Roman army there, and the city was known for its wickedness. So after our Lord was born, Joseph and Mary took him back to Nazareth, and that is where he grew up. So it was not any advantage to our Lord that He grew up in Nazareth.

And then as I mentioned before, when Joseph and Mary got to Bethlehem, so many other people were there that "there was no room for them at the inn." And so the Lord was born among cattle, and was placed in a manger which was the first bed that He had. You would think that the One Who some day will be King of kings, and Lord of lords, would at least have been born in more desirable circumstances.

And then as we come to our text this morning we find that His birth was not announced to Caesar, nor to men of high positions in the government, but to lowly shepherds whose names are not even given to us. Everything about the birth and life of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, led from one place of humility to a lower place. It was humbling for Him to be born as a human being, to take the place of a servant, and to be such in His appearance that people could not distinguish Him from any other man, and so would take Him to be just a man and no more. And His humiliation reached its lowest point when He suffered death as the worst of criminals by crucifixion.

You probably remember that in Philippians chapter 2 Paul speaking of the humility of Christ, which in His case was often more than humility; it was humiliation. And he exhorted us to be of the same mind, to have the same attitude toward ourselves that the Lord had about Himself. Our Lord's humility was greater than any other person's has ever been because He came from the greatest heights, and descended to the lowest depths. But in the providence of God it is going to lead to the highest possible exaltation. And the beginning of His exaltation was His resurrection from the dead.

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Now I want to spend the rest of the time this morning taking a good look at these shepherds. We are not even told how many there were. There could have been only two, or there could have been more than that. I doubt if there were more than two or three, but that is just my opinion. I know that they had to leave some to care for the sheep while they went in search of the child who had been born.

First, let's consider what the angel said to them. They were obviously frightened by what took place. They had obviously never experienced anything like this before, and there is no record in Scripture that they ever experienced anything like this again. But why did the Lord appear to them?

I think that the answer to that question is, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." The angel did not say, "Unto me . . ." The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us in chapter 2, verse 16, that He did not come as an angel, but He came to be the Savior of men. So He came as a Man. But we know that He did not come to save all men, but He came to save those whom the Father had chosen, and whom the Father had given unto Him. So I believe that there is a world of truth in the angel's words, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord." I believe that God had chosen these shepherds to be numbered among the redeemed, and the angel simply told them that the One you have trusted, and have been looking for, has come. What a moment that must have been for those shepherds! It is not recorded that they said even a word to the angel who spoke to them. He spoke, and they listened. And what a message it was that they brought to them. He didn't speak long, but when he had finished his message, a large angelic host, probably a choir (although it does not say that they sang), but they appeared out of nowhere, and said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The original ASV renders it, "Men in whom He is well pleased," or "Men of good pleasure." The NASB translates this, "with whom He is pleased." Cf. Philippians 2:13. This fits in with verse 2:10 in our text where the reading should be "the people," instead of just "people."

So we are reminded again that God's ways are not our ways. I think we would have made great arrangements for the birth and life of our Lord, finding some way to let the whole world know that He had come. What could those shepherds do to give Him the welcome that we probably believe that He should have received? The last verse of our text, Luke

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1:20 tells us that the shepherds gave the Lord exactly what He wanted to receive. (Read.) Everything was done exactly according to the will of God.

But let me point out another interesting fact in this passage. What did they do with the message they had been given? Our answer is given in verse 15. They immediately decided to go into Bethlehem to “see this thing which the Lord hath made known to us.” They did not go to prove what the angel said, but to “see” what the angel had told them about the child. They didn’t go to confirm the message; they went to see what the angel had said that had taken place. There is a difference. They did not doubt the angel’s message, but they could not be satisfied until they saw the Lord.

Now if we want to see the Lord, we don’t go to Bethlehem, do we? I have been to Bethlehem, and I didn’t see the Lord there. I heard a lot about Him, but I didn’t see Him. No, we don’t go to Bethlehem, but we go to the Word. That is where He is revealed to us. And that is where you can expect true believers to go. The Lord Jesus said while He was here on earth, “Search (which can be either a statement of fact, or a command) the Scriptures, for in them ye think that ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39).

The shepherds going to Bethlehem to see the Lord are like believers today who go to the Bible to learn more about our Savior. We “see” Him there with the eye of faith. And we can’t see too much. The more we see of Him, the more we want to see. The more we know of Him, the more we want to know.

And yet isn’t it amazing that with all that has been made known in the world about the Word of God, and what it tells us about God, that in every generations there are millions upon millions of people who have never read a word in the Bible, and many in our day that have never even seen a Bible. And with all that people spent on everything else, some today do not even own a copy of the Bible. We are going to know that something very, very good is going on in our world when there is a real interest among people in wanting to know what is in the Bible. The shepherds, at least for the moment, forgot their sheep, and forgot to get anything to eat, but they unanimously said, “Let’s go right now to see this that the angel has made known to us. You and I don’t need to go to Bethlehem to see the Lord. He is to be found in this marvelous book

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which has come to us from God.

But there are two other things that I want to point out about those shepherds. After they had gone and seen the baby Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, then read in verses 17 and 18 what they did. (Read.)

When is the last time that you spoke to someone about the Lord? I think that what is strongly implied here, is that if we have seen the Lord, and continue to find Him in the Word of God, we are simply going to have to tell others what we have seen. And the result was that other people, the people who heard the shepherds, “wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” Their interest was aroused also in what had taken place, and you can be sure that some of those who were made to marvel at the baby Jesus, are people that we are going to meet when we get to heaven.

One of the most touching things about this whole passage, is found in verse 19. It has to do with Mary, the mother of our Lord. I have told you that I don't believe she was God, but I believe that she was a very godly lady. But she was also a learner like you and I are. And this means that the shepherds had told her about the appearance of the angel to them, and what he had said. And it was over this that she “pondered.” The word means that she was bringing together in her mind all that she was continuing to learn about her baby. The shepherds had a real ministry with Mary, the mother of our Lord. No mother ever before her, or ever after her, had such a wonderful child.

Let us be like the shepherds, and like Mary. The Apostle Peter said it the best way in the last verse of his second epistle:

18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever.
Amen (2 Peter 3:18).

Keep reading your Bible, always looking for the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we will continue to be like the shepherds as we see them in Luke 2:20. (Read.)