

## THE ANGELIC ANNOUNCEMENT Luke 2:1-20

12-24-15

Luke 2: **1-20**

*Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." 15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us. 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.*

Now we in the Christian church do not slavishly observe days and seasons, but I think it is okay for us to have our Christmas and Easter celebrations. But when we celebrate these is of no importance. We have some idea that Easter probably was in the spring of the year, around the time we remember it, but concerning Christmas we have no idea when Christ was born. Oh, speculations are made and suggestions given, but I bet you could find 365 different views on the birthday of Christ. May 6 is as good as December 25. But this is the day we have picked for the remembrance and so I feel great freedom in saying to you now, *for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* I stand here this morning not as a prophet to denounce sin (there will be other days for that). Today I come to you as a herald with this royal announcement. This was the announcement of the unnamed angel to the unnamed band of shepherds some 2000 years ago, but I can think of nothing more fit for our meditations today. For brethren, consider what a proper understanding of that great announcement can do for your life.

First of all, it can cast out fear. The angel appears suddenly to these shepherds in the night. And they react in a manner no different than other men of old who saw angels. Like Abraham, Gideon, Jacob – they got scared. Whenever in the Bible an angel appears men draw back in fear. Now, this could puzzle those whose idea of angels is taken from modern TV shows or medieval art where the angels appear as chubby-little infant-like creatures with curly hair and feather wings. What fear could they cause? Those painted angels are more likely to say, “There, there” instead of “fear not!”

But real angels, however they look, are frightening to men. And this angel in particular was surrounded verse nine says “with the shining glory of God.” Here is an angel, no doubt, of great honor, perhaps he or she was grander still than Gabriel. Maybe he is the chief of the seraphs or the captain of those angels whose sacred responsibility it is to surround the Majesty Himself and cry, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts.” From his proximity to God and his presence in the throne room, something of the divine grandeur and glory of God must have become attached to his person. If, after 40 days and 40 nights with the Lord on Mt. Sinai, the skin of Moses’ face shone with a residual reflection of the glory of God, so much so that all Israel was afraid to come near him – how much more must God’s glory stream from the countenance of an angel who is ever in the very presence of the King?!

The shepherds understandably were afraid, because the glory of God is always a threat to men who are sinners. Not that these shepherds were especially evil, in fact, I think it reasonable that these may have been of especially fine character. But still, with all men, they are sinners and hence the glory of God is to them a danger because of their guilt. Nevertheless, the angel says, “Fear not” and why? *10 for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.* “Fear not” because the news which he brings is just the kind of news that eliminates fear. It is precisely news of a Savior, news of one who comes to abolish fear by abolishing its cause, which is sin.

But Jesus Himself can be frightening. So much so that the announcement of the angels could have been “There has come to you a great fear.” In His day, Jesus scared people, just read the gospels and you will see that clearly. In the Christmas story of Matthew we learned that the birth of Jesus brought fear to King Herod. So fearful of Jesus was Herod that he ordered all the baby boys in Bethlehem to be killed. You remember that? As a man Jesus scared people too. He was a great source of fear. In Luke 5 Jesus heals a paralyzed man and look how folks responded. **26** *They were all struck with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen remarkable things today.”* In Luke 7 Jesus raises a man from the dead and in verse 16 we read **16** *Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, “A great prophet has*

*arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!* You see, they recognized that Jesus had the power of God and that frightened them. The presence of God is a scary thing. Some of you may be familiar with the children's books by CS Lewis's called *The Narnia Chronicles*, which feature the character of Aslan, the Narnian Lion-King, who represents Jesus in the stories. And when one of the children in the stories encountered Aslan for the first time he asked this question: "Is He safe?" Remember that? One of the great lines in all of literature came next. "No, he isn't safe, but He's good." ® I have no idea what Jesus will do with you when He gets a hold of you. It may hurt like uh, like, a whole bunch. Jesus has been known to tear us from things as precious as right hand and right eye, but He always brings something better thereafter. You don't control Him. He controls you. He is the Lion, not the kitten. But He is so very good.

Still, some people are too blind to see the goodness. They only see the sovereign power. In Luke 8 Jesus goes to the land of the Gerasenes and he delivers a demon-possessed man and Luke 8:35-37 *The people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. 36 Those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. 37 And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to leave them, for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat and returned.* We've read four times now that Jesus caused fear and yet the angel indicates that His coming should cast out fear. What's the deal? I still say that a proper understanding of the announcement in Luke 2:11 will cast out fear. These people who feared Jesus and asked Him to leave only had a partial understanding of who Jesus was. They know He had had divine powers. They saw in Him the visitation of God, but they did not see in Him the coming of a Savior. But the angel said, *unto you is born this day a Savior.* And it is this realization that casts out fear. The Gerasenes, out of fear, asked Jesus to leave, but look further in Luke 8. Luke 8:38 *the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that he might accompany Him. This* man reacted so differently to Jesus because he saw more than His awesome power, He had experienced His saving love. He realized that Jesus was a Savior and that gave him peace in His presence. Do you realize this? Jesus may be, He is frightening to sinners like you and me. But John 3:17 *God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.* How marvelous! This is a truth indeed to cast out all fear. Unto you is born a Savior and this Savior is none other than God in flesh. A poet has written:

*Till God in human flesh I see,*

*My thoughts no comfort find;  
The holy, just and sacred Three,  
Are terrors to my mind.  
But if Immanuel's face appears,  
My hope, my joy begins;  
His name forbids my slavish fear,  
His grace removes my sin.*

As that poem indicates, not only does a proper understanding of the angelic announcement cast out fear, but, and secondly, it also gives great joy. I will give you three reasons why this birth generates joy. #1 – because of what the child is. Unto you is born this day a teacher? No. Unto you is born this day a revolutionary leader? No. Unto you is born this day a Savior. Now they could have used a great teacher, no doubt. A military leader could bring joy. But what these men and what you and I need most is not a teacher or a guide or a friend, but a Savior. Nothing is more valuable to a sinner because nothing is more needed. If angels came to you with good news, you might think you won a the lottery, but money to a sinner cannot help. You need a Savior.

Savior, Savior, who needs a Savior? Jesus as Savior doesn't get people excited these days. And the reason is that we are living in a sinless society. And people with no sin need no Savior. Now when I say we are a sinless society, I don't mean that we are so in practice, but we are in theory. Over a century ago Dostoevsky said, "Centuries will pass and humanity will proclaim through the mouth of their wisdom and science that there is no crime and no sin – only hunger." Folks, that time is now. The tax-supported high-priests of American Education are drilling it into the minds of a whole generation. There are no absolute rules. What is right is what you choose to call "right" and nobody can say you are wrong. The only absolute is that there are no absolutes and of this we are absolutely certain. In our day, when the concept of sin is a joke, who in the world needs a Savior?

But, if you immerse yourself in the world-view of Holy Scripture, and if you listen to His holy law you will find yourself longing for a Savior like a starving man longs for food. You will be satisfied with nothing else. No ceremonies, no rituals, no sweet words will suffice, you must have a Savior. Furthermore, when you face the realities of death and judgment the whole world will seem to you as rubbish and all that will matter is to have a Savior and to have Him is reason for great joy.

Among the most valuable paintings in the world is Raphael's glorification of the Christ child and His mother. Ten million dollars could not purchase this picture. Yet, if you receive and believe in Jesus you have a blessing that makes \$10 million seem paltry. You have a Savior. And of all that

Jesus is to me – My Shepherd, Master, Guide, Lord, Wisdom, Life – the most precious title of all to a sinner is this one – “Savior.”

The second reason the angelic announcement brings joy is because of who the child is. He is a Savior, Christ the Lord. To these Jewish shepherds those two terms “Christ” and “Lord” were pregnant with meaning. “Christ” – the anointed one, the Messiah. This Babe of Bethlehem is to fulfill all the Old Testament hopes and prophecies. He is the long-awaited coming King of the Jews. And “Lord” means that this child is somehow, in some inconceivable way, one and the same with Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To these Jewish shepherds this amazing truth was clear just from what they heard. If this babe is the Savior He had to be God. Let’s see why. Isaiah 43:**3ab** *For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.* 43:**11** *I, even I, am the LORD, And there is no savior besides Me.* So, if Jesus is a Savior what does that tell you about Him? 45:**15** *Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior!* **21** *there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.* So, if Jesus is a Savior He is either God or a phony. The Shepherds probably knew this. They knew too that when these angels spoke of the Lord, they were talking about the Old Testament God of power and glory. This term *kurios*, “Lord” was the most popular term of that day to refer to God, and Luke had used it in reference to the Creator 15 times already in his gospel. Look at this. Luke 1:**6** *They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.* We then read the same use of the term “Lord” in verse 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 25, 28, 32, 38, 45, 46, 68, and 76. All referring to the Creator with the term “Lord.” So, we come to our text where we read about the glory of the Lord shining around them and the announcement comes in **11** *today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* When the angel calls this Jesus-child “Lord” he is equating Him with God the Almighty. In Luke 2:26 He is called “the Lord’s Christ” and in our text He is just “the Lord” and both are accurate because He is from God and He is God. God has come down to man as a man and so the Shepherd’s and angels rejoiced.

The angels and shepherds rejoice because of what He is and who He is, but also and thirdly, “why He is.” Our text says **11** *today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* “For you” says the angel to the shepherd. What a surprise to this pack of lowly shepherds whose position was hardly respected among men! Yet here God has come to be a Savior “for me?” each of them must have thought. And as those words sank in they increased in joy and excitement. This is the amazing thing. Christ has become a man for you and for me. God gave His

own son for you and for me. Consider that. Consider that next time some man or woman won't give you the time of day. God gave His Son for you. He became a man for you. Consider that next time you get discouraged and feel like a worthless nobody, God became a man, a Savior for you. The next time the devil tries to tell you you're no good quote him this verse. "For me is born a Savior, Christ the Lord." Christian, you need to decide whose opinion about you you are going to believe. Will you believe that arrogant guy at work who treats you like used rags? Or will you believe God who calls you His special treasure? Will you believe Madison Avenue who says that unless you are young, beautiful, well-dressed and drive a fancy car you are a nobody? Or will you believe God who says, "Unto you lowly shepherd, engineer, young mother, retiree, whatever you are, unto you, I give my only begotten Son.

And why did God do it? Cause you deserve it? You know, one of the first and best movies I ever saw is the Sound of Music. It really is a marvelous film, very entertaining and somewhat inspiring, but the theology in it is very unsound. At one point Julie Andrews is singing about her good fortune to be married to Captain Von Trapp and she says *Perhaps I had a wicked childhood. Perhaps I had a miserable youth. But somewhere in my youth or childhood. I must have done something good.* A nun should know better than to say that. The very notion that my present good fortune indicates some merit or worthiness in me is about as contrary to the spirit of the gospel as anything you could suggest. No! We know not to believe that. What does that old hymn say about why God sent His Son? *Out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe, only His great eternal love made my Savior go.* Only HIS love! It's God's love brethren! And you have not grasped at all the magnitude of that love unless you have grasped the unworthiness of its objects. He loves sinners and He loves us whether we are rich or poor, pretty or plain, shepherds or kings. Can you tell yourself that today and believe it? Say this with me, "God loves me." Again, louder this time: "God loves me." Okay fine, but don't let it go to your head. No, please do. Let it go to your head and to your heart and to every fiber of your being. And you know what, God loves failures too. Isn't that good news? God gave His Son as a Savior to those who have failed. For that, I praise God because I am in that group. I have failed morally, vocationally, relationally and at times I look at myself and get nauseated. Some days I get terribly discouraged with Dan Hendley until I remember and say to myself, "*somewhere in my youth or childhood. I must have done something good.*" No, that's not it. I say, "Hey Bud, God loved you when you were His enemy and He still loves you even as His inconsistent, imperfect friend. What a relief!

Now, our thoughts of Christ, whether in the manger or on the cross, if they remind us of anything surely should remind us of this, that we are loved by the only One whose opinion of us really matters. This whole episode with the angels and the baby Jesus and the word of God, I believe left these shepherds stunned by God's love for them. So may we be amazed with his love. May we let our minds bathe in it, bask in its beauty and warmth, delight ourselves in it. And as you understand God's unfailing love for you, your cup will be full and bubbling over with joy.

As the words of the angels sunk into the minds of the shepherds they increased with joy and excitement until one finally spoke up and said, "What are we waiting for? Let's go to Bethlehem and see this child." And so they came in haste and departed with joy, a joy like they had never known before. How shall we speak of that joy, the shepherd's joy and our own? Can we begin to describe it? John R. DeWitt says "it is the triumphant *Te Deum* of the ancient church and of the martyrs. It is the loving praise of Christ which rose from the lips of a Bernard and a Francis. It is the confident shout of the reformers and Handel's Messiah and mighty organs, and great congregations, and glorious choirs and bells, thousands upon thousands of bells – and light and love and goodness and peace and art and poetry, and hymns and family and all the Christmases that have been are or ever will be - - all rolled into one. No, it is still more than that. It is the multitude of the heavenly host and an innumerable company of all the little children of God, young and old, from every time and every place, singing together with a sweetness and beauty to be heard only among those who know Him and have come to worship Him. *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.* No, it is even more than that – immeasurably more than that. The joy we know and have and shall have always is simply this: *For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*"

This announcement, when understood: it casts out fear, it gives great joy. There is one more point to this sermon. It moves us to worship. 20 *The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.* The shepherds praised God and what about the angels? What do the angels do? Play baseball? Not these angels. Fly from cloud to cloud? No no. They worshipped God. 14a *Glory to God in the highest.* The angels worshipped, the shepherds worshipped. Guess what you get to do this Christmas eve? Let's join with the shepherds and with the angels, and let's worship the King.