

PROPHETS & ANGELS PROCLAIMING

Luke 2:1-20

INTRODUCTION: Christmas all about Jesus, but what I like secondly is the Christmas Songs, and stories about how kids look at and enjoy Christmas. Here are a couple of examples I've told before:

"During a school play near London, three six-year-old boys acted out the role of the wise men. As they presented their gifts at the nativity scene, each boy stepped forward and stated what they were offering to Christ. The first held out his arms and said, "Gold." The second boy knelt down and said, "Myrrh." The last boy stepped forward and declared, "Frank sent this."

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"A church group made the rounds to serenade all their homebound members with a strain of Christmas carols. On their return trip to the church for hot chocolate and cookies, one little girl was touched by what she had heard in one of the carols. Although the carolers had sung, ". . . while shepherds watched their flocks by night," this sensitive young child heard something entirely different. While reflecting on that carol she turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, wasn't it nice of those shepherds to wash those sheep before taking them to Jesus?" **While Shepherds Washed Their Flocks, Liz Higgs, 1998, p. 81**

Today we'll focus our attention on the Prophetic and Angelic Proclamations of the Saviors Birth. But first let's look at the circumstances that led up to those.

Luke 2:1-7 *"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."*

The Roman governor had insisted people return to the land of their fathers to register for taxation. You can imagine how busy the roads would have been as people made their way to their appropriate towns. *"There was busy Christmas traffic the 1st Christmas."*

Mary and Joseph had traveled some 75 miles through hill country on the back of a donkey; and what made the journey more strenuous was that Mary was 9 months pregnant. Mary had never known such exhaustion; and this combined with a rough ride upon a donkey's back may have sped up her delivery.

If there are any Mom's here, who went into labor soon after a ride down a very bumpy road, you can understand what this may have been like.

Her labor pains would probably continued to get closer and closer as her time of delivery was near. When they finally saw the lights of the little town of Bethlehem lying ahead, she must have been so relieved!

Oh, how Mary must have longed for a soft bed in the Bethlehem inn. But her condition had caused them to travel at a slower pace than the other traffic making its way to Bethlehem.

So when by arriving later than others, it's not surprising that there was no vacancy at the Bethlehem inn.

And Mary's condition had gotten to the point that she needed to find shelter as quickly as possible, because her baby wasn't waiting any longer.

What do you suppose was going through her mind at that moment?

I know if it had been my wife, Laurie and I, we would have been basket cases. Someone would be blaming the other about leaving too late or making too many pit stops along the way.

But I got to tell you, though Mary was in labor and the lodging situation beyond inadequate, I half expect that Mary and Joseph – knowing that she was carrying the Messiah - felt an unusual peace, a peace that passed their own understanding.

For nine months preceding that hour, their fears concerning this pregnancy had been removed when the angel of the Lord upon appearing to each of them instructed them **not to be afraid**. With that in mind he gave them the joyful news of the special babe within her womb.

So, on that evening in Bethlehem, despite all their difficulties, they knew that everything would be all right—God would see to it. **But they were not the only ones who needed to be comforted after being frightened half to death by angels.**

Verse 8-9 *"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel*

of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, **and they were greatly afraid.**"

In the same way Mary and Joseph were comforted, the angel prepared these shepherds for the glorious proclamation they were bringing them that evening.

Luke 2:10 "Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

I. GOOD TIDINGS – Good news – the Gospel

A. Of Great Joy

Great Joy – Happiness. The whole world is in search of Happiness and Great Joy.

Some one once said,
"If joy or happiness could be bought, we'd be unhappy with the price."

Men have pursued joy in every avenue imaginable. Some have successfully found it while others have not.

**Perhaps it would be easier to describe where joy cannot be found:
It's not found in Unbelief -- Voltaire was a staunch atheist. And he wrote: "I wish I had never been born."**

It's not found in Pleasure -- Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone."

It's not found in Money -- Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying, he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

It's not found in Position and Fame -- Albert Einstein said, "It is strange to be known so universally and yet to be so lonely."

Madonna said, "I won't be happy till I'm as famous as God."

It's not found in Military Glory -- Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent, before he said, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

"Are most people happy? Dennis Wholey, author of Are You Happy? reports that according to experts, perhaps only 20 percent of Americans are happy."
Dennis Wholey, Are You Happy?

Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz says, "*Happiness is an imaginary condition...*"

I have news for you, it's not an imaginary condition! The angel's announcement stated that there was cause for joy which makes happy the soul. **Why?**

Verse 10-11, "Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The reason for such great Joy is because you have been given a Savior.

B. A Savior has been born to us

I know that for some of you this sounds far fetched! It did to me too! I thought Christians had to be about the most boring people on the face of the earth. Touch not, taste not, handle not, that sounds pretty unhappy.

I thought money, prestige, partying, drinking, and accumulating lots of stuff were about as good as it got.

Yet, in all honesty, those very things have often been at the heart of my most unhappy moments.

And since becoming a Christian, there has been no joy or happiness that compares with that which comes from a peace that God loves, cares for, and has forgiven and cleansed me. It is simply awesome.

Nathaniel Hawthorne said, "*Happiness in this world, when it comes, comes incidentally. Make it the object of pursuit, and it leads us on a wild-goose chase, and is never attained. Follow some other object and very possibly we may find that we have caught happiness without dreaming of it.*"

*"As a third-century man was anticipating death, he penned these last words to a friend: "It's a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians--and I am one of them." **Today In The Word, June, 1988, p. 18.***

But their happiness that this 3rd century man and I have found wasn't meant to be some exclusive or illusive dream. It was meant for everyone; for anyone who would embrace it. That is why it says...

Luke 2:10 "Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."

C. To All People

Though the angel only addresses the shepherds, he plainly states, that the message of salvation which he brings is much broader.

Now let it be understood, that this great joy was indiscriminately offered to all.

God did not offer His Son to just a select group of people. But not all accept Him.

Oh the joy that could have been experienced in that Bethlehem Inn, but no one made room for Him. They could have shared the delight of these shepherds but they would not let Him in.

A pregnant woman ready to give birth and not one would make Him room. We can be so like this. Jesus is seen as an intruder; one who would rob us of our comforts and conveniences if we let Him in. How wrong we are.

But how could these shepherds be sure the good tidings of this Savior *who is Christ the Lord* were true? The Angel said...

Verse 12 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

II. THE SIGN

A Babe in swaddling clothes lying in a manger?

You shall find this glorious person, however strange it may appear, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a stable!

The expectations they had of the coming Messiah were quite different than this.

It seems apparent, according to **verses 17 and 18**, that others were just as surprised at this sort of sign.

"Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds."

They expected to hear something like this...

"You shall find him, though a babe, dressed up in robes, and lying in the best house in the town, with a long waiting line rich visitors."

But divine power had clothed itself in weakness to accomplish what mere power was not capable of.

An infant bound in swaddling-clothes is no symbol of strength, nor is a manger of royal or wealthy circumstances, but the very opposite.

And thus, according to the old medical maxim,
"Opposites are destroyed by their opposites."

It is the foolishness of Christ's humble birth and death that confounds the prideful wisdom of mankind. *God had to be born? How absurd! God had to die? What foolishness!*

But **pride** is the character of all **mankind**: **humility** is the mark of the **Son of God**, and of all **his followers**.

Christ came and left in the way of humility to destroy that pride which is the root of all evil in the souls of men and women.

It is by humility that Christ comes to reign; and this is the only way into his kingdom!

1 Cor. 1:18-21, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

The sign of Christ's humility is what distinguished Him as Messiah and set the stage for what He would expect from those who follow Him.

He makes way for the humble who do not trust in their own status or what they have to offer Him. All those who come to Him must accept Him as He is and what He has offered them, His work on the cross!

2 Corinthians 8:9 "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

What a glorious purpose this humble sign of a babe lying in a manger offered. And so it was that upon announcement of this humble **verses 13 - 14** say...

*"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host suddenly there was with the angel a **multitude of the heavenly host** praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"*

III. THE PRAISE

A multitude, for the angels are innumerable; there are thousands, ten thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of them: and may be that the whole company of angels were all together to sing the praises of God, and glorify him at the birth of the incarnate Savior, for it says in,

Hebrews 1:6 "But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let **all the angels** of God worship Him."

And look at the full expression of their praise!

A. Glory to God in the Highest

The praise of redeeming man is due to God. The plan of redemption will bring glory to God, and is designed to express his glorious compassion. How?

It is the highest expression of his love and mercy. Nowhere, so far as we can see, could His glory be more strikingly exhibited than in giving his only Son by birth into mortality so He could die to save humanity.

Interestingly enough, the Hebrew word for compassion has as its root in the Hebrew word for womb. The compassion of God for mankind is comparable to the love of a mother for her baby even while it remains yet unborn in her womb.

How fitting that the compassion of our Highest Heavenly Father would be demonstrated to man in this humble earthly way.

The Glory of God in the Highest was come in this way so it might bring...

B. Peace on Earth

Isaiah 9:6 predicted that the Savior would be called the Prince of peace.

Well, you might be saying to yourself, "peace on earth? I don't see any peace on earth!" How then can I believe in such a story?

Many have misunderstood the truth of this statement.

The whole world is at war with God; sinners are at enmity against their Maker and against each other. Jesus came to make peace; and this he did. **How?**

1. By reconciling us to Himself and bringing the sinner to a state of peace with his Maker; causing him to lay down the weapons of rebellion and to submit themselves to God, consequently giving him the peace which passes all understanding.

Colossians 1:19-21, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled."

2. By infusing in the heart good-will toward others—causing people to lay aside their differences, to love one another, to seek each other's welfare, and to drive out envy, malice, pride, lust, and greed—which throughout the history of mankind has caused them to war against each other.

"The history of our mistletoe tradition is worth noting. It dates back to the Druids in Northern Europe. They believed mistletoe had curative power and thought it could even cure broken relationships. When two enemies found themselves under a tree with mistletoe above, they saw it as a sign from God that they should lay down their weapons and be reconciled. When missionaries moved into Northern Europe, they realized this was a perfect symbol for what occurred on that first Christmas. Christ's birth ushered in the opportunity of reconciliation between man and God, so the mistletoe offered a powerful tool for communicating this truth. Although today we associate the greenery with romance, it's deeper meaning provides a rich reminder of what God has done through the birth of his Son."

You see, God's will is good toward men.

C. Goodwill Toward Men

CONCLUSION:

How about you this evening — Are you looking for Joy or happiness?

The happiness and peace you so long for will not be found in your:
Financial Success
Social Status
Pleasures of life

Or Good Works.

Don't let these things that can never bring happiness or joy crowd out Jesus from this Christmas or any other day of your life. Make room for Him now.

"What Jesus Would Say to David Letterman," Lee Strobel said,

Where does a person find joy? Possibly the best explanation comes from an acrostic using J.O.Y. The J represents Jesus, the Y stands for You, and the O signifies zero, or nothing. Joy is found when "nothing" comes between "Jesus" and "You." It's a great, biblical formula!

I invite you to go to Him humbly. Confess you are a sinner in need of Him as your Savior and invite Him into your heart, your home and you will discover the joy and happiness that is experienced when we come to peace with God.