

## Luke 2:8-20

NIV Harmony 37; Compassionate 33-35

**Introduction**

1. If you could be any character in the story of Jesus' birth, who would you be? Would you be Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, the Angel of the Lord, a shepherd, or a member of the heavenly host?
  - a. You can truly be one of those characters—a member of the heavenly host (cf., Rev 19:1-2,6-8).
  - b. Every believer becomes a part of the heavenly host praising and glorifying God forever in heaven.
  - c. Our eternal state in heaven will be one of perpetual praise and adoration of the God who loves and saves us, who provides through Jesus a home for each of us in heaven forever.
2. Tonight we add to our nativity scene the angels and the shepherds as recorded by Luke.

**3. Read Luke 2:8-20.****A. The Angel's Message to the Shepherds (8-12)**

1. Earlier God sent an angel to Mary (Lk 1:26-38) and then to Joseph (Mt 1:18-25) to announce Jesus' birth.
2. Now the Lord sent an angel, perhaps Gabriel, to humble shepherds in a field outside Bethlehem at night.
  - a. Shepherds were commonly considered to be dishonest and were unclean according to the law.
  - b. Again, the humble and lowly are entrusted with the good news that salvation has arrived.
  - c. In fact, these shepherds were exactly the outcasts and sinners for whom Jesus came to earth.
  - d. They were also the ones keeping the sheep that would be sacrificed at the temple for the sins of God's people. How appropriate that they would be the ones to receive the news of the birth of the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).
3. Notice the similarities in the shepherds' angelic encounter (cf., Lk. 2:8-12) and those of Joseph and Mary.
  - a. An Angelic Appearance: "An angel of the Lord appeared to them . . ." (9a).
  - b. A Response of Fear: ". . . and they were terrified" (9b).
  - c. A Word of Reassurance: "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid'" (10a).
  - d. A Divine Message:
    - 1) To Joseph: ". . . what is conceived in [Mary] is from the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:20).
    - 2) To Mary: "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Lk 1:31-33).
    - 3) To the Shepherds: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:10b-11).
      - a) The "good news" (Gk., *euangelion*) is the gospel message of Jesus, our Savior (Gk. *soter*).
      - b) It is good news of "great joy" (Gk., *charan megalen*).
      - c) This good news is for "all people" (Gk., *to lao* – lit. "the people"), Jew and Gentile alike.
      - d) This good news is available "today" for "all people." Salvation is here and available now!
      - e) It is revealed in Bethlehem, "the town of David" in fulfillment of God's messianic promise.
      - f) It is good news of the coming of a "Savior" (Gk., *soter*), "Messiah" (Gk., *christos*), and "Lord" (Gk., *kurios*). Savior, Christ, and Lord appear without articles in the Greek.
      - g) Jesus stated the good news to Nicodemus this way, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16).
  - e. A Sign:
    - 1) To Joseph: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21).
    - 2) To Mary: "Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:36-37).
    - 3) To the Shepherds: "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:12).
      - a) There may have been a few babies born that night in Bethlehem.
      - b) However, there would be no doubt which one the angels spoke about. No other baby was born that night in a stable with a feeding trough for a crib.
      - c) The sign given to the shepherds was like a blinking neon sign - THIS IS HIM!

## B. The Gloria of the Angelic Chorus (13-14)

1. The angel of the Lord was joined by “a great company of the heavenly host” (Gk., *stratias ouraniou*).
2. The angelic host was “praising” (Gk. *ainounton*) God.
3. They praised God by saying, “Glory (Gk., *doxa*) to God in the highest, and on earth peace (Gk., *eirene*) to men on whom his favor (Gk., *eudokia*) rests.” (14) – Note the parallelism between glory and peace.
  - a. This is our fourth hymn in Luke, the *Gloria in Excelsis*. All these hymns express joy for what God has done. The two key, parallel words in this poetic couplet are “glory” and “peace.”
    - 1) Glory in the highest is not the level of the glory but the place of glory—heaven.
    - 2) Peace is result of receiving God's salvation—wholeness, completeness.
    - 3) Paul described God's peace, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God” (Ro 5:1-2).
    - 4) Peace and salvation are synonyms.
  - b. G Campbell Morgan writes, “There is no peace for the earth, except among men in whom God is well-pleased. That is the basis of the peace, men of His pleasure. Look on for a moment, thirty years from all this. The Boy born has passed through babyhood and childhood and youth, and stands, thirty years of age, on the verge of His mighty Messianic mission; He goes to baptism, and heaven breaks the silence and says, ‘This is My beloved Son; in Thee I am well-pleased.’ ‘Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased.’ Mark well the connection. That Baby became the Man in Whom God was pleased. Peace will come to earth when men are like Him. That is the way of peace, and there is no other way” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 37).
  - c. The heavenly host is like the “great multitude” (Gk., *megalen ochlou*) in Revelation that give glory to God.
  - d. John described the praise of heaven this way, “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants. . . . Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’” (Rev 19:1-2,6-8).
  - e. The favor, peace, and salvation of God is given freely to all who will receive it through Jesus Christ.

## C. The Shepherds' Response (15-20)

1. The shepherds believed and went to Bethlehem to confirm the angel's good news to them. (15-16)
  - a. “Let's go . . .” – Come on! We have to check this out this unbelievable good news. (15)
  - b. They “hurried off” (Gk., *elthan speusantes*) to confirm the good news for themselves. (16)
2. Once they had confirmed the Savior was here, they spread the word about Jesus' birth. (17)
3. Look at the responses of the witnesses.
  - a. The shepherds went, saw, and told the good news (16-17).
  - b. Those who heard the shepherds' report were “amazed” (Gk., *ethaumasan*). (18)
  - c. Mary “treasured up all these things” (Gk., *suneterei ta ramata tauta*) and “pondered them in her heart” (Gk., *sumballousa in te kardia autes*). (19)
    - 1) Mary did not understand all that had happened but was seeking meaning with God's help.
    - 2) Robert Stein comments, “. . . it would have been remarkable indeed for Mary not to have been confused about the significance of all that had happened to her. No doubt she recognized her child's divine calling and destiny; but exactly what that entailed was not known to her, and she may at times have had the same kinds of questions that John the Baptist had in Luke 7:18-23. Earlier commentators held that this reference to Mary's inner thoughts (cf. also 2:51) indicated that Mary was the source for this account” (Robert Stein, *Luke* in NAC, 110).
  - d. In the end, the shepherds joined the heavenly host in “glorifying and praising God” for the good news that they had received of Jesus' birth and the arrival of God's glory, peace, and salvation. (21)
4. Three common themes for Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds are: 1) hearing, 2) obeying, 3) and rejoicing.

#### D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. God still speaks His word of strength and comfort to us in hard times: "Do not be afraid." God is with you and will never leave nor forsake you in any situation. He holds you in His hands for eternity.
2. The favor of God that the heavenly host proclaimed rests upon you today in the peace and salvation which God has sent and that you have received through faith in the birth, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. Will you follow God's plan even when the way ahead seems impossible?
  - a. Like the angels, will you rejoice and give God the glory for the great things he has done, is doing, and yet will do in you and in this world?
  - b. Like the shepherds, will you confirm that the good news of Jesus is just as God promised and then go share that good news with others?
  - c. Like those who heard the good news that the shepherds shared, will you be "amazed" at the grace of God shown to you in Jesus Christ?
  - d. Like Mary, will you continue to trust and follow God even when you don't fully understand everything that happens on your life journey?
4. God still speaks. Will you hear? Will you not be afraid? Will you obey and rejoice in God's providence?
5. Share "O Little Town (The Glory of Christmas)" from *O Little Town of Bethlehem* cantata by Mauldin & Smith.

#### **O Little Town (The Glory of Christmas)**

Phillips Brooks, Matt Redman, Jonas Myrin, and Bernie Herms

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark street shineth the everlasting Light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

And the glory of Christmas is the glory of Christ,  
And the glory of Christmas is the story of His love.

O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray.  
Cast out our sin, and enter in. Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell.  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel.

And the glory of Christmas is the glory of Christ,  
And the glory of Christmas is the story of His love.

How silently, how silently the wondrous Gift is giv'n.  
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heav'n.  
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.  
O Christ, be welcomed in!

And the glory of Christmas is the glory of Christ,  
And the glory of Christmas is the story of His love.  
Oh, the glory of Christmas is the glory of Christ,  
Oh, the glory of Christmas is the story of His love,  
the story of His love, the story of His love.