

## Peace Luke 2:8-20

### Introduction

**Christmas Songs Are Weird:** Have you ever noticed how weird some “Christmas” songs are?

- “We Wish You a Merry Christmas”: Bring us some figgy pudding (bad taste); won’t leave until we get some (rude).
- “Little Drummer Boy”: The least desired gift for the mother of a newborn is a drum solo.
- “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”: It may be your last? Thanks Debbie Downer.
- “Most Wonderful Time of the Year”: marshmallows for toasting, scary ghost stories? Is this a fall camping trip
- I don’t want a lot for Christmas, “All I Want for Christmas is You”: kind of a burn
  - I have strong Christmas opinions: “Die Hard” is more of a Christmas movie than “It’s a Wonderful Life”; the new “Grinch” movie is better than the original or the Jim Carey remake; I’d rather see a 40-year-old Macauley Culkin as Kevin in a Home Alone movie than any new kid.

**Spirituals:** Despite weird secular Christmas songs, Christian Christmas songs have rich theology. One of my favorites is “Go Tell It On the Mountain” which tells the story of the shepherds hearing the announcement of Jesus’ birth.

- I love this song because it has stood the test of time (recorded and re-recorded). It can be sung by children and adults alike. It was formally compiled in 1865 but dates back to the days of Spirituals that **Black Americans wrote while enslaved**.
  - They are powerful because they sustained the faith of black Christians in the worst kind of suffering.
  - They maintain joy and hope in the promises of God.
  - They don’t just work in the cloistered comfort of a church building but in the abuse and brokenness of our fallen world.
- **The medium of the song becomes a fitting display to highlight the message of the song.**
  - I wonder if our lives are a fitting display of the message of the gospel we claim to believe and cherish. Does the forum of our lives display the tenets of faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience, forgiveness, grace, etc. that we claim to believe?

The gospel calms our fears and brings peace to our hearts, compelling us to joyfully worship and gladly tell others about Jesus!

<sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the

angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” <sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

## 1. An Unexpected Audience (vv. 8-9)

<sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

**The Myth of Outcast Shepherds:** The main characters we’re going to focus on in this week’s passage are these shepherds. Put yourself in their shoes: you’re sleepily sitting with your sheep. Maybe you’re huddled around the fire sharing stories. Then all of a sudden, an angel appears!

- But there’s a little bit of a **myth** about these shepherds floating around (there’s a few Christmas myths floating around: silent night, donkey, etc.). Some preachers like to make the case that the shepherds represent the outcast, the poor, the shunned of society. That the shepherds would be unwelcome in polite Jewish society because of their occupation and reputation.
  - This comes from a few sources (Rabbis, Aristotle, etc.), but all of these historical sources are either hundreds of years after the time of Jesus or from places like Greece (not exactly Israel).
- And it makes no sense. Shepherds were an integral part of society. Sheep were an important part of the economic and religious system. Many children would have grown up caring for sheep (West African child shepherds). Plus, some of the most important people in the history of Israel were shepherds: the great prophet, **Moses**, was a shepherd at one point (burning bush). The great king, **David**, was famously a shepherd.
  - Jesus describes the problem of Israel as a shepherd problem (sheep without a shepherd). Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd. In the gospel, it is precisely the Good shepherd who sacrifices himself for the sheep.

**Ordinary People:** I think the idea that shepherds aren’t outcasts belies a more insidious fear we have and a more subtle problem the Gospels point out. The shepherds are perfectly *ordinary* people. They aren’t poor; they aren’t rich. They aren’t powerless or powerful.

- They are normal, hard-working, everyday people. They aren’t famous or infamous. In fact, they are sort of forgotten to history.
  - And Jesus is announced to *this* group. He’s heralded to *ordinary* shepherds. This is seen over and over again in the infancy narrative. Born in an ordinary town (not

a capital city or metropolis) to an ordinary girl (not a queen) and a contractor (not a king, philosopher, or general).

- Have you ever felt, like me, little and insignificant in a world of 7 billion people (even if you're one in a million, that means there are 7,000 just like you), where all the news is of big political and economic and social movements and of outstanding people with lots of power and prestige? God's love and power is as present and clear for every ordinary person as anyone else.

But we don't think this way. One of the reasons that so many missed Jesus was his particularly nondescript entrance.

- He wasn't born in the luxury of Herod's palace. He wasn't born to the royalty of Rome. He wasn't born to the High priest at the Temple in Jerusalem. He wasn't the son of a powerful military general. He was born to an everyday girl in an everyday city, and his birth announcement came to everyday shepherds.

"As there are no little [places] in God's sight, so there are no little [people]" (Schaeffer). I'm not sure how to get this through our heads and hearts. We have to stop chasing celebrity or infamy. We have to stop seeking fame or pity. The gospel allows us to be ourselves in Christ.

- You can't wait to come to Jesus until you're good enough (you'll never be) or until things have hit rock bottom (it might be too late). Come to him now.
- God comes to the humble, he seeks the meek, and he looks for the forgotten.

**Fearful Response:** <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. This is quite reasonable. **You** would be afraid. You **should** be afraid.

- The glory of God should cause us fear because it is not weak and empty but powerful. You want to be afraid of God (in some sense). **A God who doesn't inspire fear is a God who is not powerful enough to save.**

## 2. A Spectacular Announcement (vv. 10-14)

<sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

**Amazing News:** We should be less amazed at **who** heard the announcement and more amazed at **what** the announcement was. This announcement *is* good news and *causes* great joy.

**Gospel:** I bring you good news. "I evangelize/gospelize you." The word "gospel" literally means "good news" (εὐ + ἀγγελιον; εὐ + λόγος). It is a type of news that brings joy (rather than dread or fear, or sadness). Cf. "tell me the good news first; want the good news or the bad news."

- The gospel *is* good news because we are slaves to our sin and it is announcing our deliverance. If the message of God feels like bad news, then you have not fully understood it, believed it, and internalized it.

<sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

- The true King, the true Messiah, God become flesh, has come to save you.
- \*\*\*Have you ever received amazing news (e.g., a few great birth announcements, Joshua)? Do you know how I felt in that moment? Tears of joy, relief, hope, thanks, etc.
  - What I had waited for, has finally happened. What I had dared hoped for, had come to pass.
  - In Jesus it is more! The one we need, long, hope for, is here. The thing we dared believe has come true. The promise we'd held onto for so long, is come to pass.

**Good News for Fearful Hearts:** <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν χαρὰν μεγάλην

- "Fear not" is an important phrase in Luke (e.g., Zechariah, Mary) and in the Bible (Josh 1; Deut). Fear is the normal and natural response to an angelic messenger (you should see how angels are depicted elsewhere in the Bible; think less precious moments and more Stranger Things on Psychadelics; read Ezekiel 1: multi-faced, cow-hooved, bronze-legged, wings, hands, ox-eagle, torches, lightning, wheels within wheels?).
- Fear is the normal response to the messages these folks are receiving. It is too big for them, too impossible for them to imagine. **But** in each instance, the angel tells them not to fear. Instead of fear, they are called to rejoice. What the angel tells them is **good news that conquers their fear.**

The good news of the gospel overcomes their fear. When we explain the gospel, we focus a lot on the legal aspects of our sin (e.g., condemnation, guilt, etc.); and we should! This is true and central and important (it matters).

- But there are other effects of sin we sometimes forget about. In Gen 3, when Adam and Eve sin, it says they hid from God because they were naked and afraid. **They experience fear and shame.**
  - We know that we are helpless, so we are afraid. We are embarrassed by our sins and shortcomings.
  - But God seeks them out and covers their nakedness (they tried some leaves, but God makes proper clothes from sacrificial animals).
- The beauty of the gospel is not only that God cancels our debt, but he covers our shame and calms our fears.

**Life Without Fear:** The Bible teaches us to fear God and not to fear anything else. **When we fear God, the one with ultimate authority and power, who created everything that is, then we don't have to fear anything else. The only person you should fear (God) has promised to love you and is for you. The one who rightfully should cause us to fear tells us to "fear not."**

- God is not a vindictive tyrant but a loving Father. Father is a helpful idea. As a child, I feared my father (if I messed up, or talked back to my mom). He would

punish my mistakes. But his discipline was out of love. I also felt safe in his arms. His strength was comforting because of his love.

- **Because he is a good God who loves and protects us, we don't need to worry about anything else.** "So many people live in dread and anxiety of their worst fears becoming reality. Let me report from the front lines: even there, He will hold you, sustain you, and guide you." (Erik Reed). He is greater and stronger than your worst fears (e.g., medical diagnosis, financial ruin, relational loss). **"Even if..."**

A person who only fears God, not man or the things of man, has amazing power in this world.

- It changes the way you live: "When you feel stuck while making a decision, ask yourself, 'What would I do if I wasn't afraid?'" (Sarah Mack). Only God can truly make you not afraid. In God you don't have to fear. "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7).
  - I needed this reminder (foster care). There are lots of things I've done in my life with the simple faith that God is strong enough "to do far more abundantly than all that [I] ask or [imagine]" (Eph 3:20). But sometimes I get out on that water and I see the waves and I forget. I need to look to him to be reminded.

**Peace:** <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased What is your idea of Peace? We have our idea (Ms. America "world peace").

- Israelites had their idea of peace (e.g., military victory, national liberation).
- The word "peace" in the Bible is the OT word "shalom." It means "completeness, wholeness, restoration." A stone with no cracks, a wall with no gaps. A complex building that is put together correctly, giving it structure.
  - Life is complex, there are a lot of moving pieces. When God promises peace he is talking about bringing wholeness and cohesiveness to our lives.
  - Isaiah says that a Messiah will come who is the prince of peace, who will bring peace that never ends.
- The reality of Jesus as the Prince of Peace is more significant than simple everybody-get-along-coexistence. One day, all of the created universe will be brought under the peaceful rule of Jesus. However, the greatest war in all of history is not between two armies but between sinful humanity and its creator.
- The first and most fundamental place where our lives are out of order, lacking wholeness, is our relationship with God. So the Bible tells us that God makes peace with us through Jesus.
- Christ broke through the battle lines drawn between us and God and sacrificed himself for our redemption: "He himself is our peace." He has given us the most important peace in the world—peace with God.
  - Jesus said that he "did not come to bring peace on earth" or, at least, "not peace as the world gives." We should, however, "take heart" because Jesus has "overcome the world."
- The angel's message is good news because of who came and why he came. Our savior came to rescue us. **We can't have salvation or rescue, comfort or peace, hope or true love, without Jesus.** "God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from himself because there is no such thing" (C. S. Lewis).

- I see this mistake so often, people who want a good life, inner peace, blessing, and happiness. They're even happy to ask Jesus to give it to them, but they don't realize it can only be found **in him**. Jesus did not come to just endorse your dreams of the good life and grant you a few wishes, **he came to be your life!**
- That's why, even in difficult situations we can have peace because we can have Christ.
  - "Peace does not mean the opposite of conflict or war. It means wholeness in the face of strife" (Poe).
- When we have peace in Christ, we can be peace-makers in our world. When we find our wholeness in Jesus, we don't seek it in the broken idols of this world. When we've been restored to God we can work toward restoration with others.

### 3. A Worshipful Response (vv. 15-20)

<sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

#### Marks of a gospel-impacted life. When you encounter the good news of Jesus:

**1. Pursue Jesus:** "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." Unignorible. They had to check it out. A sign of a gospel-impacted life is the internal motivation and desire to see and learn and experience more of Jesus.

- They sought out the God who came to them. They pursued him. Don't stop pursuing!
- Too often we ignore (like ignoring a medical problem or financial issue; if I don't look it's not real). Ignoring doesn't change reality. If the Spirit is working in your soul tonight, don't white-knuckle the pew and walk out without doing something about it.

**2. Worship Jesus:** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Glorified and praised. The true and right response to God's promises being fulfilled is to worship and praise him. His grace has broken through. His blessing has found us (not the other way around).

- The gospel humbles us by bringing us to God. We can't find him ourselves, he has found us. What else can we do but give thanks? What else can we do but have gratitude?
- Described as God's favor that came to Mary and the shepherds (favor = grace). It was God's kindness to come to these shepherds. They weren't out searching for him, the angels found them on that ancient hillside.
- Salvation at its core is a gift (one reason gift-giving at Christmas is a helpful illustration of the gospel). How many of you, on Christmas morning, would see a pile of packages with your name on them, then just leave them there? **Have you done this with Jesus, your greatest gift?**

- And it leads to a life filled with gratitude and worship. Worship is not an obligation but a natural response to a life transformed by the gospel.

**3. Tell Others of Jesus:** <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. The angel's response (heavenly praise and proclamation) confirms the life-changing truth of Jesus. The message of the angels confirms the power of the gospel. Our response is similar because the gospel is so great, and Jesus is so good we can't help but tell everyone. **When you've experienced Jesus you can't help but tell others!**

- Have you told others the good news? "The gospel is only good news for someone if it gets to them in time" (Carl F. H. Henry). **Who have you told?**
- Peter and John: for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20).
- I shouldn't have to beg you to tell because I shouldn't be able to stop you from speaking.

**4. Treasure Jesus:** Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. Motivation. Sharing the gospel is not a laborious obligation, it is a joyful opportunity. The motivation to share is the very fact that it is **good** news.

- Who doesn't love to share good news? A pregnancy? A promotion? A once-in-a-lifetime trip? Get an amazing present on Christmas (especially as a kid), you want to tell.
- Why? Because you love it. You treasure it. It's important to you.
- I want to give this treasure to everyone (not argue, not debate, **share**).

The reason the worries of the world threaten our peace is because we treasure things that will use us rather than love us. We *invest* our hope in creation rather than our loving creator.

- But when we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" all the rest of it will take care of itself (Matt 6:33).
- "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37). A lot of us want the "desires" without changing our desires to "delighting in the Lord." You know that feeling you have when you get what you want? You can have it always when you want Jesus more than anything.

### Conclusion:

Have you experienced the peace of Jesus? Have you met the treasure of the universe?

- God offers peace and shalom to our hearts as we wait for him to bring peace and shalom to all things.
- It doesn't exist apart from Christ. What if the worst thing happens? You have Christ.
- A lot of us want the end to the difficulty but not restoration in Jesus. We want the way of comfort but not the way of the cross. We want peace on our terms instead of his.
- Peace can only come when we surrender our lives to Christ, turning from our sins and ourselves and trusting him

The gospel calms our fears and brings joy to our hearts, compelling us to worship Jesus and tell others! So, like the old spiritual implores us, we want to "Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere." We want everyone to know Jesus. **Who are you going to tell?**