Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Announcement of Jesus' Birth, Part 1
Scripture: Luke 2:8-11
Code: 42-25

Let's open our Bibles to the second chapter of Luke's gospel. It's Christmas in July here. We're in the gospel of Luke and we're studying the Christmas story. And it is...it's a real treat, I think, to study the Christmas story without the normal clutter of Christmas season, really refreshing to just be able to take the story itself and sort of deal without the context that clutters it up around the December time. And I think most of the sermons you've heard in your life on the Christmas story have somehow been attached with that season. And this is a very refreshing look at the account of the birth of Jesus Christ.

I want to read the text that we're going to be looking at. And this is so important, this is so foundational as chapter 1 was that we are taking our time to go through it because it has such monumental significance as foundational to our Christian faith. But let me start reading in Luke 2:8, "And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you, you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men with whom He is pleased.' And it came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven that 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.' And they came in haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph and the baby as He lay in the manger. And when they had seen this they made known the statement that had been told them about this child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them."

Now as we noted last time, in looking at this text, the key statement in the narrative is found in verse 11. In verse 11 it says, "There has been born for you a Savior." There has been born for you a Savior...that is the high note of this entire passage. The shepherds and the angels are bit players, as it were, in the scenario in which the Savior who has been born is the main character. There has been born for you a Savior. This is the greatest news the world has ever heard. This is the good news. In fact, that's exactly what it says in verse 10, "I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all

the people." This is the good news. One has been born who will save sinners from their sins and from eternal hell.

You remember when Joseph, the betrothed husband of Mary, found out that Mary was pregnant, he couldn't understand it because he knew that she was a virgin. They were only engaged at that point. When he found out she was pregnant he was so shaken that he was in deep distress about what to do, should he stone her, as the Old Testament law required because she would be found in the category of an adulteress? Or should he divorce her as the law provides and put her away privately? At the time when he was contemplating what to do, he was instructed from heaven that she was with child by the Holy Spirit, that God had planted a life in her womb. She was still a virgin. She was righteous and God had chosen her to bear the Messiah. And Joseph was instructed in Matthew 1:21 to call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins. Jesus is the New Testament version of Joshua which means Savior.

From the very beginning the child born was not just any child, this was the long-awaited Savior of the world. This is the one who finally would save His people from their sins. This is the one who would finally be the lamb who would offer one sacrifice that would perfect forever those that are sanctified. This is the one who would come and pay the penalty for sin, offer the final sacrifice with which the entire sacrificial system would go away...the endless, literally millions of lambs that had been sacrificed had never been able to take away sin. But they only pictured one who would. The people waited and waited and waited for that one to come. Jesus Himself in Luke 19:10 said, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." In John 4:42 He is called "The Savior of the world." In 1 John chapter 4, maybe the most important statement of all of those, 1 John 4:14 says, "And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."

Jesus came to save the world, He didn't come to be an example of nobility and morality and integrity. He didn't come to be an example of passivity. He didn't come to demonstrate patience and kindness and mercy and tenderness. He did all of that but He came to be the Savior of the world. The Jews had long awaited for that to happen. They, as I told you last time, knew God as a saving God. They knew the nature of God was to save because He delivered them from their enemies and He had so often delivered them from the immediate consequence of the sin, consequences which they deserved. He had rescued them from every imaginable kind of situation in spite of their sins. So they knew God as a saving God. The God of the Old Testament had revealed Himself clearly as a Savior, but there was also the fact that though God was a saving God there had never yet come one who had provided fully and finally that promised salvation. And so they long awaited the Savior of the world, the One who would come and satisfy the justice of God.

We find in this passage the angelic announcement that the Savior has been born. The One of whom Luke writes in the book of Acts, Luke wrote Acts as well, the One who would come and be the Savior

to the degree that there is salvation in no other name but the name of Jesus Christ, Acts 4:12. The long awaited Savior had been born. The One who would not only be the Son of David and would rescue Israel politically from their enemies, not only the One who would be the Son of Abraham fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant and rescue Israel from its time of suffering. The promise of David would come to pass and Israel would have a kingdom that's literally a kingdom of peace, the Messiah would rule over Israel in peace and not only Israel but over the whole world and His Kingdom would have no end, it would be eternal. Not only would the Messiah come and establish the fulfillment of Abrahamic promise and that is the end of suffering and the fullness of righteousness and holiness and blessing on the nation, but the Messiah would also come and save sinners.

In fact they wouldn't receive Davidic promise of the Kingdom, they wouldn't receive Abrahamic promise of blessing until they had received New Covenant salvation. They were looking for a Savior who would come and take away sin. They were looking for the New Covenant to be fulfilled. The Savior who would come and forgive them for their sin. A Savior who would come and wash them. A Savior who would come and take away the stony heart and put a heart of flesh. A Savior who would come and give them His Spirit. A Savior who would rescue them from judgment, the judgment of God and eternal hell.

And the great announcement of the passage here, the great angelic announcement is in verse 11, "There has been born for you a Savior." This is the high point of redemptive history. This is the greatest moment in the history of the world. A Savior would come and He would take on the judgment of God for sinners. He would be punished in our place. As symbolically the lamb died in the place of the sinner in the Old Testament, sacrificial system, this Lamb, the perfect spotless pure Lamb of God would die for sinners and He would die such a perfect death and bear sin so perfectly that never would there be another sacrifice. Jesus would be the Savior of the world by taking on the punishment for sinners. He would die under the execution of God's wrath. God literally would execute Jesus for your sins and my sins. And since the penalty was fully paid, God would be free to forgive us and take us to eternal heaven and not send us to hell to bear the punishment for our own sins because Christ had bore it for us.

Seven hundred years before the baby was born, seven hundred years before the Savior was born a prophet, a Hebrew prophet by the name of Micah had predicted that when He was born He would be born in a little village called Bethlehem, house of bread. A somewhat obscure village except for one fact, it was the hometown of David the great king. It was where his father, Jesse, lived. And that was very important because that played in to the fulfillment of the prophecy. The prophet Micah said that when He's born He'll be born in Bethlehem. Though it would be a little place, He would be born there. The great Messiah, the Savior of the world would be born there.

As it turned out, God had to orchestrate all the events to make that happen. Caesar Augustus who didn't know anything about Micah or the Old Testament or God and couldn't have cared less, decreed

that a census be taken. He decreed that census would be taken in all the fullness of the Roman Empire, that included Judea. And so the Jews had to comply with the census...with the census they resisted apparently for some time because the census was given in 8 B.C., they didn't comply until two to four years later. And when they did comply, Herod or somebody in Israel, maybe the Sanhedrin, maybe Herod required that the Jews to register for the census had to go back to their house of ancestry, as it were, back to their origins. And so that meant Joseph and Mary who were both in the line of David had to go to Bethlehem which was the home of their ancestor, David, and there they had to register. And it just so happened that the timetable, the census required them to be there, probably there was a deadline like April 15 that required them to be there at a certain time and so they had to make the 85 to 90 mile journey while she was in the last weeks of her pregnancy. Something you wouldn't normally do under those conditions because it was really a distance you had to walk, be carried on a donkey. But they did it because they had to. And that puts them there at the strategic time and the child was born exactly where the prophet said He would be born, in the little village of Bethlehem

When He was born there He was born in obscurity. The Romans were there, the soldiers were there, of course. They were everywhere Roman presence was. Roman presence would have been heightened in Bethlehem at that time because the census would have been going on there. They would have had Roman officials who were taking the census there. They would have taken up every available room. People would be coming into town and staying with families and friends because they would be related to them, going back to the house of their ancestry. By the time Joseph and Mary got there, there wasn't any place for them to stay except in what was most likely a shed, a large lean-to. There was an overnight stopping place for travelers. It could have been a situation where you have four walls surrounding a courtyard. Those four walls would have little shanty-type rooms and probably a loft so that you could have some people below at ground level and some people to climb up a little ladder and stay above. But all those places were taken, even as primitive as they were they would have been better than where Joseph and Mary ended up which was in the courtyard which was occupied by all the animals of all the travelers...donkeys, and goats, and probably some sheep and maybe some camels. Really an inappropriate place, a dirty place, terrible place for a semi-private or quasi-public birth in a very obscure and very unlikely circumstance.But it was there that the Savior was born.

He was born in obscurity. Apparently nobody around there knew. None of the people knew. None of the Romans knew. None of the inhabitants of Jerusalem or the visiting folks knew. Just another baby being born as they heard the cry of Jesus when He came into the world...the cry was just another cry of another baby. And it was so obscure, we don't hear any announcement at all going on in Bethlehem, just Joseph knew and Mary knew. But it wasn't long till we come to verse 8 and an announcement is made. And the greatest event in the saga of redemption has occurred and it's about to be announced.

In an unlikely announcement, it says in verse 8, "In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night." Now the Jews have been looking for a Savior for a long time. And even the Romans were conscious of a Savior of the world. In fact they gave that very title to Caesar Augustus. There is existing a Roman indication in some of the ruins that Caesar Augustus had the title "savior of the world." People are always looking for a great deliverer, always looking for a great savior. And while Caesar Augustus was in Rome celebrating himself as the savior of the world, the true Savior of the world was being born in Bethlehem in obscurity. There was only one true Savior. He had come to deliver His people from their sins and to bring them out of the judgment of God and to rescue them from eternal hell and to bring them out of suffering into blessing as had been promised to Abraham and out of subservience into royalty and reigning as had been promised to David. So He had come. He had come to bring the blessings of the New Covenant, the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, the blessings of the Davidic Covenant. He had come to save sinners and then to give them all the promised blessing.

It's little wonder all heaven broke loose and the angel showed up and started praising God. It's little wonder the shepherds when they left, at the end of this passage, verse 20, were praising God as well. This is the high point of all redemptive history, the greatest moment in the history of the world. That's why you have to stop a little and consider what's going on here. You can't just whistle by this one.

Now the message is...good news...good news, verse 10, good news of great joy. And what's so good news? "There has been born for you a Savior, the Savior has come who will save His people from their sins and therefore from death and hell, from the judgment of God. And who will bring them in to the promised blessings of a kingdom and a King of blessing beyond description and imagination." Eternal glory...all that, good news, good news, folks, good news. There is a Savior. There is forgiveness of sin. You can escape hell. You can go to heaven forever. You can be blessed by God.

Now as we unfold this passage I want to give you a few points. I'll give you two this morning. Number one, the proclamation of good news...the proclamation of good news. Then we'll look at the persuasiveness of good news, briefly as we close. The proclamation of good news.

You know, it's the most unlikely group of people to make this proclamation to. If you were orchestrating this, if you were a PR agent and you were designing a campaign to announce that the Savior of the world had been born, the last people you would go to is a bunch of shepherds. I mean, literally the last people you would go to. You might say...Well, we want to get this thing out, we need to go the people who have the greatest influence. We want to go to the influencers, as they would be called today. We want to go to the movers and the shakers. We want to go to the people who have the ear of the world. Well, first of all, we might consider going to the high priest. I mean, he would be the religious leader of Israel. We might be considering going to the chief priest and the scribes who

were the teachers. We might be going to the Sadducees who basically made up the Sanhedrin who were the ruling body of Israel, a body of 70 elders of Israel basically responsible for the nation as a theocracy under God. Or you might say we go to the Pharisees because they had the great...they were the religious fundamentalists. They were fastidious about prophecies and we might want to go to them because they search the scriptures. They were looking for the Messiah. And we might want to go to somebody who had some influence. Might even want to send a memo or a press release to Caesar Augustus to let him know that the true Savior had been born. Shepherds? Not on your life.

But that's exactly where the Lord sent the message. And verse 8 says, "In the same region," that's the region around Bethlehem, Bethlehem was about six miles south, directly south of the city of Jerusalem. It's just a small village, certainly not a city. So, down in that region, "There were some shepherds." There's no adjective for these shepherds. It literally says, "There were shepherds," in the Greek, just shepherds. It doesn't tell us anything about them. There's really nothing to say about them. This is the most unlikely group to which God's angel proclaims the good news of the Savior.

Nobody would have assumed this except for the fact that if you go back to Isaiah 61. In Isaiah 61 you have a prophecy that really has the Messiah speaking, it has the preincarnate Christ speaking about His coming as Messiah. And He says, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me," it's the one He quotes in Luke 4 and says He fulfills. But He says, "The Lord has anointed Me to preach the good news to the poor," or to preach the good news, that word in Hebrew can mean the lowly or the humble, or as it's translated in the NAS, the afflicted. "And He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted and to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners." So when the Messiah comes, He's not coming to the up and inners, He's not coming to the influencers, He's coming to the poor, the lowly, the meek, the afflicted, the broken hearted, the captives, the prisoners. That's just a category of outcasts.

When the Messiah comes He's going to touch the outcasts, He's going to touch the low lifes. In fact, as Jesus went through His life, He attracted to Himself the outcasts of society, the tax collectors and absolute nobodies and prostitutes and sinners and drunkards and you know all that because the Jewish elite, the aristocracy of religion in Israel criticized Him for that and they said He hangs around drunkards and prostitutes. That's what messianic prophecy said, the Messiah would come to the poor. And listen, He would come to the outcasts, come to the lowly and shepherds qualified for that.

Mary in her Magnificat praising the Lord when she was told she was going to be the mother of Messiah in Luke 1:52 praised God for exalting the humble, exalting the lowly. And if you go to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 you have the Apostle Paul saying in verse 26, "In the purposes of God to salvation there were not many wise according to the flesh." Not many of the human intellectuals are saved, not many mighty, not many noble because God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong, the lowly or base things of the world and the despised God has chosen. Then nobody can boast. And that begins at the very beginning, the first announcement of the birth of Messiah is made to the lowliest, commonest

of unskilled peasants in the Jewish social strata.

Now it doesn't mean to say that being a shepherd was a somehow an illegitimate profession, somehow some thing that ought to be despised for its own sake. Not at all. In fact, Abraham functioned at some point in his life as a shepherd. And Moses functioned, you remember, caring for the herds of his father-in-law in Median as a shepherd. And David was a shepherd. In fact, a thousand years before Jesus was born, David was watching sheep in this same area, maybe in the same field. It isn't that there was somehow a shameful profession, it was just a lowly profession, it was the lowliest of tasks. Shepherds were insignificant. They were basically ignorant. They were uneducated. They were unskilled. They did the kind of work, shepherding, that was generally given to children to do because it was so simple to do. It didn't take any particular talent or any skill, they were basically unskilled. They had no trade, they had no skill. They were really the lowest paid.

And beyond that, beyond the fact that they would be the lowest people on the social ladder, by virtue of the necessity of caring for sheep seven days a week, they lived in some level of violation or another of Mosaic law. They couldn't maintain the Sabbath the way the Sabbath should have been maintained. Because of their necessity to work they violated the Sabbath to some degree. They couldn't maintain the myriad of manmade regulations that had been added and piled and heaped on top of Sabbath law which confounded the people, for the most part, because of their inability to keep these fastidious regulations developed by the Pharisees and certainly shepherds couldn't abide by them. So they were looked not only as on...not only as low socially but they were looked as living in general violation of religious law and therefore to some degree or another they were outcasts because they violated the ceremonies.

They really were the lowest of the low. As time developed from the time of the New Testament on as the fastidious legalism of the Pharisees began to capture more and more of the hearts of the people, shepherds began to be more and more and more despised. And if you read Jewish literature over the next hundred years or so they were more and more and more despised. In fact, it wasn't long after this that they began to be seen as unreliable, untrustworthy, unsavory characters who were largely suspected of stealing sheep and doing all kinds of illegal things. They were not anybody close to the high echelons of society. Maybe that's a shock to you because all your life you grew up imagining these shepherds were some kind of special people. Well, they were the least special of all people.

Isn't that the point? Isn't that the point? Isn't that just like God to disdain the religious elite, to disdain the quote/unquote spiritual establishment, to disdain the hypocrites who thought they were good enough to achieve relationships with God by their own self-effort? And to make the announcement, the greatest announcement that's ever been made in the history of the world to the lowest of the low, the humblest of the humble...shepherds. And by the way, lest you demean being a shepherd, Jesus Himself was happy to call Himself the Good...what?...Shepherd. So there's nothing wrong with the task in itself. But in society, they were the lowest and commonest nobodies of Israel's society and

culture.

In fact, this is interesting, shepherds were not allowed to testify in court in that society for a number of reasons. One, they were trusted, and two, they weren't thought to be intelligent enough to put things together. They had such poor standing and poor reputation...just perfect for God.

If that's not a metaphor for God saving the lowly sinner, what is? The Apostle Paul got a grip on this, didn't he? First Timothy 1:15, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief." The lower the sinner, the greater the glory to God who saves him, right? Just perfect for God, disdain the palace, disdain the temple, disdain the priests and go for the outcasts, go for the lowliest of the low.

Now I would believe, and I can't be dogmatic about this, but I would believe that the shepherds that the Lord picked for this announcement were probably shepherds who believed in the true and living God, they were probably devout. They may have been among those who in verse 25 are described as looking for the consolation of Israel, that is they were looking for the Messiah, they were looking for the redemption of Israel, looking for the Redeemer. Because in verse 20 when they had gone and seen the child, realized what happened, verse 20 says they were glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It must have been that they were living in anticipation of that. It's very likely that though they were socially on the lowest level, they may well spiritually been on the highest level. They may have been devout. They may have been the ones looking for the redemption of Israel, why else would the Lord tell them this. And of course when they heard the message they were so filled with excitement they went immediately to Bethlehem.

By the way, as a note, I'll get to this next time, they were never commanded to do that. I mean, their response was...Well, that's nice, what do we care? Their response was to go immediately to Bethlehem and begin to search. Which wouldn't be easy, how do you find this baby among babies? So it's likely they were devout if lowly shepherds.

Now it tells us also in verse 8, "They were staying out in the fields." Now according to most of the history of that time and even afterwards and before in Israel, shepherds stayed out in the field from April to November. Typically the land of Israel is very much like California. In fact, it is almost a mirror image of weather in California. We have an ocean, we have a coastal plain, we have coastal mountains, we have a central valley, we have inland mountains and we have the desert. And that's exactly the way it is in Israel, it's exactly. The weather patterns there are very much the same.

The city of Jerusalem is located on mountains that fall down into the desert. The desert there is even deeper than our desert because it goes down to the depth of the Dead Sea which is the lowest point on the earth. But the city of Jerusalem is high. We know because we live in California, similar winters. You go in the mountains, you go into the Sierra Nevada Mountains from December through

March, you can be extremely cold. From April through November it can be warming up.

And so typically shepherds would stay out in the fields on the elevated plain of Jerusalem, the mountain area near Jerusalem from April to November typically. That's one of the reasons why people doubt that Jesus was born in December because typically the shepherds wouldn't be there in December. Well you can't really be dogmatic about that either, we don't know what month it was. There is really no way to know. We don't even know what year Jesus was born, somewhere between 6 and 4 B.C. He was born as we calculated the calendar back, we can't be specific, we don't have enough data for that. There's no reason to believe it was December 25, that was invented in order to try to sanctify a pagan festival. They thought if they put the birth of Christ celebration on the same day as Saturnalia, the worship of the sun god, they could sanctify that and all they did was corrupt the celebration of the birth of Christ with all the Christmas legend. It backfired on them. But there's no way to know when He was born. It is possible they could have still been out there in December, we don't know that.

But the sheep at that time would roam the fields and then they would have a little lean-to fold made out of...it could be stones gathered or wood gathered together, something to enclose them. At night they would bring them in, keep them in the fold and the shepherd would lie across the entrance. That's why it literally says in John 10, Jesus says, "I'm not only the Great Shepherd, I am the door." You might think He's mixing His metaphors, He's not. The shepherd is the door. The shepherd would put his bed and lie across the entrance to the fold. No sheep could get out without walking across him and he would make sure it didn't happen. And Jesus calls Himself the door because He wants us to know that once we're in His sheepfold, He'll never let us out. That's the doctrine of eternal security.

So the shepherd, gather his sheep...they would all be out in the fields during the day. At night they would pull them in, they'd put them in this little open-aired lean-to. And he and his other shepherds would watch...they would...each other's turn to watch and others would sleep at the door to protect the sheep from getting out. So they were staying out in the fields which puts this somewhere from April...generally April to November, could be even in to December, we just don't know.

What are they doing? It says in verse 8, "They're keeping watch over their flock." Nighttime has come and so they're in the fold now. And they could still be out in the field, if it was a full moon they might have left them out, but typically they would bring them into the fold so they could carefully watch them and no predictor could get them. Although there may not have been mountain lions that close to Bethlehem, we don't know, there could well have been. But sometimes thieves also...so they're very likely in a fold, it's night and some of them are weak and perhaps it's early enough at night that they're all awake when the angel arrives.

By the way, the Mishna, which is the clarification of Jewish law, and the Talmud which is rabbinic teaching required that flocks be kept only in wilderness areas. Flocks couldn't be kept in the populated area so they were out there in that wilderness area.

There's another very interesting note I want you to have here. Remember now, Bethlehem is about six miles south of Jerusalem. In fact, when you...that's from the city center of Jerusalem, when you're driving today out of Jerusalem, you don't even know a break between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, it's an uninterrupted suburb. It's very close. But the rabbis had made a rule, it's recorded in the Mishna, in the clarification of Jewish law, that any animal found between Jerusalem and a certain spot in Bethlehem was subject to be used as a sacrifice in the temple. Now there were sheep grazing in that area purposely to be used as sacrificial animals. But the rabbis reserved the right in the event that there were more people than available animals to literally commandeer any animals in the area and take them and use them as sacrifices. And if we remember history, we remember there could be as many as a quarter of a million animals slain around the Passover season. That's a lot. The rest of the year there were thousands upon thousands upon thousands of animals slain. So they went through sheep rather rapidly and they had the right to go into that area, between Jerusalem and a certain spot, and take any sheep if necessary to be used as a sacrifice in the temple.

Interesting thought, these shepherds may well have been caring for sheep that would be offered as sacrifices. How interesting that the announcement of the final and full sacrifice, the Lamb of God slain from before the foundation of the world, the Savior of the world, was made to shepherds who very likely who took care of sheep who were offered as pictures of that coming sacrifice.

Well, the tranquil normalcy of a night of shepherding was violated in an amazing way in verse 9. They were out there and it was a night like any other night. It was the very same period of time, the very same 24-hour period as the child had been born in Bethlehem, they were outside time in a field and it was just a night like every other night. They were doing what they had always done, telling their normal stories, playing their little flutes, doing what shepherds did. "And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them."

Now I've been telling you all the way along in our study of Luke, nobody saw angels. There hadn't been any account of anybody seeing an angel in 500 years, half a millennium. And now, all of a sudden, we start seeing angels. Gabriel, not just any angel, but Gabriel appears to Zacharias and then Gabriel comes back and appears to Mary. And very well this angel of the Lord could have been Gabriel back for his third visit. Perhaps the most likely candidate is Gabriel. And it says here he comes, the Greek verb is ephistemi, it literally means to stand near somebody. So there shepherds are there checking out the fold, doing whatever they do and all of a sudden here's Gabriel standing there. And it's evident that he's not one of the guys. It's very evident.

It's a dark night to whatever degree, it's all of a sudden emblazoned with the highest of all created beings standing in the midst of the lowliest of all earthly folks. And the sequence is the same as always. When Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, when Gabriel appeared to Mary, or when he appears, this angel of the Lord appears to the shepherds, the sequence is always the same...appearance, fear, comfort, message, sign. That's always the sequence...appearance, fear, comfort, message, sign. And that's exactly what we see here. We saw it with Zacharias when Gabriel came to him. We saw it with Mary when Gabriel came to her.

And so, the angel of the Lord suddenly...suddenly, instantaneously, immediately with no anticipation he's standing near them. Now if that's not enough, the text adds, "And the glory of the Lord shone around them." Now we read that and we've heard that and we perhaps haven't thought about it very deeply. Folks, I can't even describe to you what a significant statement that is. That is one of the high points of all of history.

If you go back and study the glory of the Lord. That is simply defined the manifestation of the presence of God in light. Now God is not corporeal, He doesn't have a body, He doesn't have a form, a physical form. He's the invisible God. But when He reveals Himself He reveals Himself as light, some kind of...some kind of glowing, brilliant, shining, incomprehensible manifestation of light. In fact, if He revealed Himself fully in light, in Exodus 33 it would be enough to incinerate anybody. And that's why God said to Moses, "I can't show you My full glory, you'll go up in smoke." So God tucked Moses in a rock and just let a little bit of His afterglow shine so that Moses could see it.

But if you study the glory of God, you start in the Garden of Eden and God is there with Adam and Eve and there's no sin so there's nothing to fear so that the presence of God is not something that consumes them because there is no sin. So they're walking and talking with God in the cool of the day and they're in the presence of the Lord. They're walking with the glorious, shining Shekinah manifestation of God. Then sin comes in and immediately God says, "I can't have fellowship with you anymore," and He throws them out of the garden and puts an angel with a flaming sword there...and that wasn't because He didn't care about them, it was because He did care about them and should they enter the garden and come into His presence they would have been immediately destroyed. So God put the angel with the flaming sword there in a sense as protection.

Here was man walking and talking in the presence of God with the glory of God. All of a sudden he's alienated from the glory of God completely. It's a long time before the glory of God appears again. In Exodus chapter 40 they finished building the tabernacle. The tabernacle is where they're going to be where they worship the Lord and there's a place in the tabernacle called the Holy of Holies where God is going to take up residence and when they finished that, according to Exodus 40, the glory of God came out of heaven and came down. And the glory of God came and just filled that place, just the great shining Shekinah presence of God came down and filled that place and the glory of the Lord had come back and God was manifesting His great presence and His great glory. It was a

monumental moment. It was the establishment of worship. It was the establishment of the place of worship. There was an establishment of that place where sacrifices were to be made in order to give people access to God, where once a year the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would go into the holy place and then into the Holy of Holies and he would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat and there sins would be atoned for. And God signified the great importance of that when His glory came down.

And His glory, you remember, came out of the tabernacle and went up into the sky during the day as a cloud and led them, and as a pillar of fire at night and led them. And they saw the glory of God, the great light manifestation of God. Later on when they build the temple, the same thing happened. The temple was completed in Solomon's day, the glory of God came down and God again said I'm taking up residence, I want to be a focus of your worship, I want you to give your attention to Me to worship and glorify Me. It wasn't very long, however, until they turned against God and you can read in Ezekiel 8 to 10 the glory of God left, it departed and went away from the temple. A sad moment. The prophet stands and he watches the glory of God go up over the temple and go up over the door and up out over the mountain and it disappears and God leaves Israel.

And the glory never came back till this night been a long time until this night and the glory of God appears on earth again. Boy, this is not just a small event, it signified in the Garden the presence of God. It signified in the tabernacle the presence of God. It signified in the temple the presence of God coming into the world. And it signified this night the presence of God had come into the world. The presence of God had come not in a building, not in a tent, this time it had come in human flesh in the Messiah.

Later on in His life, Jesus took the disciples, and Matthew 17 records it, up in the mountain and He pulled His flesh back and they saw the glory of God. He was transfigured before them. Remember that? Someday, as I point out in my new book on the Second Coming, the glory of God is going to come back. We haven't seen it. It hasn't happened since this earthly time. Nobody has seen it since those shepherds and those disciples, but some day the glory of God is coming back, Matthew 24 and 25, when Jesus returns and when the glory comes back it won't just be Israel and it won't just be a few shepherds, and it won't just be some apostles, when the glory comes next time the whole world is going to see it because God is going to blacken the sky, the stars are going to go out, the sun's going to go out, the moon is going to go out, it's going to get pitch black and then the full universe is going to be filled with the blazing glory of God. It won't be His back parts, it won't be His afterglow, it will be the full face and when man, sinful man confronts the full glory of God he will be incinerated. And that is the final glorious judgment of God when He establishes His Kingdom of glory on the earth where He reigns forever.

This is not just some small event. This is the glory of God coming down. But of all people, to shepherds, to the lowliest of the low the glory comes. And we know this is a monumental moment in

redemptive history. And it says they were terribly frightened. Well I understand that. That was the same reaction everybody else had. The glory of God is terrifying.

When Isaiah saw God in a vision, he was terrified. He pronounced a curse upon himself and expected to be immediately incinerated. When Ezekiel in chapter 1 of Ezekiel saw the glory of God in a vision, he fell on his face in a coma. When John the Apostle saw the glory of Christ, the Shekinah glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1 it says he rolled over as a dead man and went into a coma. Terror is the result of seeing the presence of God. Even the veiled presence of God. People who saw Jesus and understood that He was God were terrified. A woman was healed by Jesus and it says she was absolutely terrified when she realized He had to be God because He had just healed her. The disciples had Jesus in the boat, it says they were afraid because of the storm. Jesus stopped the storm and it says they were exceedingly afraid. They were more afraid of having God in their boat than having a storm outside their boat. I understand that. Even a veiled presence of God was enough to terrify a sinner because a sinner knows...if I can see God, if I'm in the presence of God, He can see me. I see holiness, He sees sin, I'm in trouble.

So this is the normal reaction. These are common guys. They probably haven't had any very interesting experiences in life, certainly nothing could even come remotely close to this. And would they have ever expected that God would have showed up? But He did. This signifies the importance of this event. This is not just any life here, being born in Bethlehem. This is not just another example of religious virtue. This isn't another good man. This is something monumental here. God Himself has come down out of heaven in shining light. And they were terribly frightened. And I understand that. They were in a state of absolute panic, terrified.

Verse 10, "And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid.'" Ohhh, easy for you to say. Do not be afraid, or stop being afraid. By the way, it's the same sequence to Zacharias and Mary. These men didn't need to be afraid to fear God which again indicates to me that they were righteous, that they were true believing Jews, devout who loved the true and living God and were waiting for the Savior to come. You have nothing to fear...he said. Now the only way that could be true is if your sins had been...what?... forgiven.

By the way, that's a very common phrase. If you want to have a good Bible study, start in Genesis 15:1 where that phrase first appears, "don't be afraid," and follow it all the way through Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. You find it in Nehemiah. You find it in Daniel. You find it in Zachariah. And then you find it in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Acts, Hebrews, 1 Peter and Revelation 1:17. Just follow that whole phrase and you have times when you ought to be afraid of God but there are those times when God says...don't be afraid...don't be afraid. And every time it is when God is going to reveal grace. Okay?

Listen, if God shows up and He's not come for grace, be afraid...true?...but when He comes with a gracious purpose. And He did that so many times in the Old Testament. So many times He said to Israel, "Don't be afraid, I'm coming in compassion, I'm coming in grace, I'm coming in mercy." You don't need to be afraid in the presence of God when He brings a gracious purpose.

And look what the angel says, "Stop being afraid, behold, I bring you...what?...good news." The news is not bad, guys. Come on, get up, don't be afraid, the news is good. You know, being in the presence of God should panic anyone. I...I always wonder about these quote/unquote charismatic people who see God and talk to God and anybody in the Scripture who had that kind of experience was in a state of terror until God graciously said, "Stop being afraid." It doesn't make you into a celebrity, it instantly transforms you into a self-conscious sinners who fears judgment and death and hell.

So, the angel says, "Don't be afraid, the news is good...the news is good." In fact, it's good news that will produce great joy. This is not news of judgment, this is not news of punishment, this is not news of cursing, this is not news about death, that will come to the world and that does come to sinners. "I bring you good news" is from the verb euangelizo from which we get transliterated the English word evangelize which simply means to tell people the good news. Evangelize isn't even an English word, it's just a transliteration of a Greek word, euangelizo. By the way, Luke uses the verb often to proclaim the good news, to preach the good news, to bring the good news. He uses it in chapter 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 16, chapter 20. He likes that word. Luke uses the verb more than any other New Testament gospel writer. You'll find the noun all over the place, euangelion which is the noun form of the same root. It's all over the place because the message of Christianity is good news, isn't it? It's good news we have a saving God, it's good news He sent a Savior. It's good news there's One who's come to take away sin.It's good news all your sin is forgiven forever... that's the good news. And this is such good news it ought to produce great joy which is the utter opposite of fear. Joy, as 1 Peter 1 says, inexpressible with which you greatly rejoice.

You know, you can't contemplate the gospel without joy, can you? Without laughter and hilarity...good news. Boy, these guys went from absolute sheer terror to hilarity upon the instruction of this angel, perhaps Gabriel. The highest and best joy is for those who receive salvation. This is great joy. This is the highest joy. This is the joy that comes to those who receive the grace of salvation...I bring you good news of great joy, there has been born a Savior.

There's no greater joy than that, is there? Against that matter every other matter pales in importance. The highest and best joy is for those whose sins have been forgiven, those for whom the Savior has died and paid the penalty for their sins. The news is good, folks, and this is what we tell the world, isn't it? Go into all the world and proclaim this good news.

Let me give you one other point just briefly. That's the proclamation of the good news, here's the pervasiveness of it. And this is a good place to close...the pervasiveness of it. Back to verse 10, "I'll bring you good news of a great joy," here's the pervasiveness of it, "Which shall be for ALL the people for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior." Just those two phrases, one in verse 10 and one in verse 11, sum up the pervasiveness. How widespread is this good news? Verse 10 says it's good news of great joy which shall be for all the people. Now THE people, primarily the word laos in the Greek, primarily from which we get the word laity in the English meaning the people, the word primarily refers to Israel. Luke uses it a number of times to refer to Israel, for all the people, of course, the angel is saying, first of all, for Israel, salvation is of the Jews, the message of salvation comes to Israel, the New Covenant is being delivered and ratified to Israel and the fulfillment of Davidic promise and Abrahamic promise with it. But is Israel...Israel the primary recipient of this wondrous reality to all the people...and he knows that the shepherds would understand it as Israel because they understand God as the redeemer of Israel, and God is the God of Israel and they being the covenant people. But it doesn't end with Israel. They are the primary people. They are the ones that would be understood by those shepherds as the people. They're the ones that Luke intends us to understand as the people.

But it doesn't stop with them. Go over to verse 31 where you have Simeon picking up the baby Jesus in the temple and he realizes that this child is the Savior and he says that He's been prepared in the presence of all peoples a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel. So we've got to go beyond just Israel. Israel is the primary but the secondary is He goes to the world, to the Gentiles. And that is exactly what Isaiah the prophet said there in Isaiah chapter 60 in that wonderful...and by the way, the promise of the gospel to all nations is in Isaiah 9:2, Isaiah 42:6, Isaiah 49:6 to 9, Isaiah 51:4...it's not just isolated to one verse...but listen to Isaiah 60, "Arise, shine, your light has come, the glory of the Lord has risen upon you," that's the Messiah, and it says, "The Lord will rise upon you, His glory will appear on you and nations will come to your light."

From the very beginning this good news of the forgiveness of sin would go to Israel and through Israel to the nations...to the nations...the nations. In fact, all peoples in verse 31 is plural, all the peoples. That's why it's translated that way with an "s" at the end, whereas back in verse 10 it's singular, "the people," Israel. But the message of forgiveness extends to all the peoples, all nations. And so we are to make disciples said Jesus in Matthew 28 of all nations...all nations.

So this good news extends to all nations. That's the big picture. That's the collective picture. Look at the individual picture in verse 11. "Today in the city of David there has been born...look at this, what are the next two words?...for you a Savior...for you." That's right, you guys standing right here. You...you...you shepherds, the angel standing right with them says "for you...for you." You could say it this way, "The Savior has been born and He will be the Savior of everybody, and the Savior of anybody who comes and believes." The humblest, the most ignorant, the most uneducated, the most lowly and unskilled, even despised, even the chief of sinners, even the lowest of low, He is the Savior

of everybody who is saved, from every people and tongue and tribe and nation on the face of the earth and anybody who chooses to come. He's the world Savior and He's your Savior.

So the proclamation and the pervasiveness. Now next time we're going to talk about the person with the good news and look specifically at the titles given to Jesus.

Father, we thank You for this great portion of Scripture, that's so foundational, basic, important understanding our faith. And, Lord, I know in our congregation this morning there are people who do not know Christ Jesus as Savior, who have not really embraced the Savior. The good news has been given to them. The angel could stand by them today and say, "Don't be afraid, I'm here with good news and the good news is a Savior was born for you...for you...for you." Oh how sad that He came unto His and His own received Him not. We pray that that wouldn't be the case today. I hope that all of us will hear the good news, the greatest news you could ever hear, a Savior has come to save you from your sins, from the power of sin, from the penalty of sin which is eternal hell and some day from the presence of sin which is holy heaven. We thank You for the Savior and the good news that turns fear into great joy. For those who reject the Savior, there's reason to be afraid for He will come again and there will be no grace when the glory returns. But for now the news is good, the day of salvation has opened the door to any sinner who will repent and embrace Christ. May You work that work in the hearts of those who are here today and those who hear this message. We pray for Jesus glory and sake. Amen.

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