

## **The Announcement of Jesus' Birth, Part 2**

Luke 2:8-14

42-26

This morning as we prepare for the Lord's Table and consider the Word of God, we don't have to go anywhere, we can stay right in Luke chapter 2. So open your Bible there, if you will, as we think about the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, the One who died for us on the cross which, of course, is our focus when we come to the communion service. We certainly are in a fitting place to consider that as we look at Luke chapter 2.

In the second chapter of Luke, of course, the first seven verses describe for us the birth of Jesus Christ, born to the virgin Mary. We remember the circumstances. Born in a little village of Bethlehem, no place for them in the inn so that basically they were having to lay the child in a feed trough in a stable. And the birth of Jesus Christ, as we remember, was anonymous at first. Nobody really knew anything about this child. As far as people around were concerned, it was just another young couple and another baby born. No one at first really understood what was going on.

It didn't take long, however, because we come to the text of Luke 2:8. On the very same day that the Lord Jesus Christ was born we read, "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 a 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 among men with whom He is pleased.'"

And I mentioned to you last week, this is where all heaven breaks loose. They can only be restrained for so long. The birth of this child having been laid in the feed trough in anonymity at first and then this monumental announcement to the angels that even involves a whole heavenly host of angels praising God and affirming peace on earth toward men with whom God is pleased.

And so, as we come to the text, this is a text we already have begun to consider, I want to take us a little deeper into this text in preparation for the communion this morning. In particular, we're focusing on verses 11 and 12 to start with where the child is identified for us as the Savior who is Christ the Lord.

The beautiful old Christmas carol asks the question, "What child is this who, laid to rest on Mary's lap, is sleeping?" And, of course, that is the real question. Who is the baby in Bethlehem born at first so anonymously to anonymous Joseph and Mary as far as any public knowledge was concerned? Who is this child who...whose birth established the world's calendars? Who is this child more widely known than any other child ever born? Who is this child whose life and work has impacted more

souls than all other influential people in history combined? Who is this child who determines the eternal destiny of every human who has ever or will ever be born? Who is this child?

The angel says, "A Savior who is Christ the Lord." There is no question, there's no need for clarification as to who is this child because the angel tells us in very explicit terms.

First, the child is Savior. We've already looked at that. That's the great, great affirmation of the angel that causes verse 10 to say, "I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people." And what is the good news that produces universal joy? "A Savior has been born." A Savior has been born.

And somebody at this point might ask the question: A Savior to save us from what? That's certainly a fair question. Well, the word "savior" implies that we need to be saved from something. "Saved" is a synonym for "rescued." It's a synonym for "delivered." And it implies that there's some kind of threatening condition. There's some kind of dangerous condition, some kind of desperate condition, some kind of deadly condition from which we need to be rescued.

You know, it's amazing to me how very little people today talk about being saved. That doesn't seem to be a very popular term. It seems as if people don't understand what that means. I remember preaching one time and mentioning that people needed to be saved. And another preacher came to me afterwards and said, "You've got to stop using that word, it's really obscure, nobody even knows what you're talking about when you talk about people needing to be saved."

Well I admit that it's certainly a biblical word, it's certainly an old-fashioned evangelical word. And there may be a generation of people alive today who don't quite connect with it. But it really is a very good word. If somebody is drowning in the ocean, I think, and you explain that to them that somebody is drowning and you say, what do they need? They might say, "Well they need to be saved." They might understand that in that context. Or if somebody is in a car that's had a terrible accident and all the metal is twisted around them and they're bleeding to death, they might understand if you said somebody needs to go in and save them from a terrible death, a terrible fate. They might even understand it in a medical situation where somebody has a terminal illness and they need a doctor who can save them. They would understand that.

There's really nothing wrong with the word, it's a great word. I think it's a word that has a level of desperation to it that we shouldn't be too quick to give up. We could talk about being rescued. That's probably a good synonym which implies impending disaster, impending death even.

But that still begs the question: From what do we need to be rescued? From what do we need to be delivered and saved? And today when you hear people present the gospel, very often you get the idea that we need to be rescued from...from our...our unfulfillment, that there's something in life that just isn't complete, that there's some great level of disappointment with which we live. Our marriage really hasn't worked out the way we hoped it would. You know, all the euphoria, all the hearts and flowers, all the bells and whistles that were going off and we thought that this was going to be one of, you know, permanent state of romantic bliss and it would all work out. And it just didn't go that way. And, you know, even our family situation when the precious little ones came into the world has turned out to be a disaster. You know, the kids have not turned out the way we would want them. They bring us heartache and grief, etc., etc. Our careers don't necessarily follow the path that we

perhaps dreamed they should. We wind up working for years at a job we really don't like, particularly working for people we can't stand. And the people around us we like the least get promoted over us and life just doesn't seem to be as fulfilling as we would wish it was. And it doesn't seem to work out that we get the kind of house we would like. We're not able to go to places. We look at the travel brochures, and you know we really want to go to Switzerland and we end up with a three-day trip to Tijuana. You know, it's...it's really not... Life just doesn't deliver. You know, that's kind of it.

And so, you get the idea that Jesus will come and deliver you from your unfulfilled life. Jesus will fix your marriage. And Jesus will notch you up a few ladders on the career ladder. You know, He'll deliver you from this sort of unfulfilled life, this sort of purposelessness, this kind of frustration or disappointment or even despair, this kind of hopelessness that you're never really going to get it; it's not going to ever come to pass. All the dreams that you dreamed for so long have really turned into nightmares and that's the way it's going to end. And Jesus will come along and fix you. Jesus is the one who rescues you from being unfulfilled.

Secondly, the gospel takes a tone that Jesus will rescue you from debilitating habits. Things that kind of...you can't get control of. Jesus is going to cause you to be able to get control of your life. As the alcoholic would say in Alcoholics Anonymous, you know, he never was able to get control of his alcohol until he came to recognize there was a quote-unquote higher power. Somehow...somehow there's a hook up there and if you can latch onto that hook it can lift you up out of the...out of the pain of your passion. That...that you look at your life and not only are you unfulfilled but you find yourself literally overpowered by lusts and desires and passions. You're out of control, whether it's in the case of alcohol or whether it's in the case of drugs or medication or whether it's just some kind of other habit. For some people it might be something like...like smoking that leads to cancer and you still can't quit. It might be that you have other preoccupation with pornography. You get on that Internet and sooner or later you go to that stuff because you can't resist it and you're really tired of these debilitating things. Maybe it's sexual sin, homosexuality or heterosexual sin where you know the price of that can be death and sexually transmitted disease, etc., etc. And you just can't...you just can't get control of it. You can't get control of your temper and consequently you're ruining your relationship with your wife, you're ruining your relationship with your kids, and Jesus is going to come along and fix that. Jesus will deliver you from drives and desires that destroy life, your life and the lives around you.

And there are people who would look at the gospel and they would see it as that. And Jesus will fill up the empty holes in your life. And Jesus will give you victory over those things that tend to destroy your life. And there's a sense in which the gospel secondarily does make an application to those things because when you come to Christ and you are genuinely saved and you are genuinely converted and you become a new creature and you belong to God and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart and you have a new reason to live and the hope of eternal life and the promise of heaven, it does have a dramatic effect on the lack of fulfillment in life and you do receive the power of the Holy Spirit over the debilitating habits and passions that your sinful nature generates. This is true. But those are not the primary issues in salvation.

There is another issue that is primary and singular. And there's a reason for that. Not everybody in the world is unfulfilled. In fact, I think unfulfillment very often goes with our western culture. There are people in the world and Third World countries who don't have any expectations so they don't experience any unfulfillment. They're not unfulfilled because there isn't anything out there anyway. And not everybody in the world is...is discontent with their condition in life. I mean, there are a lot of

people even in a materialistic environment like ours that are very happy to perpetuate permanently the condition they're presently in. They're living life to the max, as far as they're concerned. They've got all the wine, women and song, money that they could possibly want. They've got it all. They're really very content.

There are others who are very content with their life style. Maybe they're retired. They've got the ultimate fishing spot and that's it for them. I mean, not everybody is unfulfilled. There are people who exceed their dreams and ambitions. So that is not a universal problem. If we have a Savior who came to save the world, and is the Savior of the world, then it can't be dealing with just unfulfillment. That can't be the main issue. Not everybody is unfulfilled. In fact, there are large segments of the population of the world that don't have any expectation for anything because there isn't anything in the materialistic world to fulfill them and so they don't experience the artificial unfulfillment that so many people do in our western culture.

And on the other hand, not everybody is driven to a...to a point of danger and disaster by their passions. Not everybody is to the same degree dominated by those things. There are people who have a certain measure of self-control. Those aren't the universal problems.

The universal problem from which the Lord sent a Savior to deliver us is not the problem of purposelessness or unfulfilled living. It's not the problem of passion or lust or unbreakable habits. It's the problem of sin and guilt. That's the issue. It's to rescue us from the consequence of our sin, of our sin. That is to say everybody falls into that category. I don't care whether you're a person living in a Third World country with no expectations of anything, or whether you're a person who isn't particularly consumed by lust and evil desire, you have a certain measure of self-control and you live life on a certain moral even keel, you still have the same problem. You have broken the law of God and you are on your way to eternal hell and you need to be rescued from sin. In the presentation of the gospel, folks, that's where we need to go with the gospel. That's the issue of the gospel.

The fact of the matter is when you're rescued from sin and its power and its penalty and one day from its presence, you may never still realize your career dreams or your marital dreams or your vacation dreams or your economic dreams. You may never get total dominance over the drives and passions of your life. But you will get some measure of triumph because when your purpose is eternal those things that don't come true in life don't matter as much. And when you realize you have complete forgiveness and you do have the power of the Holy Spirit to give you victory over your passions, there's a measure of joy and victory in that. Those things will be dealt with but that's not the main issue.

The church needs to get back to remembering that God sent His Son into the world to save His people from their what? Sins, that's the issue, and a proper presentation of the gospel is to talk about that. That is precisely what is bound up in the announcement of the angel that the one who is born today and is lying there in a feed trough in Bethlehem one day old is a Savior. And as the angel told Joseph: "Who will save His people from their sins." That's why you must name Him Jesus. The real destroyer is sin and the guilt for sin is a real guilt, not a psychological, artificial guilt, not a self-imposed guilt but a God-imposed guilt that damns to eternal hell. It is from that that people need to be saved, rescued and delivered. And that is precisely what we must understand in understanding the gospel.

So this is good news. The good news of great joy is for all the people. And the good news is that

there's been born for you — that is individualizing this universal good news — a Savior. And so in the first few verses, verses 8 to 10, we talked about the proclamation of the good news and we talked about the pervasiveness of the good news. The angel proclaims the good news of great joy which is in its pervasiveness for all the people and for you. That is to say it's for everybody and anybody.

Now that leads us to the person of the good news, the third point. The proclamation, pervasive, it's the person of the good news and this certainly is the message of verse 11. Who is this child? Who is this child? Already we have noted that He is the Savior who saves His people from their sins. But beyond that, this One who is born that same day, today, the day, the very day of the birth of Messiah, the day is the same day as the angelic announcement to the shepherds that came that evening, that same day one was born in the city of Bethlehem which is the city of David, actually the village of Bethlehem, the Savior who is identified. And here is the identification, who is Christ the Lord.

His early name is not given, Jesus. That is given in Matthew 1:21. It's not given here but Savior is the equivalent. It's the synonym. And so we understand that. But His title is given here. Not His earthly name but His title. His title is Christ the Lord, Christ the Lord. That is to be understood that He is both Christ and Lord. He is both *Christos* and *kurios*. He is both Christ and the Lord.

This is an exalted title, by the way, for a baby in such humble circumstances. It would be a little hard to convince anybody who was located in that traveler's rest stop, stable area, when two teen-agers, Joseph and Mary, were taking care of that little baby that was lying in the feed trough, it would be very hard to convince anybody there looking into the face of that baby that this was the Christ, the promised Messiah, the anointed one and the Lord. That would be... Well, you say, "Well didn't He have a gold halo around Him and a little gold spikes all the way around His head?" No, He didn't have that. There wasn't any hat on His head. There wasn't any halo on His head. He was a baby just like any other baby. There would have been no visible distinctive marks of His sovereignty, of His deity, of His messiahship.

But...and by the way, when the shepherds were told to go and see the child they were simply told in verse 12, there will be a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. He's not going to have any other distinguishing mark than that He is lying in a feed trough which is very distinguished. There wouldn't be any other baby placed in such an unspeakable environment after birth, but this baby.

So this baby, in terms of what anybody would assume, wouldn't be anything remarkable...anybody remarkable. But in fact He is identified as Christ the Lord. Let's talk about the word Christ. That's an exalted title. Back in Daniel chapter 9 verses 25 and 26 there's a prophecy concerning the coming Messiah and there He is called Messiah. Twice, 9:25 and 9:26, that is the Hebrew word for "anointed." In the Greek Old Testament that is *Christos*. It simply means the anointed one. God's anointed one. Now, in the Old Testament time and in ancient times, and in some places even in modern times when someone was anointed by the ultimate authority that was signifying that they were being placed in to some very high office, given some very, very high title.

First of all, the Messiah is anointed because He is God's King. He is in the line of David. We've already learned that when Gabriel came to Mary and said you're going to have a baby, she was told that the baby would be the Son of the Most High, that is, the Son of God, but the Son of David, also. He would sit on David's throne and He would establish a kingdom and then He would reign forever and ever. He is the ultimate King. He is the eternal King. He is the King of kings. And kings were anointed. That was a way to symbolize that they were identified as set apart, elevated above, and

distinguished. And this indicates, Christ being called *Christos*, or Jesus being called *Christos*, that He is the anointed God's King. Later on in His life, you know, when Pilate confronted Him, he said, "Are You a King?" He said, "You said it, but My kingdom is not of this world," at least not yet. There will be a day when He reigns over a kingdom on this world for a thousand years, according to Revelation chapter 20. Then He will reign, of course, forever and ever as King of king...King of kings and Lord of lords. But He was a King. Matthew, all the way through his gospel, portrays Jesus as a King. Clear through the gospel of Matthew, that is the theme of Matthew's emphasis.

But there was more to it than that. Priests were anointed; particularly the high priest was anointed. And the one who comes, this Messiah, the one who is the anointed one, will not only be anointed because He is the King but He will be anointed because He is the great high priest. There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, Paul said in his letter to Timothy. And this is the anointed High Priest, the final High Priest, the glorious High Priest, the great intercessor between God and sinners, the One who can truly take sinners into the presence of a holy God, the One who alone can give them access, the One who by His death literally severed the veil that separated men from God. He is therefore the great Priest, the great High Priest who takes us into the presence of God.

He also is the great prophet. And prophets were anointed as well because they were God's spokesmen. God never had such a spokesman as Jesus. "God at sundry times and diverse manner in time past," Hebrews 1 says, "spoke according to the prophets but in these last days he's spoken unto us by the Son." And His Son, of course, is the greatest of all prophets, the greatest preacher that ever lived, the One who spoke and out of His mouth came only the truth of God.

So when it says He's the anointed one, it can sum up all of that. First of all, I think, and primarily it means that He is the One to fulfill Davidic promise to be the anointed King, who would establish the great promised kingdom that lasts forever, a kingdom for Israel and a kingdom from Israel over the whole world and a kingdom that would last forever in the new heavens and the new earth. But also it implies also that He is the great High Priest and the great prophet of God.

So we know Him in that way. What was happening there, the little child in the feed trough was the greatest King the world will ever know, the greatest Priest the world will ever know, the greatest Prophet the world will ever know, all summed up in one person. He was the King of all kings. He was at that very time in His birth the Priest who alone can give access to God and the Prophet who spoke for God and only for God. That was this child.

It's amazing to think about that, to understand that you had a real baby there and that the condescension of the second member of the Trinity was so great that He submitted Himself to the conditions of being an infant. What does that mean? Well later on when He was...when He's commented on in Luke's gospel, Luke says about Him that He grew in wisdom, in stature, and favor with God and man. There was actual growth that is normal to human beings. He actually started out as a baby and was a toddler and grew to being an adult. This is the wondrous condescension. All the while, even from the beginning, He was the anointed King and Priest and Prophet.

And then He is called Lord and Lord could be just a term of honor used in a human sense in the sense of a benefactor and in the sense of a patron, in the sense of someone who is revered and highly esteemed and given some exalted position. In England today you hear about Lord So-and-so and Lady So-and-so. That's been a pretty...pretty traditional in western society through the years.

Lord is a term referring to someone in a place of leadership, in a place of authority. In fact, in 1 Peter 3 we find that it was even true in a Jewish environment, in a New Testament environment because it says that Sarah called Abraham, her husband, lord. And Peter affirms that that is a right designation, that in fact a woman should recognize her husband as one who has authority over her. So it can be used in a human sense to speak of a legitimate authority.

But in this usage it's way beyond that. When it says this is the Savior who is Christ the Lord, you'll notice and it will be true every time it's used in the Bible to speak of Jesus Christ or of God, it's a capital "L". You're not seeing it here as some human designation, you're seeing this as a divine designation. To say that this child is Lord, listen very carefully, is to say that this child is God. Lord is intended to imply in the Greek all that is implied by the Hebrew word Yahweh, the Tetragrammaton, the Hebrew name for God. To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that Jesus is God first and foremost. And let me say this as clearly and simply as I can and you need to remember this, the most fundamental and basic confession of Christianity is this, Jesus is Lord. That is the most fundamental and basic confession of the Christian faith. Without that you don't have Christianity.

I was reading a letter to the editor in a magazine and this editor was...the magazine had written an article on Jehovah's Witnesses and this person had read it who was a Jehovah's Witness, apparently some leader in the Jehovah's Witnesses and was writing the magazine complaining about a misrepresentation that the editor had made in writing about Jehovah's Witnesses. He accused them of saying this and that and this and that and this and they were wrong. And the Jehovah's Witnesses really weren't like that and didn't believe that. That Jehovah's Witnesses did believe in Jesus Christ and the Jehovah's Witnesses did believe that Jesus died. And that Jehovah's Witnesses did see Jesus as Savior. And that Jehovah's Witnesses believed in grace. And Jehovah's Witnesses believed in faith, trying to position themselves as legitimate Christians.

All of that aside, there's one thing that Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe. They do not believe that Jesus is Lord. And because they do not believe that, they are not Christians. That is not Christianity.

Again I say: The most fundamental and basic confession of the Christian faith is a three-word statement, "Jesus is Lord," with all that Lord means. Now you remember when I was in dialogue with the leaders of the Mormon Church who flew down here from Brigham Young and they were talking about how they love Christ and they honor Christ and Christ is their Savior and that they appreciate the books I write which exalt Christ and so forth and so on. And as we talked about that for hours and they wanted me to come and speak at BYU and address the faculty and address the students because there's a common love for Christ. And...and they wanted me to know that they were Christians just like I was and so forth and so on.

And we got through all of that and at the end I said, "Who is Jesus Christ?" To which they replied, "Jesus is a created being, is a spirit brother of Lucifer and Adam." That is not Christianity. That is not Christianity.

And, you know, there's so many people out there who really don't get it. There are Christian people who when they hear people talk about grace and talk about faith and we love Jesus and Jesus is our Savior and He died for us, they don't understand the subtleties of what's going on. Those cults, obviously masquerading as Christian are not Christian. They are satanic counterfeits because no matter what they affirm they deny that Jesus is Lord. And that, again I say, is the most fundamental and basic confession of the Christian faith. If you want to be saved, Romans 10:9 says, you must

confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. That is unequivocal.

What does it mean? It means to say that Jesus is God and all that that implies. And if you're God, that implies sovereignty and authority.

Let me talk a little further about that: The selection of the word *kurios* here for Lord; that's a very important selection. There are two words in the Greek language, still are, I think, that could be used to refer to "Lord" or "Master." One is *kurios* and the other is *despotēs*. And if you study the background of those two words, and even how they've sort of come down to us, we have a word in English, "despot." When we think of the word "despot" we think of someone who is in authority and someone who is in power, but with a certain level of high-handedness, don't we, or a certain kind of illegitimacy or abuse or unearned, undeserved power. To say someone is despotic or a despot is to assume that they have somehow garnered power that they don't really deserve and it doesn't belong to him...to them and has somehow been gained not by the will of the people or those who have the right to give it, but it's been illegitimately usurped.

But the word *kurios* is just the opposite of that. *Kurios* means supreme power with authority with legitimacy. It is a word that expresses an authority that is valid, lawful, and legitimate. And *kurios* is used here. Jesus is legitimately, validly Lord. He is Lord lawfully. He is Lord legally. He is Lord by virtue of nature who He is. So the root idea of *kurios* is legitimate sovereignty, legitimate authority. And, of course, the ultimate legitimate authority in the universe is God. That's why in the Old Testament, the Greek translation of the Old Testament... That... That helps us to understand word usages, in the Greek translation. The original Old Testament is Hebrew. But if you looked at a Greek translation you will find that where Lord is used in the Old Testament, the Greek Old Testament uses the word *kurios* 6,156 times; so that...and that to represent "Yahweh," to represent "God." So 6,156 times the Greek translators of the Old Testament translate the Tetragrammaton, that is to say Yahweh, Lord, *kurios*. So they would understand that *kurios* in the Old Testament refers to God. It's a proper name for God, affirming His legitimate sovereign power and authority. You come in to the New Testament, the writers of the New Testament use *kurios* all the time. It has become, in the Greek language, of course, the name for God. So when it says Jesus is Lord, when it says you must confess Jesus as Lord, you are confessing Him as God with all that that implies. That implies authority. That implies sovereignty.

So the good news is this, the good news is there's a proclamation of salvation. The good news is the pervasiveness of that salvation reaches to everybody and anybody. The good news is the person of that salvation is none other than the anointed King and Priest and Prophet of God who is none other than God Himself. That's why when Isaiah the prophet was talking about this and prophesying about it, he said, "A child is born," Isaiah 9:6, "a Son is given, His name is going to be called Wonderful, Counselor," what's the next one? "the Mighty God," and then, "the eternal Father," and then, "the Prince of peace." There is no question as to who the child is. The child is the anointed One of God, Prophet, Priest and King, who is Himself God. That is who was born that day. A Savior, King, Priest, Prophet who is God, now you understand who Jesus is. Anything less than that is sub-Christianity. Amazing titles given to a...a one-day-old lying in a feed trough. The wealth of those titles and the grandeur of those titles and the majesty of those titles stands in stark contrast to the conditions in a stinking stall.

Verse 12 takes us then to the next statement by the angel. The angel doesn't tell them to go look for the child, assumes they will though, which is another indicator that they were probably devout and

really believed in the true and living God and were looking for the Messiah. And that's why they were selected for this announcement even though they were the humblest of the humble, and the lowest people on the socio-economic ladder were shepherds, as I told you last time. But the angel says to them, "This will be a sign for you, you'll find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

No king of royal blood and right ever had such a birth in Israel. This is just so much contrasting the glory of who He was. This will be a sign for you. Don't get too mystical about the word "sign." It just means a plain old sign, just a physical sign, nothing spiritual, nothing supernatural about the sign. It's used in a very plain way. A sign... You know what a sign is for; a sign is to point you somewhere. A sign is to identify something. And that's exactly what he's saying. You're going to have a sign. This is what you're going to look for. You're going to have to find a baby wrapped in cloths. Well, any baby born would be wrapped in cloths; they did that with all of them. In fact, not to wrap a baby in cloth was...was the worst imaginable treatment. If you go back to Ezekiel 16 there's an interesting analogy there, it's a description the prophet Ezekiel gives, and he pictures a baby coming out of its mother's womb. It's very graphic, one of the most graphic chapters in the Bible. The baby comes out of the mother's womb and it's all bloody and the cord is still attached. And the baby is just thrown out in a field. And God makes that baby analogous to Israel. And He says when I found you, nobody had cut your umbilical cord, nobody had washed you with water, nobody had rubbed you with salt — which was used as an antiseptic in case there were any wounds in the birth of the child — and it says nobody had wrapped you in cloths.

Way back then in Ezekiel's time, hundreds of years before this, it was tradition among the Jews and still at the time of Jesus to wrap babies. And as I told you, they would wrap each limb separately, the little legs and the little arms would be wrapped, and then the body would be wrapped tightly as well, providing the child warmth and security and protection. And also they believed that this...this helped the limbs to grow straight because they were wrapped so tightly together in that fashion. That was what any caring parent would do to a child. And so the angel tells the shepherds, you have to look for a baby that's been wrapped in cloths in the traditional way.

Well, that would be a sign to some degree, but any baby they found would be wrapped like that and there might have been more than one. So there's a further indicator that will really narrow it down, "You'll find this baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." It's a feed trough for animals. That would limit it to the right baby.

So they were going to have to go looking to find the baby who is Savior of the world, who is the anointed King and Priest and Prophet of God, who is God Himself, Yahweh in human flesh. And they would find Him wrapped like any other baby, without any distinguishing marks, with the exception that He was lying in a feed trough. This is a very normal looking baby, nothing to distinguish this baby from any other baby except the place it's laying.

So the person of the good news is introduced to us in starkly contrasting terms. And that leads us to the fourth point, the purpose of the good news. And I'll just wrap up with this, the purpose of the good news.

As this good news unfolds it has a purpose. And frankly, as we come to this in verses 13 and 14 we come to the transcendent pinnacle of all thought and action. And I mean that. I mean, you can't get any higher than this, folks. You're going to get as high as you can get right here. This is the highest of all truths. This is the reason for everything.

Verse 13 says, "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 among men with whom He is pleased.'"

You say, "What are you talking about?" We've come to the pinnacle. We've come to the transcendent high point. We've come to the highest point of thought and action, the highest truth of all truths. What is it? It's the glory of God. What you see here is the highest thing that can occur in the universe, the created universe. The highest thing that can occur in the created universe is that God is glorified by His creatures. And that's exactly what you see the angels doing. This is the purpose of the good news.

You say, "Well wasn't the good news to save sinners?" The good news is to save sinners so they can join angels in giving glory to God. The ultimate is always to glorify God. The highest, transcendent pinnacle of all thought and action, the reason for everything, is to glorify God. It comes pretty suddenly, this scenario here. I mean, it's shaken them just to have an angel there, just to have an angel from God there and to hear this incredible message. That alone is a startling and shocking event. But verse 13, "Suddenly," and God occasionally does things suddenly. Malachi 3:1 says the Messiah will suddenly come to His temple. If you read Mark 13:36, 1 Thessalonians 5:3 there's suddenness in the return of Jesus Christ. He's going to come in a sudden fashion. There are times when God invades human...the human realm with great suddenness. This is one. "Suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host."

Now I don't know how many there were. The heavenly host really could be translated "army," a multitude of the heavenly army. These are angels. How many is a multitude? I don't know how many is "a multitude." How many angels are there? I don't know how many angels there are, but according to Revelation there are ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands and thousands. Now ten thousand times ten thousand, is that an actual mathematical number? You could multiply that and add a few thousands and you've got a hundred million plus angels.

Well, the word *murion*, which is ten thousand, is the highest number for which there is a word in the Greek language, so there isn't a word for any higher number. It may just be that John, in writing *murion* times *murion* and thousands of thousands is just using sort of hyperbole and we don't know how many angels there are. I'm not sure you could just multiply and add there the thousands and thousands and get to the number. Let's just say there are hundreds of millions of angels, and leave it at that. This is not all of them, this is a representative group. Obviously it's not all of them in visible form, but a representative group, a large group.

"Multitude" refers to a large group. I'm not even going to speculate how many but it wouldn't be a handful, it wouldn't be a few, it wouldn't be a small group, it would be a large group, a multitude, large group. Whenever you see the word "multitude" used in the New Testament about Jesus — it says He was surrounded by a multitude — it's talking about a large crowd, hundreds and maybe in some cases thousands.

Now think about it, those shepherds have never seen an angel and they saw an angel. Now they see who knows how many angels in manifest visible form. Now this just didn't happen. It just didn't happen. You can find a place in 1 Kings 22 where there was a vision into heaven of the throne of

God and angels there. You can go to Revelation 4 and 5 and John had a vision of heaven and he could see in heaven the throne of God and angels there. But angels on earth? Not in a vision but there, really there? Who had seen this many angels? This is pretty remarkable. There were occasions in the Old Testament when an angel came and an angel went, but to have a...a huge multitude of angels out in this field with these non-descript shepherds, incredible. I mean, they were, according to verse 9, they were panicked. They were literally in phobic reaction, the Greek word *phobeōmi* used there, when it says they were terribly frightened. One angel scared the daylights out of them. You can imagine what this group did to them.

And the angels appeared and what were they doing? Well they were doing what angels always do, praising God, praising God. That's all they do is praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God. Well what were they praising God about? Well they were saying, "Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God, glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among men with whom He's pleased."

What were they praising God for? Well they were praising God because Jesus was born. They were praising God because the Savior had come. They were praising God for the Savior who is Christ the Lord. You see, they knew what was going on. They knew Jesus as the second member of the Trinity. They knew Christ before the incarnation. They had been associated with Christ in heaven before the incarnation. They knew of His glory, they knew of His riches, they knew of His majesty. They were also aware of the Fall of man. They understood the Fall of man, they knew about that. They had been informed also that God had provided a way of salvation for man. They knew about that. They knew that prophecies had been made that a...that a Messiah would come, a Savior would come, a sacrifice would be made. They understood the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, to some degree. They understood that all those animals had to be offered and they couldn't take away sin but they would picture One who would come and die and would.

They understood that. They...they had given the report to Joseph, "You shall call His name Jesus for He'll save His people from their sins." They knew what was going on. They knew the work of saving man. They knew that there would come a Savior who, while maintaining perfect righteousness and holiness, would also bear sin. They knew that God would not spare His own Son but give Him up for sinners. They knew that the Son, though rich, would become poor for the sake of undeserving sinners. They knew that He would vicariously bear their curse and take their punishment. They knew that the Holy Spirit would condescend to convict sinners and bring them to salvation, regenerate them and then take up residence in that sinner's heart. They understood the birth of Christ. They understood that He would enter into a condition of poverty, that He would become poor so that sinners could become rich. They understood this and they were praising God because they were seeing God's grace on display. They were seeing God's mercy. They were seeing the salvation plan come to its glorious fruition. They were thanking God for His indescribable gift. They were looking into the things that Peter says angels desire to look into but cannot fully comprehend because they can't experience grace and mercy and forgiveness because holy angels are sinless.

They were doing what angels always do, they were praising God. If you turn to Revelation 4 and Revelation 5 you will see them doing it there. That's what they do. They were saying, "Glory to God in the highest." The highest is heaven. The highest is heaven. And this is contrastive language, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth," that's the lowest. Glory to God in heaven, on earth, peace among men with whom He's pleased."

On earth peace. What kind of peace? Salvation peace. He's not talking about comfort of the mind,

rest of the spirit; he's talking about salvation, peace with God. The war is over, the battle has ended. No longer is God our enemy and we His enemy but reconciliation has come. In the highest is glory to God. In the lowest on earth is peace among men. And they're praising God for that. They're praising God, giving Him glory in heaven because He's brought salvation to earth. Glory to God in the highest. The adoration of the angels over the good news of the Savior's birth. This is pure, perfect, holy praise given to God alone because He is supremely worthy, because He has sent Jesus to save sinners. He has sent Jesus to bring peace among men on earth. In the highest place, glory to God. In the lowest place, salvation to sinners.

And then verse 14 ends with an interesting statement, "With whom He is pleased." That can be very misleading, very misleading if you're not careful. It sounds like He's going to give salvation to those who earn it, to those who earn it. The King James Bible says, "On earth peace, goodwill toward men." That also sounds like God is going to bring peace and goodwill toward those who earn it, those who deserve it.

But the Greek literally says, "Men of His good pleasure," men of His good pleasure. It's a genitive. There's an alternative reading here but the best reading would be "Peace among men of His good pleasure." Or to put it another way, "Peace among men of His good will." It's not... It's not men who have earned it. It's God who has given it because it's His pleasure to give it.

Salvation peace belongs to those whom God is pleased to give it to. That's what it's saying. It's the same words in chapter 3 verse 22, for the Father says about the Son at His baptism, "You're My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

There are some in whom God chooses, in whom He wills salvation. It's not the result of what good men have done. Angels are not rejoicing and glorifying God for what men have done or will do. Angels are not rejoicing that some men will merit salvation. They're glorifying God because, though none can merit salvation, God is pleased to give it by His own good pleasure. And there will be salvation peace among men of His good pleasure.

If you are a person who has been given the gift of salvation, you are a person of His good pleasure. It's incredible, incredible truth, men to whom He extends His good pleasure. He gets all the credit. He gets all the glory. We couldn't devise a plan of salvation. We couldn't earn a plan. We couldn't earn salvation so if we're saved it's because God designed it and God was pleased to give it.

Saying it another way, there is salvation peace, peace between man and God, among those whom God has chosen to delight in. And so the angels are praising God because He has chosen to delight in bringing salvation peace to sinners.

And, you know, that's what's going to go on in heaven forever and ever and ever. Both the angels and redeemed souls in glorified bodies of men and women are going to spend forever and ever and ever and ever glorifying God in heaven, glorifying God in the highest, which is heaven, because He brought peace to the lowest, which is earth, and granted it to those in whom He chose to delight. He gets all the credit. Revelation 4 and 5, you have the angels starting out to glorify God for salvation, and then you have all of redeemed humanity chiming in; might be a good place to end. The four living creatures, twenty-four elders, representing the church, "fell down before the Lamb." It says in verse 9, "They sang a new song, 'Worthy art Thou to take the book and break its seals for You were

slain and did purchase for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You made them to be a kingdom and priest to our God. They will reign over the earth." In other words, that's...that's praising God for salvation, praising the Lamb for salvation.

"Then I looked," verse 11, "I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, the elders," that's everybody, the redeemed saints, the angels, "the number was" there's the *murion* times *murion* and thousands of thousands, all the angels, they're all saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing,' and every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea and all things in them I heard saying to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, 'Be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever and ever.' And the four living creatures," who are angels, "kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped." That's heaven, and that's what we will be doing and what we saw that multitude of heavenly hosts doing there in the field in Bethlehem was just a foretaste of that preoccupation of eternal heaven.

The purpose of everything then is that God will be glorified and forever and ever and ever we will glorify Him. We could sum it up by saying the purpose of salvation was to bring glory to God in heaven from angels and from saints and we will see that and participate in it when we get there.

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