

Christmas Comfort

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 2, and those verses from 8 to 20. Now we're going to think about this night when angels preached the gospel.

I wonder if you can think of a time in your life when you knew there was something more than this. When you knew there was something bigger simply than what our eyes can see.

For me, when I begin to turn my mind to that, I think of journeying home to sky. And on those nights when it's not cloudy and dry.

Being able to look up and to see for the first time in months a sky full of stars. A wonderful reminder of the creative glory of God.

A very different place. I remember too going to visit family in the Philippines over Christmas. Just enjoying snorkeling in the lovely warm water, which seems kind of good right by now.

[0 : 59] And again, being in the ocean and seeing the depth and the complexity and the beauty of what lies underneath. And again, being reminded of the majesty of God.

Stars and sunsets. Waterfalls and wonderful works of art. The realities of life and death. There are different moments in our lives that God can use, as it were, to lift the roof off.

To remind us that there is more than simply what our eyes can see. There are those moments that speak to us powerfully, both of the reality of God and the glory of God.

This is one of those for the shepherds, isn't it? Here, the shepherds have the roof lifted off as a host of angels gather to sing to them of the glory of God and the glory of God's salvation.

These shepherds, ordinary people, going about their business another ordinary night. And they are invaded by the glory of God's messengers. And they hear of the glory of the gospel of Jesus.

[2 : 11] And life would never be the same for those shepherds again, as we see as the story continues. Has God had that mercy on you to smash the false ceiling so that we were able to see the glory of God?

That's the story for every Christian. There was a time when we were blind to the glory of God, but God, by his grace, caused us to see. If you've never had that experience, our prayer for you as a church is that you would have that, maybe even have that today.

Let's get to our text. I want to answer and ask three questions. So we're thinking about Christianity Explored because we're doing it as a church in January.

And Christianity Explored is really helpful because it asks three questions. Who is Jesus? Why did he come? And what does that mean for us? So I want to use those questions as we look at Luke chapter 2.

So who is Jesus? Well, listen to how the angels describe him in verses 10 to 12. Let's read that again.

[3 : 20] So there are three titles for Jesus there in verse 11.

First of all, he is the Savior. Now, this is significant in and of itself. You know, for in the Old Testament, it was always God who saved his people.

It was God who saved Noah from the flood. God who saved Joseph's life so that he might in turn save Egypt and save his family's life. It was God who saved and delivered Moses and the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

It was God who acted to save and deliver David and the kings and the nation time and time again. And now we're being told this Savior has come. A Savior has been born.

It's a glimpse for us that the child in the stable is no ordinary baby. We read it earlier. The word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus, the Son of God, has become one of us in order to be our deliverer, our Savior.

[4 : 38] The Savior who was born in the town of David. The town of the king. The great hope was that another in the line of David would come. And now the shepherds are being told that Savior king has arrived.

He arrived at the same time as an emperor was on the throne by the name of Caesar Augustus. It's interesting that when Caesar Augustus was born, his birth was announced as gospel, as good news.

That word gospel was used of any event that seemed to have life-changing significance. So it was used of the birth of a new emperor. And this Caesar Augustus, he too was proclaimed as a savior. So this angel is reminding the shepherds, don't think that Caesar Augustus is the true savior king. Don't place your trust and hope in him.

There is a king who is bigger than any emperor. There is a king who is bigger than any prime minister. The angel from God declares, trust Jesus. Above all, place our hope in him.

[5 : 44] So Jesus is the savior. Jesus is also, in verse 11, the Christ. He is the anointed one. The Christ is one who would be chosen and appointed for a special task by God.

Just as in the Old Testament, prophets and priests and kings were set apart for God for a special purpose. So too, Jesus has come, appointed and anointed by his father to be the king that we all need.

Jesus would be the king who would fight for his people. Just as kings in days gone by would fight at the head of their armies. So Jesus would come to fight and win a victory for us over our great enemies, Satan, sin and death, conquering over them at the cross.

And Jesus as king then deserves our loyalty and our obedience. So Jesus announces himself as the king who comes to save and he calls people to repent and believe.

So there is a response that we need to make to this king. We need to show him the loyalty and the honor that he deserves. Jesus also came, anointed and appointed to be the priest we need.

[7 : 02] So as the priest in the Old Testament offered worship in the temple, Jesus offers true worship from a heart that's constantly turned towards his father. So he's always obeying, he's always pursuing the glory of God.

And then he presents himself as the perfect and once for all sacrifice that we need. Just as in the Old Testament when a person sinned, they could have their sin forgiven through presenting a clean animal as a sacrifice that represented the coming of Jesus, the perfectly pure and spotless one who was willing to take our sin and to die on the cross for our sin so that we might be washed clean, that we might be forgiven.

And Jesus also comes, the Christ comes as that prophet that we need to hear from, the one who speaks God's word to us with the authority of God himself, the one who is the word who became flesh.

And just as the prophets in the Old Testament, so too Jesus comes to call people back to God by calling people to faith in himself. To a wandering people, to a disobedient people, Jesus calls them back to God, as he still does today.

So Jesus has come as the Savior, he has come as the Christ, and he has come in verse 11 as the Lord. That title that points to his honor and that points to his being God.

[8 : 40] And the rest of Luke's gospel gives us all kinds of different evidence to point us in that same direction. We have the many miracles that Jesus performs.

We have the teaching with authority that Jesus brings. We have his character and his life that show us this is no ordinary man. This is Jesus, God in the flesh, come to be the promised Savior.

Let's just pause for a moment. What have we just read in verse 11? We have read in verse 11 the verdict on Jesus from heaven itself, from God's appointed messengers about Jesus.

Their verdict, Jesus is the Savior, he is the Christ, he is the Lord, he is the hope and the joy of the world. What's our verdict about Jesus? How do we respond to what is presented to us?

If the angels are reliable witnesses, how do we respond to the gospel message that they preach? Here is a message that surely is too big to simply ignore and pass by.

[9 : 57] Even more so because we discover that in his coming, to go back to verse 10, in his coming there is good news of great joy. This great joy that God has become a man to save his people.

Good news that God has extended kindness to his creation. Christmas, of course, is a time when we typically find ourselves focusing our energy on kindness towards others.

We send cards and we send gifts. We want to bring happiness to others. We want to give something of ourselves to another. Well, here is the greatest kindness, the greatest gift that has ever been given.

Jesus, our creator, has entered into his creation to save us from sin so we might be brought back to God. We might be brought back to that relationship that we were made for.

And that's why the angels can say this is joy. This is eternal joy. This is an unbreakable and a deep and a lasting joy.

[11 : 08] This is bigger than that momentary buzz of happiness that we get around Christmas. This is something that endures. Now, who is this joy for, according to the angel?

In Luke's gospel, it's interesting. Luke has this deliberate focus on how Jesus chooses to include those who are usually excluded. So you go through the gospel, you find special attention for the weak, special attention for the poor, special attention towards foreigners, special attention, as we see here, towards shepherds who were typically despised.

So when the angels say that Jesus has come to be good news for all the people, we think, well, who's this delivered to? This is delivered to the weak and the poor and the marginalized shepherds. This is true. That is joy to the world because a saviour has been born to you.

Think about when we wrap a present, a Christmas present, and we put that tag on. We say, from X to whoever we're giving the present to.

[12 : 20] And here the angel is saying, Jesus is a gift from God to you, to all people, to the world. Jesus' birth is bigger than simply family joy.

The angel didn't say, Jesus has been born to Mary and Joseph. No, Jesus has been born and given to the world. There is the joy of God for anyone who will recognise Jesus as God's son and God's saviour.

And it's not for a select few. We just need to look around any gathering of God's people. Come to church on a Sunday and you can look around and you can hear people's stories and you can appreciate that it isn't just for a certain type of people.

We can think about the growth of the church around the world and we understand this is proof that people are seeing and believing this good news of great joy in the coming of Jesus.

So that today, if you're not a Christian, whoever you are, whatever your background, whatever your culture, whatever your language, this joy can be yours too if you will repent, if you will turn from sin and if you will believe in Jesus as saviour and Christ and Lord.

[13 : 31] So that's our way to answer who is Jesus. The second question that Christiana explored answers or explores, I suppose.

And a question for us here from our text is, why did Jesus come? That takes us to the angel's announcement in verse 14. Let's read again verse 13 and 14.

Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace to men on whom his favour rests.

So Mary sang, as it were, Zechariah sang Luke chapter 1. But here is a Christmas carol sung by the angels of heaven. And they're praising God for two reasons that Jesus came into his creation.

The first reason is that in the coming of Jesus, there will be glory to God. God will look great in the salvation of sinners. Why? Because salvation is all of grace.

[14 : 39] Its source is God's undeserved kindness and mercy. God's salvation, a place in God's family, is not something we work ourselves up to. It's not something we merit.

This rescue that we need has come, and it's come not from ourselves. It's come from outside of ourselves. It's come from the kindness of God in the sending of Jesus.

So in the coming of Jesus, there will be glory to God because he will look great in the salvation that Jesus will bring. Despite the optimism that people have often that we can find answers and salvation within ourselves through technology and education and through good government and through environmental campaigns, they do not, in the end of the day, have the ability to save ourselves or to save our world.

Because the problem that we have, the problem of sin, runs too deep for that kind of fix. Truth be told, in every heart, there is a problem of glory.

We're told in the Bible, in chapter one of Genesis, that we are made in the image of God and we are made to reflect the glory of God. We are supposed to live to represent our king, to make him look great and wonderful as he is.

[16:05] But as God's image bearers, we have robbed him of his glory. And we have a saying that we should give credit where credit is due.

But sadly, as people, we do not apply that standard to God. And we delight in making ourselves number one. We delight in our own importance and bringing glory and honor to ourselves and dismissing God.

We are guilty of sin when we rob God of his glory. Jesus is not like that. When you look at the life of Jesus, you discover one who brings glory to God throughout his life and giving glad obedience to his father and going to the cross in order to bring glory to God in salvation.

Jesus will take on full humanity. The son of God becomes truly human so as to heal and restore so that once again, we might instead of absorbing glory for ourselves, we might be like mirrors reflecting the glory of God because we've seen it in the face of Jesus.

Jesus. There's a passage in John chapter 12 that speaks to that. Jesus, in John chapter 12, in verse 23, says this.

[17:29] He says, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now, Jesus, in John's Gospel, when he speaks about the hour, is thinking about the hour of his suffering and his death before his resurrection and return to glory.

So that hour of suffering and death there on the cross is a means for Jesus, the Son of Man, to be glorified. And then a number of verses later, in verse 28, Jesus, as he begins to contemplate the cross, says, Now my heart is troubled.

And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

Father, glorify your name. So Jesus is saying that the cross, his hour of suffering and death, will bring glory to himself, but will also bring glory to the Father.

Jesus lives and dies for the glory of God. And the angels announce that in their song. The hour of Jesus' death and resurrection is the point when God's glory is most clearly seen in the world.

[18:45] We see the glory of God's justice. We see that a holy God cannot simply ignore sin, cannot turn a blind eye to sin, cannot sweep sin under the rug.

And so we see the justice of God at the cross, but we also at the same time see the love and mercy of God in that Jesus, God's own son, has come to take the justice of God on himself because he has taken on the sin of his people.

So he dies in our place for our sins. So we see justice and we see mercy at the cross. We see the glory of God's wisdom at the cross.

Nobody could have made up the essence of Christianity. Nobody could have possibly foreseen that God would send his one and only son to live among us, to then die for us before rising for us.

This wasn't made up. This is the glory of God's wisdom. And we see the glory of God's love and that he was willing to do that. He was pleased to see his son suffer so that men and women, boys and girls, might be brought into the family of God and enjoy eternal life.

[20:10] So God will get glory as Jesus comes to complete the plan of salvation and that's announced from the beginning of his life. So Jesus came to bring glory to God.

But we're also told in verse 14 that Jesus has come to bring peace with God. Jesus has come so that people might find joy in God, that through his saving work, we can be reconciled to God.

He is a king who offers us God's peace. Now the emperors of Rome, kings of Rome, they also offered peace, the Pax Romana, but often that was peace at the point of a sword.

Nations were defeated. Nations were plundered. Slaves were taken. Oppression was rife. The peace that the emperor offered served to benefit him, served to make him rich, but not so with this king, not so with King Jesus.

Jesus offers total peace to us that we might be rich. Jesus, who enjoyed all the riches of glory for our sake, became poor so that through his poverty, through his suffering, through his death, we might have all the riches and glory.

[21:31] Every spiritual blessing would be ours in Christ. We would have the joy of peace with God. No longer experiencing that sense of guilt and with it condemnation, with it shame, and alongside that, a fear of judgment beyond death.

When we have peace with God, by God's grace, those things can be removed from us. And when we have peace with God, it also enables us to have peace with others.

When we know we have this secure identity, when we're secure in the love of God through Jesus, we don't need to fight to get ahead. We don't need to fight to prove ourselves. Instead, we can extend ourselves to bless and to help others.

We understand that the more that people accept gospel peace, the better the world will be. The more people who come to have peace with God, the better life in God's creation will be. Because that's how we were made as people.

[22 : 49] We were made to enjoy God. We were made to enjoy his life and love. We were made to enjoy his peace, to flourish as people in relationship with him.

But sin has come and has destroyed that peace. And we know this ourselves, how sin destroys our relationship with God. And sin is also so destructive in our relationships with other people, in the lies that we tell, or the gossip and the jealousy that lurks in our heart.

In so many ways, we see how sin destroys relationships and destroys our peace. But Jesus has come to bring peace. Because Jesus has come to reconcile us to God at the cross.

So if we make peace with God, through knowing Jesus as Lord, we can go then and make peace with others. Now it's important to notice, let's go back to verse 14.

This peace is to men on whom his favor rests. So at one and the same time, Jesus can be announced as joy for all people. We can be told that Jesus is born Savior to you.

[24 : 01] But we also see that not everyone is saved. And we're reminded here of God's part in salvation, that we are saved by grace, by God's favor through the sending of Jesus that comes to us as a gift.

The Bible tells us our part is to receive and to believe in Jesus, to turn from sin and to God, that we would know that favor for ourselves by responding in faith to the good news of Jesus.

Third question, what does all this mean for us? How do we respond to the angel's message?

Well, let's follow the story of the shepherds. And as we do that, we'll see three different responses within our text to the message that they bring, which they've received from the angels.

And perhaps as we do that, think to yourself, where am I in this scene? Which of these different groups of people best reflects my response? So when the angels, verse 15, had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem, see this thing that's happened, which the Lord has told us about.

[25 : 26] So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. Now, we see a group of people in verse 17. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed or they wondered at what the shepherds said to them.

This is the kind of message that's going to get people talking. You know, most of the people in Israel were waiting for God's Christ, God's Savior to come.

And so the shepherds announce there's a baby that was born in a manger. We've just seen him and he is the promised Savior. He is the Lord. So it gets people talking, but that doesn't in itself mean belief.

To wonder and to be amazed by itself does not mean belief. There needs to be a point of decision. So if you're here today and you know Jesus is amazing and wonderful and what you've read of his life and of his death and of his resurrection, you need to come to a point of decision.

[26 : 43] You need to decide, will I trust him with my life and with my death? Will I trust him as my Savior and with my Lord?

To wonder, it is not enough. There's another response in verse 19. It's Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

And Mary's response is really interesting. So she doesn't understand it all yet. You know, there's this journey of faith that she will go on as Jesus journeys through his life.

So she doesn't understand the full implications of what the shepherds have said, but she loves what she's heard. She loves the good news and she's going to keep reflecting on it.

She's pondering these truths so that she might get more understanding. Perhaps that's where we are at today.

[27 : 46] Mary is a great example. This truth that I've gathered so far, I find it wonderful, but I know I don't have the full story yet, so I'm going to keep on reflecting, keep on seeking for understanding.

If you're not a Christian today, but that's where you're at, it's great. Keep reading, keep coming to church, come to our Christianity Explored course so that you might come to a point of belief.

Because as we said earlier, this is too important just to push to one side, to keep on discovering and inquiring.

But so too for us as Christians. Our God is infinite and eternal in his glory. Therefore, there is always more for us to understand and appreciate.

So our faith should never be a static thing. So we too should be those who keep on reading and praying and coming to worship and looking to discover more about God in all his glory so that we might worship him more and live for him more.

The last response is that of the shepherds themselves. Verse 20, the shepherds returned back to their sheep, back to that hillside, but now they're glorifying and praising God for all the things they'd heard and seen, which were just as they have been told.

[29 : 09] So they have now met and worshiped their Savior. They have seen and know that Jesus deserves all the praise and glory of their hearts.

And we see that they can't keep quiet about that. They're telling anyone who will listen. And the shepherds present for us as Christians and as a church, a great pattern to follow.

That as we have heard the gospel, as we have seen God's love to us in Jesus, as we have believed that he is the Savior for us, what then are we to do?

We are to live for his praise and glory. No longer looking to make ourselves look great. We live to make Jesus look great. And part of that is that we share our good news with a world that really needs to hear about Jesus.

Needs to hear that there is forgiveness for them. There is peace with God for them. There is love from God for them through Jesus. So the angel's message, the gospel message, the message to you and me today is that God has lifted off the roof.

[30 : 20] God has entered in with the coming of Jesus. And God offers to you and to me a perfect gift this Christmas, his only son sent to be our Savior.

Let's not leave that gift unwrapped with all the other excitement. Let's not ask how much we have to pay God for that gift because it's free, it comes by grace. Rather, let's enjoy that gift.

Let's enjoy the new life, the forgiveness, the peace with God that Jesus has come to offer.