

Christmas Eve 2024

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 December 2024

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] I want to talk for just a few moments about the passage that was read from the Gospel of Luke. Every birth of a child is a holy event.

It's quite unlike any other happening in one's life. To be present, in fact, at the moment of delivery, to be in the very room as life enters the world, is nothing short of privileged attendance at something sacred.

I've had that opportunity five times. To see a little one's first seconds with your own eyes. To watch an infant draw his or her first breath of air.

To hear those earliest of sounds. Well, there just aren't enough words to convey what that moment's like. When I think of what Luke wrote on the birth of Christ, I'm amazed at the economy of words.

Let's just call it the lack of his emotion or sentiment. It's obvious to me that he wasn't there when Jesus was born, but heard about it later.

[1 : 28] Listen to what he said in verse 7 of the text that was read tonight. As I look at the text with my own eyes on it this evening, it's eight simple words to describe the birth.

Believe me, if he had been present, he'd have had a lot more words. So why does Luke act in this way?

Why does he take your gaze and mine on a night like this, away from the mother and her firstborn son to a group of shepherds beyond Bethlehem's city gate, and then from the shepherds into the night sky?

It's just the opposite of what every movie director does. Effective movies begin with the panoramic view from the heights.

Then they settle into a particular scene. Then they focus your attention on one thing to get the story underway. But here it's reversed.

[2 : 52] It moves from the baby to the shepherds to the heavens. It moves from the heavens.

It's beyond the event. It's beyond the event. He's reaching for an interpretation. And an interpretation with implication.

Let me just sit on that for a moment. He's looking for the meaning. And then what to make of it. Let me be even more clear what it makes of you and me.

We know this because the arrangement of his material moves through two announcements by angels and then two speeches by shepherds.

I mean, think of an angel descending from the heavens to where our interpretation for this birth must come. And the angel announces these words.

[4 : 27] For unto you is born this day a Savior. That's the interpretation. That's the interpretation. A Savior.

A Savior. A Savior. The infant son is a Savior. Savior. And we ought to think, as Joseph in our little narration led us already into, saved from what?

What do we need saving from? We're doing quite well on our own. Or even if we're not doing well, we're able to pull ourselves up and move along with a little help.

What do we need saving from? What do we really need saving from? The hint was in Zachariah's song, which we weren't able to read tonight.

But Zachariah says concerning his son, John the Baptist, that the Baptist will give knowledge of salvation to his people, comma, the forgiveness of their sins.

[5 : 34] To be saved is to be saved from sins. How big a deal our sins must be if God needed to send an infant son from heaven and grant the angelic appearances of angels to make us know what was really taking place.

That single announcement by a solitary angel was followed by another one when the night sky filled with a host.

And their announcement indicates this, among other things, peace to us on earth with those with whom he's well pleased.

This is the interpretation of the event. A savior and peace.

Peace. What I find fascinating about peace is the moment in history in which Jesus was born.

[6 : 44] It was very unlike our moment. You turn on the news today or you read your news feeds, the whole world is pivoting on its axis in conflict.

But at the very moment when Jesus was born, they actually called it the moment of the Pax Romana, the peace that Rome had brought to the world. Everything was fairly stable.

So what kind of peace is this? It's peace with God. The savior who forgives sins ends the hostilities that are raging between humanity and our rebellion against our creator.

Now you might not think that you rebel against the creator. You might not think that you need saving from sin, but this is the Bible's interpretation of the event and I proclaim it to you tonight.

Peace, an ending of hostilities between you and God. Now I know if I could crawl into your mind and explore the depths and the moments where you've been at war, some of you would indicate to me, yes, I've been at war with God.

[8 : 18] I've fought him tooth and nail. Maybe you fought him and are fighting him even as you entered in here tonight. You fight the fact that he wants your life.

You resist the notion that you're to follow him. You're at war with wanting to turn over your life to him. But the interpretation of the angels stands clear.

Unto you has been born this day a Savior. Oh, may those words penetrate your heart. Unto you has been born this day a Savior.

Unto you the forgiveness of sins. Unto you a cessation of the hostilities that rage within us when we buck what he wants us to do with our lives.

What's the implication? The implication doesn't come from the two announcements by the angels.

The implication of the Christmas event comes by the two speeches given by the shepherds.

[9 : 33] I'll be quick. They said to one another, let us go see this thing. That's the implication I want to leave with you tonight.

One of them. Go investigate this message for yourself in the coming days. Go inquire. Pick it up again.

Look at the scriptures. And go see if Jesus is not a Savior who will bring you back into relationship with God and set your life on a course of real distinct purpose.

That's what the shepherds did. They investigated. They thought about it. They talked about it. They walked it through. If you're visiting tonight, even in our own church, this is what we do on Sundays.

This place is filled with many more than are in town. Tonight, people are exploring Christianity. They're thinking it through for themselves.

[10 : 38] They're coming alongside, reading the Bible, having conversations. I invite you into all of that in the coming year. The shepherds inquired.

The shepherds inquired. And you ought to as well. The other implication, though, was what they did. It says that they praised the Lord.

They left that evening praising God. And as we stand in just a few moments and leave this auditorium and enter across the threshold of the day of his birth, we ought to be praising God.

What does it look like to praise God? How does one praise God? Tangibly, tactically. You do it through song, singing, allowing something to emerge from inside you that gives thanks and honor to him.

You do it through prayer. I'm sure there are some here who haven't had a quiet moment of prayer on your own for days or weeks or months, perhaps even years.

[12 : 06] Why not tonight, when you're back home and on your own, why not lift your voice in the quiet of the evening of his advent and simply say, dear God, I have heard tonight that your son is a savior, that your good news is that my sins can be forgiven, that you are for me, not against me.

O God, help me, even on the day of your birth, to lay down my arms and be embraced by you.

We praise him through singing. We praise him through prayer. We praise the Lord with our voice as we proclaim. Many of you know Jesus.

Many of you tonight are even looking at these candles and thinking, wow, the light is warm. He came into my life and I remember it. Well, the shepherds went and told others about him. that's a way that you can praise the Lord. Some of us are reticent to ever speak the name of Jesus to people we don't know. Some of us, we find it especially difficult to speak the name of Jesus to people we know well.

[13 : 44] But that's what the shepherds did. They went and made this known. So tonight, as we have gathered in this room, I've been praying for you.

I've been praying that you would sense for unto you a son is given for the forgiveness of sins. I've been praying that the announcements of the intention of God would lead to the implication of your life.

And that even tonight, you would say, well, if I'm not ready to believe, I'm ready to investigate again. Or, no, I know enough and I'm ready to give my life to him.

what a Christmas that would be. It would far outstrip being in a delivery room at the sacred moment of seeing life enter into the world.

[15 : 04] It would be, in truth, life entering into you and into your world. And that would make you give great joy and praise to him.

Our Heavenly Father, we've gathered on Christmas Eve to just stop for a moment and consider things weightier, mightier, more glorious than all of the things that crush our days.

I pray for many here tonight that our hearts would be filled with praise. I pray for some here tonight that our hearts would be turned to embrace your grace.

We give ourselves to you in the privilege and in the presence of one another. In Jesus' name. Amen.