

Luke 2:8-14 "Gloria in Excelsis Deo!"

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless. Father, you know that some of us here are maybe dealing with a lot of shame. And Father, you know why they're feeling that, but there are many here probably feeling a great deal of shame. And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that your Word speaks to us, the real me, the real each of these people, the real them. And it speaks realistically, and it speaks, Father, with compassion and mercy and hope. And so I ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would continue to fall with gentle but penetrating power, so that we might know that you are our Father in

Heaven, that Jesus is the Savior who loves us and wants us to be His, and that you speak to us tender words of love and encouragement and hope. And so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would bring the truths of this Word into your hearts, the hearts of everyone here. And I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated. I don't just read nerdy political and cultural op-ed pieces. I read the newspaper. I read all sorts of things in it. And this week, just the other day, I read part of an interview, maybe all of the interview, at least as it was published, with one of the voice actresses, the main star, voice actress star for the huge hit movie, the K-pop Demon Hunters. And the person who played Rumi, her name is Arden Cho.

[2 : 52] I don't know if I've pronounced that correctly. She gave an interview. And one of the things which was really interesting about the interview, lots of things were interesting, but one of the things that was interesting is that she said that hopefully this movie would hopefully really help people who feel unseen. And she implied that she herself felt unseen to be seen.

That that's one of the benefits of this movie, that those who are unseen like her can be seen. And especially for young women who are of Asian descent, and in particular, because she's Korean, for Korean young women and girls to actually feel seen. And I thought, wow, like, I mean, here she is being interviewed, and I'm reading about it. And I'm not saying this is a put down.

I don't take, sorry, if I said anything to imply that, I am not saying that whatsoever. What I am saying is this. It is a very common human problem of not feeling that you're seen.

Of going through your day and your week and your month and your years and your decade feeling completely and utterly unseen. And she gave voice to that very, I think, very well and very articulately.

And so that the Bible text that we're going to look at today has some very profound and helpful and hopeful things to say about that phenomenon. For those of us who feel unseen.

[4 : 18] And feeling unseen often goes along with another experience that people struggle with. And that's the feeling of shame. That often we feel a deep sense of shame.

And that means that there's something fundamentally wrong with us. There's something, it's not that we do wrong things, but that there's something that we're wrong. It's not that we do some types of things that break relationships, but that we're broken.

It's not just that we do some things occasionally that push people away, but there's something fundamentally about us that pushes us away. Where makes us, makes the me, the you, unseen.

And we feel deep shame around that. And this Bible text that we're going to look at actually has some very profound and helpful things for those of us struggling with feeling seen.

And struggling, or maybe not struggling because you've just surrendered to feeling shame. You've just accepted that you will be unseen and feel shame for the rest of your life. There's a very profound good news in this text that we're going to look at.

[5 : 22] Today. So if you take out your Bibles, we're going to be looking at Luke chapter 2, verses 8 to 14. Luke chapter 2, verses 8 to 14.

And just as you sort of turn to that, what we're doing is during this season of Advent, the four Sundays before Christmas, we're looking at four songs of the Savior in the Gospel of Luke.

Two of the songs of the Savior are before his birth, and two of the songs of the Savior are after his birth. So we looked at Mary's song, the Magnificat. Then we looked at Zechariah's song, the Benedictus.

Today we look at the Gloria in Excelsis, which is the song the angels sang after the birth of Jesus. And then next Sunday we'll look at the Nunc Dimittis, which is the song or the poetry that Simeon prayed over the baby Jesus when he came into the temple.

And so in the flow of this, and on Christmas Eve, by the way, we'll look at the text that goes just before this, the actual account of the birth of Jesus. But this takes place just after the birth of Jesus that same evening.

[6 : 24] So here's what happens, and it goes like this. And in the same region, it's about a kilometer or two away. So in the same region, probably a couple kilometers away, there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. Now, just pause here. This is a very shocking development, and it's because it's so familiar to Christians that we've lost the sense of shock.

So the first thing about that, first thing to maybe get your mind around it, and I'm a guy, so I can say this. But when you're thinking of the shepherds, okay, they probably weren't writing love poetry or working on their Hebrew grammar or praying.

Think working class guys out in the bush with no women. Young working class guys out in the bush with no women.

Now, for married people, I hope I didn't introduce an awkward question from your wife as to what it might have been like when you were a young man in the bush with no women spending time.

[7 : 41] But as I said, it probably wasn't writing poetry. They probably weren't sharing their feelings. They were being young guys out in the bush. And maybe even some little guys acting like young guys out in the field away from women from several days.

And so they're doing whatever young guys would do in that type of situation. And all of a sudden, an angel shows up. And you can see all sorts of reasons why they might be filled with fear.

They might be wondering what the angel just overheard, amongst other things, or what they witnessed before they noticed it. They would have noticed the angel right away. But one of the things about that, then, is if you think about it, most of us probably, if we were giving God advice as to who the angel should show up to for this important announcement, would not have picked these guys.

In fact, if anything, we might have said, God, go to their wives and girlfriends and daughters and sisters, not them. They're way more worthy. But we wouldn't have picked these guys out in the field.

But the angel picks them. And right off the bat, you're seeing more and more aspects of how this is a profoundly biblical and Christian story. And so there's this big, big shock.

[8 : 57] And one of the things, by the way, when you see here, look at that verse 9 again. And the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. The word glory here can also be translated as majesty.

If you think of some coronation scene, and it's just really done very, very well. And just this sense of majesty. I don't know how to describe it other than just say the word. But it also would include the word beauty.

So they see, in a sense, this beauty and this glory that is, in a sense, always with God, connected to God. And one of the things that's shocking about this, if all of us have probably seen really stunning sunsets, in really stunning vistas.

And if you think then of what these shepherds are seeing, they're seeing something way more than that. But they're also seeing uncreated light.

Uncreated light. We only live in it. We've only seen created light. They're seeing uncreated light. Uncreated radiance that comes right from the uncreated God. And they see it. And, um...

[10 : 08] And it's just... It's just glory. That's all they can say. It's just a very, very simple word. Now, if this is all that happened to them, we would never have heard about the story.

Like, you can be guaranteed that they probably would have been... had people buy them cheap wine for years to come to hear the story. But nobody... None of us would have heard it. Why we've heard the story is not only the context, but what happens next.

It's the message that comes to them. And that takes place... Start looking at verse 10. And in verse 10 it says, And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Now, one of the things about this is that it is good news for all the people. It's encouraging us to talk and tell... When we hear the good news in a moment, that we're to tell this good news to all people.

We aren't to say, This person is way too bad, way too wicked, so we won't tell them this news. We aren't to say, This person is too completely given over to fentanyl that we won't tell them this news.

[11:12] We aren't to say, This person is so high in the government, or so wealthy, or so powerful that we won't tell them this news. This is news for all people. Years ago, I guess maybe not that long, years ago, there was a woman who came to this church who, believe it or not, she was the fashion advisor to three prime minister's wives.

So she would meet with the wife of the prime minister privately in their residence, and she would help the prime minister's wife pick out the clothes that she would be wearing for upcoming events.

And they'd talk about fabrics and designers and colors and accessories and all of that type of stuff. And she was a very bold woman. She always also told the woman about Jesus.

And that's really what all of us should be like. Not to be intimidated by either somebody's goodness, their evil, their power, their wealth, but to be willing to tell people about Jesus, the good news.

And that's what the all people means here. And the other thing here, which is really important for us to notice, is that the, look again at verse 10, it says, And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news.

[12:26] That's the word gospel. I bring you good news. And I can't say it enough because it's something which we Christians keep falling into, that we have good news for the world.

We don't have good rules. We don't have good advice. We don't have good examples per se. We don't have good rituals. We don't have good things like this. It's all news.

We get to share this most wonderful news in the world with human beings. And it's news which is to be shared because God wants people to hear. And God wants people to hear this news and want to say yes to it.

Please include me. Please take me to be part of what this good news is all about. So what is the news? Well, that's what happens that we begin to hear in verse 11. Verse 11, For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Unto you for, this is the, why is the news good? Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Now, this is the first time that these three momentous terms all appear together and talking about the exact same person.

[13:38] So it's not saying that Mary had triplets. One is Savior, one is Christ, and one is Lord. No, there's just one baby. But this one baby is, it can be described as the Savior.

In fact, in, in, in the original language there's no definite article there so it should literally be translated. It, it doesn't, it's not grammatical English.

It should literally be translated for unto you is born this day in the city of David Savior. Savior is born. And this Savior is the Messiah and this Savior is God Himself.

The word translated here is Lord should be understood as referring to God Himself. and so Savior means that for all of the longings that human beings have had that we, that they would be delivered, that things would be made right, the one who we long for was born in Bethlehem on this night.

Christ is the word Messiah. It's, it's really even more deeply connected to the longings of the human heart, the longing of the promises of God and of things being made right with human beings and with God and things just being made right and all of those promises that, that, that there will be good and all of these promises are captured in this term Messiah and the Savior and the Messiah was born that evening and the Lord is born that evening.

[15:03] God Himself has entered into His creation and, and that's who this baby is. This baby has come to bring the promises of God to completion and fulfillment and to make you right with Him and it is God Himself who is doing this in the person of His Son and it just happened a couple of kilometers away.

Now, there's lots of big ideas which I've just said and that's why this next bit is really important or we won't understand them. Look at what it says in verse 12 and this will be a sign for you.

You will find, so how are you going, the implication is the shepherd should go and this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

In other words, the implication is you should go and when you go, don't look for the best house. In fact, don't look for a house at all. Look for an animal shelter and when you look for an animal shelter because there will be lots of animal shelters, look for the animal shelter because there will only be one.

There will only be one animal shelter in Bethlehem where there's a baby lying in an animal's feeding trough. You have to go, huh?

[16:30] Huh? So, there's several things about this which are really important. You see, the thing is our minds tend to go in certain directions.

So, you hear, you know, all this thing I said about the mighty deliverer that delivers from all the different things, you know, whether it's, you know, any type of enemy, whether enemies in external world, demonic enemies, whether it's, you know, enemies of sickness or disease or, you know, or sin, all of that.

There's huge, huge ideas. Thank you. This person who's going to be born last week in Zechariah's song is described as God raising up a horn of salvation.

And I said, in that, what you need to think of is you need to think of a really big elephant and its tusks or a rhinoceros with its horn or a huge bull with its horns or a huge bull moose with its horns.

And that's this image. Okay? And so you have all of these things and our minds will move in certain types of directions when we hear this, but it's not just these songs of the Savior are introducing Jesus but they're not just, you don't just take them, the rest of the story fleshes out what on earth that means.

[17:45] And so you hear these wonderful titles and it is a baby in a feeding trough in an animal shelter in Nowheresville.

When you're thinking of, and so that's the second thing, you know, about this. It's in a sense it's inviting you to see as you go through the whole gospel, it's inviting you to say, oh, okay, well that's what the Savior's like.

Oh, like he's going to be born, that's really cool. Like, that's really cool. Like the Savior's going to, is in a feeding trough. Oh, like, that's really cool. Like the Savior casts out demons.

Oh, like, oh, that's really cool. Like the Savior feeds people. Oh, that's really cool. Like the Savior and God himself. This is what God is like. The real God is like that he's, you know, even when there's some, you know, woman who's led a completely and utterly disreputable life and nobody likes her and everybody hates her and he talks to her and welcomes her.

That's what God's like. That's what the Savior's like. Oh, and that's what the Savior's like. That's really cool. The Savior is like, is Jesus, is dying on the cross. That's what, you need the story to fill in the words.

[18:59] Otherwise, we'll go in all of these different directions. And you see, that's why this story is such a profoundly Christian story. You would never see a story like this in the Quran or the Hadiths.

On one level, Allah doesn't even really like people. Do you know that the Quran teaches that everybody who dies goes to hell? Truth. Everybody who dies in the Quran, everybody who dies goes to hell.

And then Allah picks some people out of hell to go to his heaven. Allah doesn't even speak directly to Muhammad. Allah speaks to an angel.

There's always intermediaries. It is, in a sense, an offensive idea to think that Allah would be in a feeding trough.

It is a denial of his glory and his majesty. And if you think about our friends, maybe not at the very folk level of Hinduism and Buddhism, but at the more philosophical levels of Hinduism and Buddhism, a story of God himself, of the Savior himself coming and being born is not a story that they would tell because the whole hope of Hinduism and Buddhism at a higher level is that you will undertake these exercises so that you will no longer be born.

[20 : 19] That's the hope, that you will no longer be born. And so this is a story telling you the exact wrong stuff. And in paganism, while the gods, if they come, they're going to come as fully, full, big men and women and do all sorts of types of things and maybe they'll be hidden for a bit, but it's not the way they would tell the story.

And of course, in secular world, you know, we would automatically think that if things like this were going to happen, it should be somebody more powerful, more important, more connected, more prestige, more followers, all of that type of thing.

This is a profoundly Christian and Jewish story. The Old Testament, what our Jewish friends call the Tanakh, we call the Old Testament, is filled with David is the youngest son, not the oldest son.

It's filled with this surprise and it culminates in how God is going to save in a profoundly Christian story that's only Christian and that even in our culture, when we resonate with stories like this, whether our culture realizes or not, it is breathing in the air of Christianity.

And it's also, of course, touching us at a point of our deep longings and yearnings, that God would take the lowly. God would take the lowly. Now we come to the actual song, right?

[21 : 46] They say, verse 12, and this will be a sign for you. This will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, just before I say that, this is more an in-house thing for those who have been Anglicans for a long time, or Roman Catholics and Lutherans.

If you see a lot of liturgies that have been written since the 70s up until today, a lot of liturgies get rid of the phrase the Lord God of hosts. And you know why they get rid of that phrase? Because hosts means angel armies.

And so the people writing the liturgies think it's too militaristic and imperialistic, and so they get rid of it even though it's in the Bible. And just they gong the word, because they don't like something that might imply armies.

But that's when it says here, and suddenly verse 13 was with the angel, the heavenly host. That means angel armies. Angel armies praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

[22 : 54] Or quite literally, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those men and women of his good pleasure.

That's what it's saying. That's the song. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those men and women who are of his good pleasure.

And the word glory here means that we're to brag about God, we're to talk about God, we're to be unashamed about the triune God, we are to hope in the triune God, we are to extol him, we are to adore him, we are to praise him, and we are to do it with our minds and with our lips and with our time and our body.

And for those of you who are very creative with dance, with plays, with poetry, with music, and no matter how much we praise the triune God, he is still even more, even more.

You read the Narnia Chronicles, I just finished listening to them on audio, the Ottawa Public Library, seven fantastic versions of the Narnia Chronicles. If you haven't read them, take them out of the library, listen to them in order, and further up and further in, further up and further in, we'll never exhaust the glory of God.

[24:11] And that's what it's saying here. And peace, it's not referring to wars, it's not referring to emotions. How do you understand that? Well, you understand that by reading the rest of the story. By reading the rest of the story.

The rest of the story tells you what this peace means, and it means peace with God. It means peace with your creator. It means peace with the one who will save, can save you.

It means peace with the one who will be the final judge about you. It means peace with goodness itself, justice itself, mercy itself, beauty itself, love itself.

It means peace with God, given as a gift. And it's a type of an ontological type of thing. For those of you who are here and you've been considering the Christian faith, there comes a point in time to be a Christian is not to kiss your mind goodbye.

It's not you think and you reason, but at some point in time you need to just say, God, you know, I think I know enough and I realize right now that there's a part of me in my flesh that will always want to know a little bit more, think a little bit more, try to answer a little bit more of the questions, but there comes a point in time when you just say, I'm in.

[25:18] I'm yours. Take me. You know, that's why, are you born again? That's what this peace with God is.

You're born again. You're born again. And you're made right with God. You have peace with God. And there's a really interesting interview that I just saw with the guy who's a really good friend with a guy, he has an important podcast called The Diary of the CEO.

He's a guy worth tens and tens of millions of dollars. His name is Andrew Scott Logan. He lives in Dubai. Young, good-looking, creative entrepreneur who just became a Christian within the last year and a half or two.

And he became a Christian in the most surprising way because he became a Christian not because his life was in the pits, but because he was unbelievably successful. And he came to start to say to himself, is that all there is?

Is that all there is? And he ends up giving his life to Christ. And one of the things which he says is really interesting in the interview is that he said on one hand he had a profound sense of peace that comes from being at peace with God.

[26:30] But he also said, honestly, to Glenn, the interviewer, it's actually harder being a Christian than it was being a non-Christian. And Glenn says, well, why is that? He said, well, on one hand, there's peace, but on the other hand, I mean, God convicts me that I shouldn't do certain things or that I have to apologize or, or, you know, maybe I should be doing something different in my life.

And there's this constant sense of unsettling, but all of this unsettling just creates this deeper type of harmony with God because that's partially what this, this is, is being talked about. The Peace is a harmony with God, a balance with God.

And even the fact that this peace is talking about harmony, that's so, that's so wonderful because, you know, when you have harmony, you have harmony, you have a, you know, you have a male voice and a female voice and you have different, you have different baritones and basses and you have all these different, all coming together and it's not a monotonous sound.

It's not a, it's not just the sound of crashing and banging and like dump trucks doing things and jackhammers. It's, it's music, it's beautiful, it flows, it's active and it brings together these things which would be discordant all by themselves and brought together to sound like a harmony and that's what God wants to give to human beings and what he's doing through the birth of his son that moment, that, that night in Bethlehem.

Now I said I would talk about being seen and unseen and I need to do that with my last few minutes which are here. Let's look at the text again, glory to God in the highest, and on peace, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased or literally, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those men and women of his good pleasure.

[28 : 17] Now this is an idea that lots of people find scary. It's the doctrine of election. It's the doctrine that God chooses you before you choose him and there's lots of Christians.

I for a long time didn't like the idea. I resisted it even though it's all the way through the Bible and, but that's what it's saying and of course the fear is that when you hear that, those of you who are here and you hear that and you say, well George, now that explains why I'm not a Christian.

You finally explained it. All my life I'm not getting chosen. I don't get the jobs. I don't get the promotions. You know, I don't get the kids. I don't get the goodies.

I don't get all these types of things. I'm unseen and nobody cares about me and George, if I was completely honest with you, one of my great fears is that I will get to a certain age and I will spend my entire life alone because I am unseen and this is just another example.

Nobody sees me. God's not going to see me and all I have to say is that is two things. First of all, God is not the mean girls because in the mean girls, you have the mean girls show up to a group of six people to just invite two of the six in front of the other four so the other four are completely and utterly humiliated.

[29 : 46] That plays me to the second thing. You just heard this? That means he's calling you. I just read it to you.

You just heard the invitation. He's calling you. You're not unseen. And look at the way he describes being seen.

It's so interesting in this particular text. It describes, what does it say again? And on earth, peace, that's harmony or peace with God, harmony with God among those men and women of his good pleasure.

For those of us who are dealing with shame, God looks right into the very center of you and he describes that he wants you to be his and he describes you as the woman or the man of his good pleasure.

I mean, for those of you who struggle with shame, you should take this out of his good pleasure he called me and put it up beside the mirror. I don't recommend tattoos.

[30 : 53] I'm not against them either. You're going to get a tattoo? Put it on the inside of your arm. I am a woman of his good pleasure. I'm a man of his good pleasure. That's what the gospel is.

He wants you to say yes to Jesus because he has pleasure in you and he wants you to know his glory and his love and his splendor and his pleasure.

And even this thing here again in terms of you and you know, you think, there's something wrong with me. Isn't that the whole idea here of peace and his harmony? No, no. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Okay. You know, John Ortberg, the book was only, was all right, but the title's spectacular, right? Everyone is normal until you get to know them. Then you realize you're actually pretty weird.

But this isn't saying God's goal is to make everybody vanilla, make you all the same. No, no, no. God's going to take those quirks, those really weird things, those broken pieces and he's going to start to heal them together and he makes this beautiful harmony out of you and your uniqueness and you are a person of his good pleasure.

[32:12] And then the final thing to take from it is you get a vision of heaven. Oh my, what is heaven going to be like? Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those men and women of his good pleasure and it's being sung by the angel armies and it's being heard by shepherds in the field and you get this vision of heaven that this news of harmony that even now throughout the entire planet, whether we were in the Congo or whether we are in Singapore or in Taiwan or Nigeria or Manhattan or Venezuela or Colombia, there are people who are singing God's praises today and we are all one redeemed humanity in Christ and our future is to be in harmony with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven and we will behold the uncreated light, the beauty and the glory of the triune God and we will sing his glory and we will be filled with joy.

that is your future in Christ. Not because I say it but because this says it.

Give your life to Christ if you haven't and if you struggle with being unseen and maybe you are unseen by everybody but God sees you and he sees you as his person of good pleasure.

That's what he's calling you to. Let's stand and close in prayer. Good grief, what else can I say? People who know me, I'm actually very shy and not very demonstrative.

I didn't, somebody was just telling me that speakers choreograph this stuff and I said, no, I don't choreograph anything. I never know actually how I'm going to bring it across when I start speaking but I just, that was how I had to say that today because it's so glorious.

[34:00] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, if there are any here who have not yet given their lives to Jesus, may you help them right now to call out to you and say, Father, this good news, I want it to be for me. Take me, take me.

I desire to submit to you to be in this harmony and peace with you and Father, for all of us who at different times struggle with being unseen and all of us struggle at different times with shame, Father, we ask that you bring this good news of Jesus deep into our hearts that this might be the story that forms us.

This might be the story that we stand on. This might be the story by which we filter, that with which we hear. This might be the story by which we see the future. This might be the story by which we see other people and that even how we see our communities and our culture and what we desire to do, that they might all know the glory of God.

We ask, Father, in your mercy that you would bring this story deep into our hearts and form us. We ask this in the name of Jesus and all God's people said, Amen.

Amen.