

ALL AGE - Herald Son - Read All About It

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Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 00] Well, it's a challenging gig to speak to such a wide age group, but I hope there's something that we can all learn this morning, whatever our age, as we examine God's word together.

Let me ask you, how was your birth announced? Did your parents tell you what they did to announce when you were born? One of the things that parents traditionally do is that they put a notice in the newspaper.

And boys and girls, you might want to ask your mum and dad if they've kept the little birth notice from when you were born. My mother kept mine, and I've got it somewhere. I don't know where, but it's somewhere.

And it was years ago, and it's somewhere. And when our son Timothy was born, we did put a notice in the paper.

And although we didn't do that, we didn't seem to get round to it when Jonathan was born. It did cost \$70. So that may have been something to do with it. But we have in the Bible passage today the most incredible birth announcement ever.

[1 : 07] The baby born was unique. And the way the announcement happened, the way it was done was incredible. And the audience who heard the announcement was actually relatively small.

So I invite you to join with me as we check out this birth announcement in the Bible. You can find it in the black Bibles in the seats on page 833.

Page 833. And we're looking at Luke chapter 2, verses 8 to 20. Page 833. And seeing we're looking at the Bible, and we're going to learn from God what he has for us today, let's ask him to help us. Let's pray. Lord God, thank you so much for revealing yourself to us, ultimately in the person of Jesus.

Thanks also that you continue to speak to us through the pages of the Bible. And God, as we look at this part of the Bible, written by your servant Luke, please speak to us by your spirit.

[2 : 13] Help us to learn more about you, and help us to apply what we learn in our lives. We pray it for your glory, and in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there are no prizes for guessing who the baby is I'm talking about, and that's Jesus.

And the first people to hear the announcement of his birth were just a bunch of lowly shepherds. Let's have a look at verse 8. It says there, In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Now, they were near Bethlehem, and Bethlehem in those days was a small village just south of Jerusalem. These days, if you go there, it's almost like an outer suburb of Jerusalem.

You can go there today, and it's an outer suburb, really. Well, these shepherds were the first to hear the good news that Jesus had been born.

Why them? Why a bunch of shepherds? Why not some VIP or a king or a president or some other important person? Because as a bunch of people, as a class of people, shepherds had bad press.

[3 : 25] They had a bad reputation. A number of them were known for being thieves and confusing other people's sheep as being their own. They were also considered as unreliable and were not permitted to give evidence in a courtroom situation.

But we don't know if these shepherds were like that. Perhaps they were quite devout shepherds, seeing that God chose to speak to them in such a spectacular way on this first Christmas night.

And friends, you know, if these shepherds were the first people to receive the good news that Jesus had been born, then the good news of Jesus is for everyone.

If they were the first people to hear this good news, a bunch of lowly shepherds, regarded very lowly by a lot of people, the good news is for them. It's for everyone.

It's not just for the important people. It's not just for the famous. Not for the exalted only. It's for everyone. Including those that we may perceive as being insignificant.

[4 : 28] People in jail. Criminals. Homeless. Those suffering from disease. The poor. Even those who currently deny Jesus and adhere to another religion.

The good news of Jesus is for them. It's for everyone. And sometimes, I don't know about you, but I catch myself and I get disappointed with myself.

I sometimes have what I call a spiritual condescension. I might see someone in public and I might even look down my nose a bit at them. And I think, oh, the gospel of Jesus is too good for that person.

I was having a conversation with some boys and girls at school in about grade six. And we were talking about Saddam Hussein and the things that he'd done. And we were saying that the good news of Jesus is for Saddam Hussein as well.

He's not beyond redemption. We might not think that people like him deserve to hear about Jesus. Well, neither do we. And yet God in his grace and mercy has revealed himself to us for those of us who will accept it.

[5 : 40] So friends, we must never forget the good news of Jesus is for everyone. Not a select few. It's for everyone. Whether they accept it or not is another matter. But it is for everyone.

Okay, so what happened next? Let's have a look in verse 9. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified.

And who wouldn't be? Just imagine, you know, the quiet stillness of the fields outside Bethlehem. Perhaps the only sound was the sound of the sheep chewing on the grass.

Maybe some quiet conversation between the shepherds. Have a look at the picture up on the screen. This is from a website which has actually got the Bible made out of Lego bricks. And if you're interested to find out the website, I'll give you the web address later.

But you'll see there the shepherds and their sheep just on a quiet night outside Bethlehem. And then this angel rocks up and the word angel means messenger and he appears and stands in front of them.

[6 : 47] Let's have a look at that one, Anthony. There he is. And who wouldn't be terrified if that happened? One writer says that the splendor of the Lord blazed around them.

So you can imagine. Here's my shepherd's crook and they're just minding their own business. It's a fairly quiet night, you know, looking after the sheep. Nothing much happening.

And then the angel appears. Ah! What? How'd you be? I would have got a huge fright and I frighten easily.

I bet we've all been in situations where we've entered a room and we wanted to speak to someone in the room and they're completely engrossed in some other activity and they're completely unaware of our presence in the room.

And we know that as soon as we say, excuse me, they'll go, ah! It's funny, Brendan, isn't it? And my strategy in that situation, I always walk into the room and I say, I begin quietly and I get increasingly louder.

[8 : 00] I go, don't get a fright, don't get a fright, don't get a fright. And they still do. Isn't it great? Because the angel's first concern was that they were not frightened.

Look at the first words that the angel speaks. He says, in verse 10, the angel said to them, do not be afraid.

I think that is fantastic. The angel's first concern was not to freak the shepherds out. Don't be afraid. And you know what, friends, God says that to you and to me.

He says, don't be afraid of me. I love you. In fact, that is the most frequent command in the Bible. Do not fear or do not be afraid. The most frequent command in the Bible isn't do not murder or do not steal or do not lie. The most frequent command is do not fear or don't be afraid.

[9 : 06] And by happy coincidence, it happens 365 times in the Bible. One for every day of the year. How about that? And sadly, friends, there are many people who think that the only way to approach God is to cower in fear before him, to be very fearful of him.

There are many Roman Catholic families at the school where I work as a chaplain. I think many of our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters are very fearful of God from what they've been taught.

Those who adhere to the teachings of Islam are incredibly fearful of Allah. You see, Muslims have no peace with God and no confidence of his acceptance.

The nature of his Islamic teaching is that they can't be sure whether or not Allah accepts them or whether they're forgiven by him or not. And this is doubly sad, firstly because Muslim has no real hope of forgiveness and secondly because Allah is not the one true God anyway. a Muslim has every reason to be full of fear. But those who follow Jesus know and believe that he is the final and full revelation of God.

[10:24] He really shows us what God is like. And we're told by the angel that we trust in his message given to the shepherds. We cannot be fearful of God. There's no need to be fearful of God knowing his forgiveness and his love.

We can be at peace with him. We'll talk a bit more about that later. So let's go on and see what the angel said. So he says, Don't be afraid. I'm bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. To you in this day in the city of David is born to you is born in this day in the city of David a saviour who is the Messiah the Lord. So once again we see that the good news is for all the people and the wonderful news is that in the city of David that means Bethlehem Jesus has been born. And the angel says that he's the saviour he's the Messiah and he's the Lord. And briefly that means well he's the saviour Jesus saves us from our sin we are forgiven for our sin as we trust in Jesus. He also saves us from death. Death is not the end but we will be with God forever. The baby who is born is also the Messiah. Messiah means anointed one.

[11:35] And in biblical times someone may have been anointed often maybe they had some oil poured on their head and they were set aside for a particular job and kings and priests were anointed.

But this baby is the anointed not an anointed person but the anointed person. He is indeed the Messiah the long hoped for one.

And the baby born is also the Lord. And Lord is another way of saying Yahweh God's name from the Old Testament. So there's no mistaking this baby is God's son saviour Messiah and now Lord. Okay well the angel would assume the shepherds would want to go to Bethlehem because he says in verse 12 this will be a sign to you you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Boys and girls do you know what a manger is? Josh what's a manger? It's where the animals eat and drink from. Well done Josh yeah an animals feeding trough that's what a manger is.

[12:42] And there would have been a number of babies no doubt in Bethlehem that night but there would have only been one lying in a manger. And so that would have made it easy for the shepherds to identify which is the special baby was the only one lying in a manger.

Also as they found the baby in the manger they would realise that the angels were speaking the truth indeed. Okay so one angel has appeared and announced the birth of Jesus and then in verses 13 and 14 the most incredible thing happens.

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favours.

how about that? How would you love to have been there that night? Some of you know that one of my interests is astronomy not astrology let me point out.

So I like the scientific study of the stars and planets and I've seen some beautiful things in the sky. I've seen a couple of eclipses of the sun I've seen quite a few eclipses of the moon through my telescope you can see the rings of Saturn which are just incredibly beautiful the moons of Jupiter I've seen amazing meteor showers a number of comets and some beautiful star clusters but I tell you what I wish I'd been there this night that would have been an astronomical phenomena not to miss there's a number of times in the Bible I sort of think gee I wish I'd been there and this is one of them this is probably the main one would have been fantastic to witness the sky with these angels praising God how would have that sounded I don't know but it would have been beautiful I thought we might try and capture what it must have been like and you've all been given an angel I hope you've got your angel ready and what I'd like you to do please is just to grab your angel and just hold hold it up okay and perhaps if you're on my side perhaps face your angel that way and if you're on this side face your angel that way so we can all see each other's angels

[14:57] I wonder if we're just beginning to capture what it must have been like to see all those wonderful angels praising God in the sky alright put your angels down and let's just join in God's praises with the angels let's read the verse together which is printed on your angel this is what the angel said say with me glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favours that sounded good but I'm sure it would have sounded better that night well the angels

had the right priority didn't they they sought to bring glory to God and you know friends as we seek to have the priority of bringing glory to God not to ourselves the world will be a better place as we have God's perfect and good priorities alright perhaps we'll turn the angel off there on the screen and I wonder if we might have a visit from a couple of angels

I wonder what it would have been like to actually hear from a couple of the angels we're going to listen into a conversation between a couple of the angels a senior angel and a junior angel Arthur's not the junior angel and Arthur is just patrolling the gates of heaven and a junior angel is about to appear and lets eavesdrop on their conversation wow check this place out it's amazing see the stars everywhere flying around the sky beautiful it's amazing what brings you to the gates of heaven angel oh I'm nothing nothing no no I just came outside to look I'm sorry I'll go straight back have you never been outside before no

I'm just a young little cherub I haven't been given my wings yet but one day hopefully I'll fly swiftly across the skies at my master's bidding what's your name Herian what's yours Raphael oh I've never spoken to an archangel before what were you looking for oh nothing in particular I've just heard so much about the wonder of all created things so I wanted to see for myself I'm not restless or anything but I meet so many angels returning from flight far and wide across the universe their eyes almost popping out of their heads as they try to describe what they've seen I know the feeling even when you fly faster than light you never seem to come anywhere near the end oh but I wish I could go well hmm soon maybe but you can see a lot from where we're standing now

I'll show you it's bigger than I could have possibly imagined it's bigger than you can possibly see stars and galaxies in eternal motion old stars die and grow cold and new ones burn blue and bright like these ones up there millions of them as if a paintbrush has been flicked across the sky flicking new lights and stars all around the place and each gap between the stars is like a window into eternal space beyond star after star their messages still travelling even when they themselves have gone out wow do archangels ever feel small all the time wouldn't it be great if we could all go on a guided tour of the universe you could show us around oh a lot of us did go out once together when the son of almighty god himself left the splendor and glory of heaven and went to live on earth for a while it was a very special occasion so we took along the heavenly choir filled the sky with singing just to let them know that he had come wow the people on earth must have loved that yes they did and it also made them jump earth must be a fabulous place for the son of god to want to go and live there well it used to be before it was spoiled

I bet it's that great big orange planet up there because it's going a little bit pink around the edges it's not that one you can hardly see it actually it's that little dim one down there you can't be serious I am it looks like a chewed up golf ball or something what in heaven did he want to go down there for to help them to put right what was spoiled so did he rule the earth then not in the same way as he now rules with god in heaven but dad how did he live did you build him a palace or a castle or something no he was born in a cattle shed and lived in various places wandering around born born yes as a man you mean he changed into something else he became very small nothing more than a seed and was born onto the earth how horrible it was the only way to help them surely you've learned that about god by now you spoke about the wonder of all created things but the real wonder is that he cares for each one of them that much well it's a wonder to me that he didn't come to grief with those miserable place down there well he did and he didn't but there was a happy ending as you know tell me about it

[21 : 38] I would if we had the time but even eternity is too short for that but I must fly but you stay and watch if you like wow would have been a magnificent sight well the angels conclude with the phrase and on earth peace among those whom he favours you see God sent Jesus to give people a way back to himself and without accepting God's gift of Jesus a person remains as God's enemy now enemy might seem to be too strong a word to use but friends it's the word the Bible uses for someone who does not accept God's love and forgiveness in accepting

Jesus' death and resurrection to new life a person can be and is at peace with God and this has wonderful consequences of peace within oneself peace with God peace in even difficult situations and I can testify to that in my own life a couple of months ago my wife and I were watching a Christian video about the South American nation of Columbia and you probably know and have heard of Columbia because of all the drug problems and the drug barons down there and there's no doubt that there are still many problems in Columbia but friends let me tell you God has been very busy in the lives of people in Columbia his Holy Spirit has awakened so many people in that nation

to their need of God and I'm sure God's doing this work in many nations around the world people are turning from their lives of sin and seeking to live for God they're experiencing healing of their relationships inner healing whole communities are being transformed there are places in Columbia where the drug barons just can't operate anymore but people are saying no we're finished with that we don't want any more of that we're following

Jesus now the peace that the angels spoke about is becoming an incredible reality in the nation of Columbia and this peace can be yours as well all you need to do is turn to Jesus and ask him to forgive you and take control of your life so friends do you want this peace have you accepted it would you why wouldn't you be at peace with God by accepting Jesus be at peace with him forever and know his love and care in your life and when the angel says peace among those whom he favours he reminds us that we don't choose God but God chooses us so if you say yes I do love Jesus I do seek to follow him well say thanks to God and praise him for tapping you on the shoulder and alerting you to your need of him pray that he would do the same in the lives of many others who as yet do not know him well in verse 15 we're told the angels left the shepherds and went into heaven

I want to make a quick comment about angels you might wonder if this whole incident is based in historical reality maybe you're thinking oh this is just a beautiful poetical little account of something that happened but it has no basis in historical facts and friends look I've never seen an angel but I have read and heard accounts of Christians who have accounts of missionaries who have been in serious situations who have felt protected by angels an account of someone who was seriously ill who saw angels above their bed and who recovered these are not sort of superstitious people or people with strange beliefs but orthodox Christians who have perceived and some have seen visibly God's angels and we know that Luke the author of this gospel was at pains to write an orderly account of everything that happened and we think it possible that he got his information from conversations with Mary at least the first two chapters anyway or maybe from others who knew

Mary I don't think it very surprising that a bunch of angels appear when Jesus is born it would be very odd for God not to do something it seems fair enough that his birth would be announced in some amazing way by God why should we not believe that God sent a host of angels to help with this incredible birth notice well keep your angel as a reminder of today's service maybe place it on your Christmas tree well the angels depart back into heaven and what was the shepherd's response well did they say well wasn't that nice wasn't that lovely that was a lovely little concert wasn't it oh well back to the sheep now off we go of course not in our bible it seems fairly pedestrian what they say and fairly sort of sedate they say let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place which the Lord has made known to us well I don't think they said it like that and the sense of the original

[27 : 12] Greek is more like what are we waiting for let's go let's get out of here don't worry about the sheep let's go to Bethlehem they were urgent in their desire to go to Bethlehem and to see what had happened now we don't know if perhaps they asked one of their friends to stay and look after the sheep or they just trusted the sheep to God's care maybe they drove their sheep to Bethlehem and we don't know also how long it took for them to find Mary Joseph and Jesus maybe they had to search for a while maybe they found them fairly promptly in any case they found them and the shepherds in verse 17 and 18 related everything that had happened so they got to the manger and saw Mary and Joseph and Jesus and it says when they saw this they made known what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them how would you be standing around the manger baby

Jesus there Mary Joseph the shepherds and here in this manger was the fulfillment of God's promise waited for for centuries and there in front of you is the fulfillment of his promise just amazing stuff that's another place I would have loved to have been and Mary's reaction well we have it here in verse 19 but Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart remember another angel had appeared to her several months earlier and said you're going to be the mum of Jesus and she'd carried this child for nine months and experienced that us blokes really cannot even begin to appreciate and she knew that in her womb was God's son well the news that the shepherds brought of what they had witnessed was another thing for her to have cause to reflect on

God's grace to her in becoming the mother of the Lord those of you who are mothers can probably appreciate that a bit more okay well to our last verse 20 and that has the shepherds reaction what was their response the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them they worship God they worship God and I got to thinking and wondering what these shepherds might have said had they been Aussies had they been Australian shepherds perhaps the Australian equivalent is the drover what would a bunch of Australian drovers have said if they'd been there and they'd left Bethlehem they'd left the stable and they'd gone back to their sheep I reckon they would have said God you beauty thank you so much for sending the angel to us and giving us the wonderful privilege of seeing the Messiah how people have waited for hundreds of years for this event and you've let us be the first people to hear about it you are such a faithful and good

God and you keep your promises you care about us so much and you love us and you want us to be your friends thank you so much God we're just a bunch of humble drovers but you've given us so much joy just imagine the shepherds having a spring in their step as they go back to their sheep full of pure joy what about us do our lives reveal a deep and abiding joy because we know that God has spoken to us and revealed himself to us are we really full of joy at being God's children and nothing not even death itself can separate us from God's love does our worship at church declare and demonstrate the joy that should characterize our life together as God's people do our lives in the community reveal the hope that we have as

Christians that yeah we're passing through our home is in heaven and we're going there and in this life we're seeking to make a difference for God now look I'm not for one minute suggesting we put on some false facade of joy I'm talking about something genuine and deep and sincere something fair dinkum and I'm just suggesting that I and all of us need to let the joy of knowing such a wonderful God bubble up and overflow in us as it obviously did in this bunch of humble shepherds it's great to have the children in our service today with all their enthusiasm and it's really infectious helps us capture some of that joy and friends we can thank God that he is a God who intervenes in the world we have in this Bible passage today a situation a very unique situation of God intervening in a point in history because he loves us so much coming to us in human form as a baby how incredible is that well some people subscribe to a worldview called deism and the deistic worldview says yes well God began the world but he has no interest in it now and he certainly doesn't intervene in it so like

[32 : 55] God wound up the clock put it on the mantelpiece and that's it he's got nothing more to do with it what a load of rubbish that is no Christians do not have a deistic worldview and at Christmas we remember God's direct intervention coming to the world in human form to show his love through the birth life death resurrection and ascension of Jesus to reveal himself so that we might be his friends and we all need to be God's friends yes God has intervened in the world and friends he didn't just intervene then and that's it he continues to intervene and be at work today I mentioned about what's happening in the nation of Colombia before and let me just conclude now with one anecdote from my own experience of where God has been intervening in the life of someone that I know the person I'm about to mention to you is a fellow teacher at my school where I work as a chaplain and this teacher is a grade 6 teacher and she has a son a teenage son at another school and late in term 3 so in about September her son was one of several students to go on a trip to

America it was a school trip and I don't think this teacher is a Christian but she's certainly someone who is very supportive of my ministry she was quite concerned because her son had left a few days previously she'd heard nothing from him and she was getting quite anxious wondering what had happened and the school term finished term 3 concluded and I knew I wouldn't see this teacher for two or three weeks because of the holidays so I offered to pray for her son and she was appreciative of that during the holidays I considered ringing her just to see if she'd heard from her son but I felt like I don't really know her that well and I felt that would be a bit intrusive so I thought look I'll leave it till term 4 starts well the first day of the new term term 4 comes around and she says Warwick I must speak to you I need to speak to you and she explained that yes a few days afterwards her son had made contact with her he was just a slack teenager who hadn't bothered to contact his mum and she was greatly relieved but she explained how in that time her son had been on a flight an internal flight in America and on this plane a man had gone berserk he was fortunately subdued by a couple of air marshals but the son thought he was going to die the teacher said to me he said Warwick she said Warwick I was in the holidays I heard all this from my son and I thought it

was Warwick's prayers who kept my son safe and she thanked me profusely for praying and I said Dale don't don't thank me thank the God who protected your son thank the Lord Jesus for being with him I told her not to be surprised that God answers our prayers often we're surprised when God answers our prayers how silly is that and I relate this incident just to illustrate that God is still intervening and at work in our lives today we can't always see what he's doing or why he's doing it we don't understand his ways but friends we have a good and loving and caring God and we can trust him even though we can't see the big picture his hand of love is there and he's intervening he's at work he's with us he intervened in a very special way on that first Christmas and he continues to be at work intervening and helping us in our lives I could have related some other stories of how God is at work in the world in today's Bible reading the angel said do not be afraid for see I'm bringing you good news of great joy for all the people friends this good news is for you and it's for me and it's for everyone out there as the writer of one of the Psalms said oh taste and see that the Lord is good happy are those who take refuge in him you