

The Message

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[0 : 0 0] Does anything about this scene actually matter? And that's the question that I want for you to consider this morning. To my understanding, no Old Testament prophecy necessitates an angelic appearance to shepherds. No Old Testament prophecy necessitates a shepherd's visit to the place of Jesus's birth. If we were to go through the New Testament scriptures, there is no place that I can find where the apostles directly reference this particular scene. They don't talk about the angels singing to shepherds or making their praise to shepherds or delivering a message to shepherds on the night of Jesus's birth. In fact, the apostles talk actually very little about Jesus's birth.

So what if we took it out? This section that I just read plus the section that we'll cover next week, that would take us all the way to verse 20. So if we started at verse 8 and went to verse 20, we just decided, you know what, there's not really a lot of significance to this. This is more of a gap filler than anything else. Let's just take it out and only leave the things that are significant here. If we were to do that, the narrative itself wouldn't really be affected. Look at the flow from verse 7 to verse 21. That's where it would read if we took this section out. She gave birth to her firstborn son, verse 7, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the end. And then skip to verse 21. There's a great flow here. And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. You see how easy that would be. We could take this whole thing out. And Luke's the only one that mentions it. It doesn't really affect the story at all. It doesn't fulfill any particular prophecy directly from the Old Testament. So if we did that, would it alter our faith at all?

Would our understanding of Jesus in any way be hindered or diverted? And of course, the way that we answer that question is directly related to our commitment to the doctrine of biblical inspiration. Are we to accept the things that the Bible records based on their subjective impact on us? Or are we to accept the things that the Bible says because God has providentially chosen to give them to us as his objective truth? So the question is, do we come to the Bible and do we decide what's important for us to know? Or do we come to the Bible recognizing that God has decided what is important for us to know? Depending on what your perspective is, depends on whether or not you think this passage is significant at all.

Of course, we understand not all Scripture is equally impactful, but all Scripture is equally inspired. And therefore, it is equally profitable. Paul made this clear to us in 2 Timothy 3.

All Scripture is breathed out by God, he says. Breathed out being the way where we get the word inspiration. In fact, you may have a translation with you this morning that actually says all Scripture is inspired by God, breathed out. It's the same thing. All Scripture is breathed out by God, and it is profitable. And he goes on to say that it's profitable for teaching, or it's profitable for reproof, or it's profitable for correction, or for training in righteousness. Everything that God has given us is profitable for us is profitable for us because it is from him. So the question of this text is not, should it be here? The question of this text is, for what purpose did God include it?

[4 : 09] What is it about this kind of bizarre scene of angels and shepherds? What is it that God intends for us to understand here? Why is it here? And to discover that answer, I think we have to begin with Luke's purpose. We did this a little bit last week, but just turn a page back to chapter 1 and look at the first four verses. Luke tells us his intention in writing the gospel.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, have delivered them to us. In other words, all these things have come from eyewitness accounts, he says. It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, here's his purpose, to write an orderly account for you, and he names his immediate audience a man named Theophilus, to write an orderly account for you that you may have certainty concerning the things you've been taught. We have to begin there, right? Why is it that God gave us this? Well, Luke tells us that he's writing this book in order to lay out an orderly account, eyewitness accounts, so that we can have certainty about the person and the work of Jesus Christ. So based on his stated purpose then, Luke didn't include anything in this gospel just to beef up the narrative.

He didn't include this scene of angels and shepherds just to give us a kind of fantastical view to kind of make this story more enticing or entertaining. That's not why he's given it to us. Every part of the Bible has a distinct purpose, and under the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit, it is to give us certainty concerning the things of Christ as we come to Luke's gospel. Luke wrote about angels and shepherds because this event truly occurred, and it had to do with the person of Christ, and it contains vital truths that we need to understand as they relate to the gospel.

He didn't care to provide an inspiring story for our murals that we hang on the wall during the Christmas season. He wrote to tell us about the gospel of Jesus. He wrote to tell us that only Jesus has the power of God to save all who believe, and this passage is profitable for us to that purpose.

So let's look at it together. The first thing I want you to see here is the surprising recipients of the gospel. The surprising recipients of the gospel. Look at verse 8. In the same region that is the region of Bethlehem, there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night, and here's what happened. An angel of the Lord appeared to them. Glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. So picture it. You're a shepherd. You are somewhere near the town of Bethlehem. You are on the night shift for the evening, and you are tending to the sheep as you would any other night. Perhaps there's some shepherd caves that they have discovered somewhere near the town of Bethlehem. Perhaps you are hunkered down in one of those caves. Maybe you're out underneath the stars. You've got a fire and a couple of your buddies around you, and the sheep are safe, and you're just doing your best to stay awake. And then suddenly, a being unlike anything you've ever seen appears before you. And not only does the being appear before you, but this unusual light shines all the way around you. Now, this is not the only time that we've seen this happen in Scripture.

[8 : 10] Do you remember Paul's conversion in Acts chapter 9? When he has this vision of the Lord Jesus, and it's the glory of the Lord shines around him, shines in such a way that it actually leaves him physically blind. So they're impacted by this. There's this single angel. There's all of this light, and what would your reaction be? Your reaction would be exactly what their reaction was.

They were filled with great fear. One of the classic carols says, shepherds quaked, trembled at what they saw, as did everyone who had an angelic encounter.

So you can imagine this is quite an unusual thing. This was a frightening thing. And what is this angel doing? Declaring that the Christ has been born. It's a birth announcement. We're familiar with those.

These days, with the way information passes through social media on the internet, it's very easy to announce the birth of a child. In fact, that's what we all do now, isn't it? Before we had social media, maybe if you wanted to, you had some nice greeting cards printed up a few weeks after the birth of your child with a nice cute little picture of the baby and all the statistics with their name and how long they were and how much they weighed and all those kinds of things. And maybe you sent that in the mail so that people could put it on their refrigerators. If you go back before then, before you could customize a greeting card, maybe put it in the newspaper. But as you go further back in the history, of course, the only way that this kind of birth announcement is going to happen is if you're somebody of importance. Maybe you're a royalty in some way. Maybe you're nobility.

And it would be interesting in popular culture at the time to know that you had a child. And that's essentially what's happening here with this angel. The angel is providing a birth announcement that the king of kings has been born. And just like a royal herald would announce the birth of a king or of a Caesar, so did Jesus have an angelic herald to announce his own birth. That part of it's not surprising, that there would be some type of scene or scenario that would announce the Christ is born. That part of this is not surprising at all, actually. What's surprising is the people chosen to receive the announcement. We would expect that the most important announcement in history would come to Caesar Augustus, perhaps, or maybe King Herod, or maybe the high priest in Jerusalem.

[10 : 53] At the time. But that's not where it came. The first announcement of the Messiah's birth was to lowly shepherds. Nobodies. Nameless people. Faceless people. In the middle of the field or hunkered down in a cave. That's where the angel came.

Now, shepherds were a necessary facet of Jewish life in that day. That's not difficult for us to understand. But that doesn't mean that they were loved and respected either. The opposite actually seems to be true if we look at the historical circumstances of Jesus' day. The Mishnah states that shepherds were under a religious ban, actually. They were commonly regarded as unclean, meaning that they could not regularly go through the worship rituals, ceremonial rituals of the Jewish people.

They were regarded consistently as thieves. Most people thought of them as kind of the lowest part of society. Their job was necessary for Jewish life to flourish. But they themselves, the men who did this, were culturally despised and rejected. And at first, it seems like quite an arbitrary choice for God to choose these random shepherds to send his angel. But if you think about God's patterns in the scriptures, it's really not that surprising at all. Over and over in the Bible, we find God extending his gracious work to weak and humble people. Do you remember when God called Moses? He didn't call Moses when he was in the royal family in Egypt. He called Moses when he was a nobody shepherd on the backside of the desert, and he called to him out of a burning bush. No one would have chosen Moses for that call, but that's who God used. We could point to others. Maybe you'd go to Gideon. Gideon, by his own admission, was the runt of the least important family in his entire tribe. And yet, he was the one that God chose to use to take 300 men to fight the armies of Midian. We look at King David. God sends Samuel to the house of Jesse because Jesse has all these sons, and one of them is going to be a king. And

Samuel comes, and Jesse thinks so little of David that he calls all the brothers to the house except David. He leaves David out in the field. He doesn't even think he's important enough to even be looked at by the prophet. And Samuel goes through all the brothers, and God chooses none of them. And Samuel finally looks at Jesse, and he says, do you have another son? Is there somebody else hiding around here?

And that's when Jesse sends for David to come. God comes to weak, humble, lowly people. That's his pattern. That's how he works. It's a well-established pattern in the Scripture. This is how God fulfills his purposes. The announcement to the shepherds reminds us that the saving call of Christ comes to those who are lowly in heart. Isn't that the picture here? Jesus' ministry wasn't to the self-righteous Pharisees.

[14 : 23] It wasn't to the self-sufficient nobility of his day. His ministry primarily was to the poor, the afflicted, the social outcast of his day. Now, that's not to say that salvation is given to people based on their physical or social condition, but it's the poor in spirit that Jesus brings his kingdom message. You see, sometimes we can easily get confused about this, and we would come to this idea of God coming to the weak and the lowly and the humble in life. And we would say, well, that's what we have to be, actually. We just have to be poor and afflicted and suffer, and that's when God will be pleased to bless us. Well, no, that's not the picture that he gives either. Salvation doesn't come to those based on their physical or social condition. The rich and the powerful often rejected Jesus.

So did the poor. The issue was not their social status. It was their pride of heart. And in the same sense, the needy often believed Jesus, but so did some people of great wealth and stature. The issue wasn't their physical condition. It was their spiritual humility.

And the announcement to the shepherds here in Luke chapter 2 pictures that glorious truth that God's salvation is actually a work of grace. It doesn't come to those who think that they deserve it, but to those who know they don't.

A person's cry for salvation is one that recognizes personal sin, recognizes the inability to earn God's favor. It's a cry for mercy that's based on God's steadfast love through Christ rather than human merit.

And their shepherds remind us that it is such a lowly, humble person that God is pleased to bless and to redeem. If you're a believer here today, are you surprised to be a recipient of the gospel?

[16 : 41] After all, that's the point that we made here at the beginning is that there is worth surprising recipients of this announcement. Are you surprised that you have been a recipient of the gospel message, that the Lord has extended his gracious hand to you?

Because if you think, well, of course I'm a recipient. Look at me. I'm an American. Why wouldn't God send his grace to me? I'm a good, respectable person.

I'm deeply religious. Why wouldn't I be a recipient? Of course I'm a recipient of the gospel. You see, if that's you, I don't actually think that you understand the message of the gospel.

Because God doesn't save Americans. God doesn't save good, respectable people. God doesn't call the deeply religious. Christ says, blessed are the poor in spirit.

But they're the ones who will receive the kingdom. So we see the surprising recipients of the gospel. Number two, I want you to see the saving message of the gospel.

[17 : 50] The saving message of the gospel. Look with me at verse 10. The angel said to them, fear not. For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.

Now that's the title that we've given to the series as we've studied through this passage these last few weeks. After calming the terrified men, the angel declared that he was not there to harm them, but to proclaim good news.

Good news of great joy. Now you may not care about this, but let me just explain something about what's behind this. The root word that's behind this phrase, good news, is euangelion.

It means gospel. It means good news. In fact, whenever we come and we use that term gospel, that's what we mean. Gospel literally means good news.

And the form that Luke used in the Greek language here in verse 10 is also the term where we get evangelism. So evangelism is the act of sharing good news.

[18 : 56] An evangelist is the person who shares good news. And the euangelion, the good news, is the gospel itself. The good news is declared to us in many ways, right?

We hear good news all the time. But when we use the word gospel as Christians, we're specifically referring to the message of eternal salvation.

That's what we mean. And as it relates to the message that this angel brings to the shepherds, we must understand two critical truths about the gospel message.

And the first is this. The gospel is for all peoples. The gospel is for all peoples. Look with me again at verse 10.

The angel said to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy. That will be for all the people. This message of salvation was not exclusive to religious insiders.

[19 : 57] It wasn't exclusive to wealthy aristocrats. It was as much for the lowly shepherds as it was for anyone else. But for Luke's first readers, a group of Gentile people, they would have taken particular joy in this statement.

Salvation was not only for the Jews, the angel is saying. It's for every nation, every tribe, every language. According to the angel, no person would be excluded from the gospel on the basis of their nationality or on the basis of their cultural background.

This is good news that will bring great joy to all the people. The Old Testament anticipated this. Psalm 67.

The psalmist says, May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us so that your ways may be known on the earth and your saving power among all the nations.

And then he goes on to say, Let the peoples, plural, let the peoples praise you, O God. Let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.

[21 : 10] For you judge the peoples with equity. You guide the nations upon the earth. You see, the gospel message was always a message for all people. And now that the Christ has come, the angel declares to these shepherds that this gospel message of great joy is for all peoples.

The apostles preached that this gospel is for all peoples as well. Acts chapter 10. So Peter opened his mouth and said, Do you remember when John had his vision of heaven in Revelation chapter 5?

And he saw the people who were gathered around the throne of God worshiping Jesus Christ the Lamb. And he writes, And they sang a new song. Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals.

For you were slain by your blood. You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have made them a kingdom and priests to God.

And they shall reign on the earth. You see, the angel said that the gospel message he was declaring could bring great joy to all people. Which means it can bring you great joy.

[22 : 43] Isn't that the thing that we learn the most here? If this is a message for all people, doesn't that mean that it applies to me as well? You see, there's no sin that you've committed that's beyond Christ's ability to forgive.

There's no social or cultural or religious status that you have to reach before you can receive the salvation that he offers. It's a global gospel.

It transcends culture. It transcends the nuances of various backgrounds that we have. The message never changes. And anyone from any nation that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved through it.

This is why we regularly bring Val and Angela's letters and read them on a Sunday morning. This is why we want to be involved with mission projects in places like Honduras.

This is why we are motivated to generously give of our finances because of what the angel said. This is good news of great joy. That's for all people. It's not an American gospel.

[23 : 48] It's not even a Jewish gospel. It's a global gospel. And we want to see this gospel go forth to all peoples. But it's not just that it's a gospel for all peoples.

Notice also that this gospel is all about Jesus. It's all about Jesus. Now I want you to pay really close attention to the actual message that the angel delivers.

Look at verse 11. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. All right? That's the message.

Now step back and look at the bigger picture here. The shepherds are in the field. The angel appears. The light shines. They're greatly afraid. Angel calms them down. Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt you.

[24 : 46] I'm not here to judge you. I'm here to deliver a message. And it's good news. And here's the good news. There's a baby. Yes, Winnie.

A baby has been born. Good news, men. Now you got to think when they first hear this, these perhaps hardened shepherds out in the field are thinking, why in the world is that good news for us?

Unto you is born this day. In the city of David, that's significant. We've talked about that in weeks past. In the city of David is born to you a Savior. Savior. It's Christ the Lord.

And he said, I've got a sign. This is how you're going to know. I'm being honest about this. You're going to go to Bethlehem and you're going to find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. That's not the unusual part. Every baby would have been wrapped in swaddling clothes.

The unusual part was this baby was laying in a feeding trough for animals. You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. And next week we'll see what the response of these shepherds actually was to that.

[25 : 49] But that's exactly what's happening. Notice what the good news was. It was all about Jesus. It was all about this baby. It was all about a Savior, a Christ, a Lord.

That's the one who was going to bring these shepherds great joy. He's the one that was going to bring great joy to the nations. It wasn't anything else. It was Jesus alone. He alone was the content of the angel's message.

Now, I read a fascinating article this week. It's by a historian named Daniel Williams. Christianity Today posted it. And you can go read it on your own if you like.

I would encourage you to, actually. Williams wrote that among the 17th and 18th century American colonists, the Christians who most closely resembled what we would call evangelical Christians or Bible-believing Christians, they actually refused to celebrate Christmas.

They were led, of course, by the Puritans in the northeast part of the United States. The Puritans strongly opposed the holiday, not only because of its connection to the Roman Catholic Church, but because where they had migrated from England, it had really become more of an excuse for excessive drinking and carousing than it was actually a religious observance.

[27 : 13] So the Puritans actually forbade it. There were some places in New England that if you were to participate in a Christmas celebration in some way, the Puritans would have you arrested and punished for doing so.

Even after the Puritan influence began to dissipate and fade away, the Congregationalists in the United States, they didn't begin to really celebrate Christmas in their homes and in their churches until the later part of the 19th century.

So we're talking 16 and 1700s all the way up to about 1860, 1865. The most conservative Bible-believing Christians in the United States really didn't have much to do with the Christmas holiday.

But it was during that Civil War time frame or just after the Civil War when some of the Congregationalists that would be your Baptist types of people began to actually celebrate the holiday.

So early in American history, it was actually the Unitarians and the Episcopalians who were largely responsible for the influence of the Christmas celebration, primarily the Unitarians.

[28 : 26] Unitarians believed that moral reform came through human effort, and they believed that Christmas was a time to promote love and kindness for the betterment of human society.

And perhaps the greatest example of this, as far as Christmas is concerned, doesn't actually come from an American, but from an Englishman named Charles Dickens who wrote a famous novel called A Christmas Carol.

You remember from the movies and from reading the novel yourself, The Christmas Carol is basically about Ebenezer Scrooge discovering that true joy comes from unrestrained generosity to fellow men.

That's the moral of the story. He's visited by the spirit of Christmas past and present and future, and he is confronted with the reality of his own mortality, and that does something for him that immediately he begins to take all of the money that he's hoarded up and all of the curmudgeoning spirit that he had.

He suddenly transforms into tremendous generosity and of the, quote, Christmas spirit and Ebenezer Scrooge becomes the ideal candidate for a Unitarian conversion.

[29 : 43] In fact, that's exactly what Daniel Williams says. Scrooge experiences what amounts to a Unitarian Christmas conversion. He becomes a better man. And for them, if Jesus is necessary for such a conversion, he's needed only as an inspiring moral example of human possibility, not as an atoning Savior.

You see, Unitarians didn't believe that Jesus was divine. Neither did they believe in his substitutionary atonement. They believed and continue to believe that, in opposition to Trinitarianism, that there is one God, that Jesus is our elder brother, would be the language that they use in that, and that he serves as the ultimate moral example of what we are to become.

And if we become like him in our moral pursuits, then God will be pleased with us, that that's the way we receive favor from God is through moral reform.

A lot of attention this year is being put on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his poem, Christmas Bells, that was eventually transformed into the hymn, I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.

Amy mentioned that there's a movie out about it, and I actually am eager to see it. But Longfellow was an American Unitarian. He was not a Bible-believing Christian.

[31 : 09] In fact, he didn't intend for his poem to actually become a hymn. It became a hymn later. He didn't even attend church himself. He didn't believe in Jesus. He didn't follow Jesus as a disciple.

He latched on to the phrase here at the end of verse 14 from the King James translation that says, Peace on earth, goodwill toward men. He latched on to that, and he proposed that, as he was writing during the tumultuous years of the Civil War, that man's hope was not in the saving work of Christ.

Man's hope is in an attitude of peace and goodwill toward one another. And this errant theology, it comes through in the lyric.

I don't mean to ruin the hymn for you, but it comes through in the lyric. Think about this. I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat.

Not of, unto you is born this day a Savior who is Christ the Lord. No, for long fellow, the bells repeated of peace on earth, goodwill toward your fellow men.

[32 : 24] He goes on to say, Then pealed the bells more loud and deep. God is not dead, nor doth he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail.

Not in the saving work of Christ on the cross. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with, he says, peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

I'm not saying you can't sing the hymn. I actually love it. It's actually an enjoyable hymn to sing. But it helps me to understand what long fellow meant when he wrote those words. What long fellow meant was that really the way to God is a way through moral reform.

That if we want to hope for any good news of great joy in this life, it will come when we live with peace and peace with one another. It will come when we finally demonstrate goodwill, the quote unquote Christmas spirit to one another.

That was long fellow's gospel. Other Unitarians used other hymns. I won't ruin all of them for you. Well, one of them was O Holy Night. It was translated, it's a French carol.

[33 : 26] It was translated into English by a Unitarian that used it to promote their beliefs on abolitionism from the slave trade. Of course, we are proponents of that. But think about the second verse of O Holy Night.

Truly, he taught us to love one another. His law is love and his gospel is peace, it says. Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother.

And in his name, through his actions toward slaves, all oppression shall cease. That was the intent on singing that hymn for those people. It was not a gospel about Jesus.

It was a gospel about the Christmas spirit. Now don't get me wrong. Peace, goodwill toward men, that is a biblical trait. And of course, Jesus embodied in perfection everything that peace means, everything that goodness means and kindness means.

Jesus was all of that. But peace and love and goodwill are not the gospel. The gospel is not be nice to people and God will love you.

[34 : 36] The gospel is not be at peace with people and God will bless you. That's not the gospel. The good news of great joy from the angel was all about Jesus.

His identity as the Messiah, as the Son of God, and his purpose to save us from our sins. And if the gospel that you subscribe to or anybody you know subscribe to is about anything other than the person and work of Jesus Christ, it is a false gospel.

Notice the three terms the angel uses. Savior, Christ, Lord. Unto you is born this day in the city of David. Not a moral reformer.

No, it is a Savior. It is a Messiah. It is the Lord God. And if Jesus is a Savior, what is it that he's supposed to be saving us from?

The answer is not disease and poverty. The answer is sin and hell and damnation. Matthew 1.21, the angel told Joseph, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

[35 : 53] MacArthur said, too often Jesus is presented as the one who will rescue people from unfulfillment in their marriages or unfulfillment in their families or their jobs, from a debilitating habit they cannot overcome, or from a sense of purpose.

From a sense of purposelessness in life. But while relief in those areas may be a byproduct of salvation, it is not its primary intent.

mankind's true problem is sin. And whether you realize it or not this morning, your greatest problem is your sin and rebellion toward God.

And because God is holy, because he is just, we are eternally condemned. Condemned to hell because of our sin.

The Christmas message is good news of great joy because it proclaims that this baby in Bethlehem is a Savior who has come to redeem us from God's wrath.

[37 : 09] We live from birth under God's wrath. The Savior comes to take that away. And his death on the cross is how it was accomplished.

He bore our penalty so that we could be reconciled to God in peace. That's the intention of the angel's statement in their praise.

Peace on earth. Not peace with one another, though that comes. The initial intent of their praise was peace with God.

And how does this peace achieve? Not through your best efforts. It's not achieved through moral reform. It's not achieved through your church attendance.

It's not achieved through your Americanism. It is achieved through the person of Christ alone. Colossians 1. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness, transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[38 : 23] God doesn't promise you health, wealth, and prosperity. He promises you forgiveness of sins through the person of Christ. That's the gospel message. It's the only gospel.

Make sure that that's the gospel you believe and the gospel that you preach. Thirdly, we see the chief purpose of the gospel. We've seen surprising recipients.

That's the lowly, humble shepherds. We've seen the saving message. It's all about Jesus, and it's for all peoples. Now we see the purpose in all of this.

Verse 13. Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, Christ and on earth, peace among those with whom he is pleased.

You know, what a sight this must have been, right? It was enough to have one angel appear to have the light and to hear the message. But now all of a sudden, perhaps the skies break open or this vision is presented to them, and it's an innumerable amount of angels.

[39 : 34] Perhaps it doesn't specifically designate angels only. Perhaps this is a vision of heaven that they see that is combined with both angels and believers who have gone on.

And what is it that they do? They do not sing to the shepherds. They lift up their praise to the one true God. And what is the dynamic of their praise? Glory to God in the highest and honor or peace among those with whom he is pleased.

And what is the motivation of their praise? This little baby in Bethlehem born as the Savior, Christ and Lord. Interesting, isn't it? I think these shepherds were getting a brief glimpse of eternity.

The first question in the Westminster shorter catechism is what is the chief end of man? Anybody know the answer? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

That's the answer in the catechism. The praise of the angels in verse 14 tells us the chief end of the incarnation and thus the chief end of the gospel.

[40 : 45] It is to glorify God by making peace with sinners so that they can enjoy him forever. Isn't that what they say?

The ultimate purpose of the gospel is the glory of God. He doesn't provide it reluctantly. He's pleased and glorified by giving his son as a payment for our sins.

Paul says this in Ephesians 1. He says that the gospel work in us is so that we who first hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

And then he says, so it is with you also that in receiving the seal of the Holy Spirit you also might be to the praise of his glory.

You see, we were created for God's glory and for God's pleasure. Because of our sin, we fall short of that purpose.

[41 : 46] That's what Romans 3 tells us. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. What does that mean? That means you were created to give him glory. Your sin mars that image in you and it causes you to fall short of the glory for which you were created to give him.

Our sin does that. That's why it's the problem. Now God receives glory by the dispensation of all of his attributes. He's glorified in the display of his holiness and justice in condemning sinners.

God receives glory from that because God is holy and God is just and he's righteous. But he also receives glory in the display of his grace and mercy when he forgives sinners.

Now in the incarnation of Jesus and hang with me and particularly on the cross, God's justice and God's mercy finally meet together in a perfect display of the glory of God.

There is no greater display of his glory than Jesus hanging on that tree because it's in that moment that we see the fullness of his justice as God's wrath against sin is poured on his own son and it's at the same moment that we see the fullness of his mercy as his perfect son receives our punishment.

[43 : 12] And so we then receive his mercy. That's why the angels, when the shepherds get this vision of this host of angels, that's why what they're saying in response to the birth of Christ is glory to God.

Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace among all who he has pleased. All who he will bring to faith. All who will trust him and follow him will receive peace for the glory of God.

You see, the purpose in all of this is not you. The purpose in all of this is not me. We get this very man-centric view of life where we think that God's role and God's purpose is to exist for us.

We pray that way. We pray demands because God is there to serve us. We expect him to show mercy because who wouldn't want to show mercy to someone as wonderful as us?

We have this very man-centric view of God. That is not the view of God that the Bible teaches. It's a very God-centric view. God's primary concern is not you.

[44 : 22] God's primary concern is his own glory. God receives glory by providing his son for salvation. He receives glory and pleasure when we follow and believe his son and receive his mercy.

Glory to God, the angels say. We started by asking the question, why did God include this episode of angels and shepherds in the Bible?

And I hope that you maybe have some more clarity of that. Maybe I messed it up for you, but hopefully you got some clarity. Very simply, this passage teaches us that God calls the lowliest of people to salvation, that the gospel message is about the person and work of Jesus, and that all of this is ultimately for his own glory.

But maybe you're wondering, what am I supposed to do with that? Let me give you a couple of things before we finish. First, you need to come to Christ alone for salvation.

It's impossible to come to Christ alone for salvation if you are not poor in spirit, as Jesus said.

[45 : 38] You can come to Christ, but if you come to Christ bringing with him your merits or all the things that you think are true about you that deserve his mercy and grace, then you are not coming to Christ alone.

You come to Christ alone for salvation. That's response number one. He invites you to do this. What is the purpose?

At this point, all of you know the truth of this. I know that. But I feel compelled to say it anyways. What do you think the point of all of this is?

If in any way it was possible for us to be good enough for him, there would be no purpose in any of this. The reason Christ came is because you are not good enough and you never will be good enough.

You will never be attractive enough. You will never be wealthy enough. You will never be courageous enough. You will never be good enough. Nothing about you will ever reach his standard.

[46 : 50] God is not good enough. You will never be good enough. That's why he came. That's why he invites you to come to him not as you are but in spite of who you are.

And our first response is to come to him alone recognizing, God, I'm not worthy of this. I need your mercy.

But you also need to be sure that the gospel you trust begins and ends with Jesus. Nothing added. Nothing taken away. Reject these worldly ideas of quote, Christmas spirit.

Rest in the finished work of Christ. not in your ability to be happy or to be giving or anything else. Christmas is not about being nice to people.

God wants you to be nice to people. Don't get me wrong. It's a very God-like thing to do. But that's not what Christmas is about. Christmas is about the Savior.

[47 : 57] The Christ. The Lord. Keep it about him. You know, that's why we're going to worship next Sunday. Because this is not about us. This is not about presence.

I can't wait to open up presence. I hope there's a solo stove under my tree. But next Sunday we'll gather for worship because this is about him. This is not about us.

Finally, you need to join the heavenly host living your life for the praise and glory of God. sometimes we get lost.

For some reason, Julie and I have been watching shows lately on midlife crisis. I don't know if that means that I'm getting close to one. But, you know, we go through those seasons where we wonder what is really the purpose?

What is our purpose here? What are we actually supposed to be doing? What significance do we serve for anybody or for anything? And some of us are very good at coming up with solutions to that because we think much of ourselves.

[49 : 04] But some of us actually legitimately go through seasons where we're like, what am I actually doing here? What's the purpose of all this? Let me tell you what your purpose is. Your purpose is to give God glory to reflect his image in everything that you do.

That begins with your faith in Christ. Join the heavenly choir here. Daily think. Are the decisions I'm making and the things that I'm doing and the places I'm going and the people that I'm speaking to and the way that I'm speaking to them?

Is all of this glorifying my Lord? Are these things, is my life bringing him glory or is actually he kind of on the back burner here?

Because believe it or not, even as Christians we are tempted to live for ourselves rather than him. What does this passage teach us? Join the heavenly chorus. Live for his glory and his glory alone.