Luke 2:8-20

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[0:00] Well, like Dan, I want to greet you with a very warm Merry Christmas. I'm trying to stay in the moment of this Christmas, and yet at the same time, it's really hard to believe that in seven more days, it will be the end of another decade and the beginning of another one.

Last year was the second decade of this century, and as you know, it's been one this last year with many protests. Yes, the differences in our world are close to many of us, I know.
Some think their regions and countries have never been more divided, and so the protests are a demonstration of a desire for change. Now, whether you're on one side or the other, or you're trying to play the middle, I figure ever since the beginning of our creation, it's been a really big protest against God.
Remember, since the creation of Adam and Eve, there's been a big division between us and him. Christmas is God's great and unique way to resolve that division.
God became a human, birthed like us, to bring, as we read in the text today, peace on earth to all people. Peace in the midst of protest is the Christmas story.
[1:18] Christmas is the telling of a story where Christ was born. And we pick up with this story this morning in a field, and it begins like this. And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Now, that's hardly a way to get our attention. It's not a real headline grabber or an attention getter in an information in digital age.
The story was told, then it continues to grab our attention around the world, as it did last night and is today, wherever you might be in this world. But the story challenges what we think Christmas looks like.
It features God's revelation to some shepherds and to us this morning. Now, last night, as I was driving into Vancouver, maybe you were too, I listened to another famous story called The Shepherd.
It's been told every year on CBC radio for the past five decades, every Christmas Eve. And the introduction to it begins like this. You may know it. If you don't, I hope that you listen to this.
[2:24] Not me, but to the story. You can find it online. The year is 1957. An RAF pilot is headed home from Germany for Christmas. Fog sets in and, well, all communication is lost.

Imagine that. It is a story of how a ghost pilot known as The Shepherd guides an RAF pilot home safely. Our story today features shepherds, but they are not the ones that are doing the guiding. They are guided to someone who will be known as The Great Shepherd. And the shepherds in the field were then guided to Jesus Christ, that baby born that morning.
The field that Christmas night seemed like a very peaceful one, a peaceful one like any other night. But that night it became like no other.
A birth took place like births, though the conception was unique. And then a surprise takes place. And there is a shift from the birth mother, father, and child, in our text, to ordinary common shepherds.
[3:32] It's not surprising that there were shepherds nearby. But that shepherds figured into the story of salvation of history as a really big surprise.

Shepherds, who didn't count for very much, who couldn't even testify reliably in a court of law, were chosen by God for an angelic appearance. And so in verse 9 we read, 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.
Who wouldn't be? Now you may think you're getting special attention today, or you may think that you're giving someone special attention today. But a part of you may think that this has nothing to

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do with grace.
The appearance of the Lord's angels to these shepherds reminds us that Christmas is a magnificent act of God's grace. A great act of grace, and even more, a great act of God's glory that's revealed.
And so the Lord revealed His glory to the shepherds that night. The Lord's glory is enough to kill people, actually. It's so overwhelming. The Lord's glory nearly shocked others in other biblical stories right to death.
[4:47] And the shepherds were no exception. They were afraid. The glory was not on just display that night, but it was declared and made a great declaration of God's greatness.

His beautiful, amazing grace. And so as we continue to read on verse 10, And the angel said to them, Fear not, behold, I bring you good news of great joy.
That will be for all people. 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 swallowing cloths and lying in a manger.
The glory of God to the shepherds. And us is, as it says, good news. And we're used to this good news, this gospel as Christians at Christmas.
But I wonder if it's hard for us to appreciate, to really let the impact of it set in on us. This good news was a royal birth like no others. And we've been exposed to some royal births recently.
[5:51] But the good news is a fulfillment of a promised Savior better than the one named David named in this passage. The good news is a fulfillment of a ruler or Lord greater than the one Caesar who's mentioned earlier in the passage.

And this good news, this gospel, also comes with a sign. The sign, unlike the baby's conception, was not very miraculous.
Bethlehem, claws, a manger. Those were the signs. I don't know what kind of signs you look for, but those were the signs that morning.
And maybe the sign was well suited for the shepherds. But it's not at this point that the shepherds believe this good news. Nope, that's going to come later.
An announcement alone is not what convinces or moves these men. It is what happens next. In verse 13, And suddenly there was an angel, a multitude of heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he's well pleased.
[7:01] In your text, you notice it's right in the center. This is central to this story. The annunciation of Christ's birth wasn't just good, it was glorious.

Mentioned earlier, now it's exclamated. The annunciation gained punctuation like nothing else.
Now, communication in our world has changed rapidly in the past ten years.
Just think of the speed of social media or things like emoji. Pretty trite compared to this communication. This is fabulous. This is attention getting.
Suddenly, not one but a multitude of angels, an army of angels exclaim the good news. And the message is not a peaceful one, but it's about peace.
That is, to bring peace. It isn't God's anger or his agitation or maybe his anxiety that brings this moment to pass and impacts the shepherd.
[8:05] You notice it is the pleasure of God who wants nothing more than to bring peace with the birth and the announcement of God's son.

So here is the Christmas and the Christmas message. Christmas, my friends, according to Luke, is about a savior who will bring peace. Let me just say these two things about this.
That wasn't a long introduction. This is better than halfway through. But just these two things. That is the peace of God and the peace that we have with God. This message of peace the angels brought to the shepherds is just what God wanted.
He was pleased. This is about his favor. I think we all want peace, but we're not really sure, are we, what it takes? Hence the need for protests and an interest in peace.
Years after years. Decades after decades. Centuries after centuries. But peace is about God's nature. He doesn't resolve it by force.
[9:05] That is, he doesn't resolve division or differences by force. And I notice that we think about a perfect being like God who's all-knowing and all-powerful and all-loving.

But I wonder how often we think about God as being all-peaceful. Often his nature, his peacefulness is left out. And Luke writes to remind us of God's peace more than any of the other

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three gospel writers.
He mentions peace twice as many times as all of the rest of them put together. And it's something that we can only appreciate through, I think, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.
When Christians think of peace, the picture of this quality, that is God's quality, and what's revealed by the angels is what peace is about. It's as the angels revealed the glory of the Lord to them that peace is brought to bear.
Now think of the most glorious experience maybe that you've ever enjoyed. Those experiences kind of convey a bit of tranquility, I think, and peacefulness with a little bit of edge to it, a little bit of excitement.
[10:13] And that's what God's peace is like through Jesus Christ. It's tranquil. It's restful. It's peaceful. It's glorious.

And everything comes to a standstill. And we're utter awestruck by the awesomeness and the greatness and the glory and the peace of God.
And this glorious, though, isn't only about the peace of God in this passage. It is also about peace with God. So God's peace is for union with Him, you see, through Christ who is born.
God wants for us to know He is the most glorious person in our life. Now, I know that we like the glory of events and victories. However, we know that they're really temporary.
They're not like God's peace. In the Isaiah passage, chapter 9, verse 7, we read, Of the increase of His government and of the peace, there will be no end.
[11:19] The glory and sometimes the peace that we experience, we must admit, is really, really temporary. Just think for a moment about one of the most glorious Canadian experiences from this last year. I'm going to pick one.

Maybe there were lots. You may have a different one. I'm thinking, not to be trivial, about the victory of the Raptors. Right? And it was pretty glorious, but, well, it's another NBA season.
The glory of those champions and what we get to enjoy is now in the past and pretty short-lived. But peace with God is permanent. It's not temporary. This is the promise that comes with Christmas.
We protest God's rule, but life with God and His pleasure for us is brought to bear through Jesus Christ and the peace that only He gives that's permanent and eternal.
Christ, beginning with His birth, but also especially His death, brings us peace. You see, this promise of peace is a gift through faith or belief.
[12:21] The deep restlessness that we have or absence of peace is only solved through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith, which is a gift that comes by God to us through Him, results in this peace that we long for.

This loving need that we have to express to someone else that only can be satisfied for God. One of the key texts of the Bible on this comes to us in another letter of Romans.
It reads like this, Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. This was the promise of God to the shepherds, which they only began to know.
With very little to go on, the shepherds finally believed. They took God for His word and then they acted upon it. And we know this from verse 15, which reads like this, When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made down to us.
You see that? They didn't just stand there. They moved. They picked up to go and see what they were told.
[13:43] This is when we know that the shepherds believed. They had to see it for themselves. But remember, it's Bethlehem. It's rags.

It's a manger. But they just had to go. They had to see it for themselves. It's the same for us today when we celebrate Christmas. This coming of the Savior.
It's not enough to be amazed by the sparkle or the glory or even just the peace or the events that surround the day. This is an invitation to us to come to Jesus.
We, like the shepherds, are guided by this peace of God that passes all understanding. The announcement of Christ coming to make peace for us with God is an invitation.
An invitation for peace to replace our protest against God. An invitation to accept union with God through Christ.
[14:41] When it seems like all communication has been lost. But peace with God through Jesus Christ is for us as he invites us to come into his presence and his residence.

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Even if it's just like a little manger. Do you accept the invitation? To come for the one who is peace and who has achieved peace for us in Jesus Christ.
I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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