

# Luke 2:13-14 "Someone to Sing About"

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Kids, you can come join me up here on the steps again this morning. We're doing this during this Christmas season. We get to talk every Sunday.

Isn't that so much fun? It's fun for me. I don't know if it's... Yeah, thank you. While they're coming up here, I want to ask the adults a favor this morning.

In light of the fact that we had this baptism and most of you stood up and took a vow about these little ones, I'd like to ask you as we talk up here if you would bow in prayer for them.

If you'd like, you can kneel if you need carpet. There's some in the aisles. But if you would at least bow your heads and just be praying for these kids as I talk with them and take the vow that you've just made seriously and be praying for God's work in their lives right now.

[ 1 : 07 ] Would you bow your heads? Kids, I want you all to look out there for just a minute. Can you see all those people sitting out there? They're praying for you.

You know how cool that is? That they love you that much, that they're talking to God about you and that they're asking God to bless you. I hope you're really thankful because they love you so much and we're so thankful that you're a part of this family.

Now y'all look up here to me for a second while they're still praying. I want to ask you about something this morning. Do any of you like Christmas music? Anybody? Oh, some of you do. What's your favorite Christmas carol? Go ahead. Yeah, that's a good one. What else? What's yours? My favorite one is Hark the Herald Angels.

That's another good one. Just a couple more. Christmas time. We Three Kings. Yeah, I like Joy to the World. Anybody else like Joy to the World?

[ 2 : 10 ] You want to say one, Millie? A Way in a Manger. A Way in a Manger. Can we sing that one in just a minute, Millie? Did we just sing that? Maybe y'all can help me sing it again in just a second.

You don't have to sing if you don't want to. Let me ask you something else. Do you sing songs when you're celebrating someone's birthday? When you go to a birthday party, do you ever sing anything?

Yeah, what song do you sing? Happy Birthday. Usually we sing Happy Birthday, right? Can you imagine if a whole choir of people came from a long way away to your birthday party to sing to you? Would that be pretty cool? If they came to sing Happy Birthday to you? Would it mean that you were really important, you think? That you were so special that someone would travel all that way just to be with you and sing to you on your birthday?

Okay. Who comes to... Y'all are very special, okay? Don't get me wrong. But who came to sing for Jesus' birthday? Do you remember?

[ 3 : 11 ] Who came to sing at the first Christmas? Angels did. A whole choir of angels came all the way from where? All the way from heaven.

You know why? Because they were coming to remind us that Jesus is the most important person ever, the most special person ever born. That's why all those angels came from heaven to sing about his birth.

So when you sing Christmas songs this year, y'all are going to sing a lot of them, right? I want you to remember that Jesus is the most special, most important person ever born, okay?

Can we sing together about his birth? Can y'all sing loud so they can hear you? We're going to sing Away in a Manger. Do y'all know that one? We just sang it. We're just going to sing the first verse, okay? Can you help me?

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed. The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.

[ 4 : 16 ] The stars in the sky look down where he lay. The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

Thanks for helping us sing about Jesus. Some of you are going with Miss Beth to kids' worship, and the rest of you can go back to your families now, okay? God, we're thankful for the privilege of praying for these kids.

We're grateful for the beauty of Christmas and the wonder of that in their eyes, and pray that we would share their joy even as we sing of you this year.

So would you work in our hearts now as we open your word as you do in theirs, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We started this Advent season.

By the way, thank you for praying for them. We started talking about what Christmas looks like. We talked about Christmas lights pointing us to the light of the world.

[ 5 : 25 ] Last week, we talked a little bit about what Christmas tastes like, this free-filling feast that we celebrate at Christmas. Today, I want us to consider what Christmas sounds like, the songs of the season.

For many of us, I think they have become an essential part of our celebrations. Maybe it's because they're piping through the stores as you're shopping. Maybe it's carolers who come to your door and you get really excited.

Maybe you like being one of the carolers. Many of us loved Hark the Herald Southwood Sings last Sunday night, and we got to be part of singing. Yes, it was very exciting. Lots of singing, much music.

Just as we got started, the band started playing like the beginning of Carol of the Bells, just like Mannheim steamroll. Dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum. My heart was beating like the drum with Christmas excitement.

It just sounds like Christmas, right? There's great tunes. And some of the best lyrics in all of hymnody we sing this time of year.

[ 6 : 36 ] You can tell your grace group your favorite one when you get a chance. But singing at Christmas is not some modern cultural development like to get you to spend more money or something like that.

Singing goes all the way back to the first Christmas when the story of Jesus' birth is marked by Mary's song, Zachariah's song.

We'll note those in Luke 1 later. But I especially want us this morning to notice the angels' song in Luke 2. Right after the angels tell the shepherds there is good news of great joy for all the people, a Savior is born to you, what happens?

Could it get any more exciting than that? Verse 13, and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

All of the sudden, Gloria filling the skies. I'm not sure if it was the same tune. I'm not sure it was in Latin. That seems a little unlikely since the shepherds probably didn't take Latin.

[ 7 : 57 ] But it was like hitting the chorus that we started this service with of angels we have heard on high. Or if you've been in a big room full of people singing Handel's Messiah, and all of a sudden you get to the point where it crescendos and the hallelujah starts exploding all over the room.

You get this feeling of suddenly just an explosion of song, of joy. And maybe you've got this nice sweet picture of shepherds on a hillside and a couple of angels in the sky.

I want to try to expand our vision of how amazing that unimaginable choral performance was. See, the Bible talks about angels quite a bit, doesn't it?

Angels are God's messengers, except in so many of the instances where angels show up, how many of them are there? Almost always one. Angels are sent one at a time with a particular message.

There are very, very few places where you get a host of angels mentioned in God's Word. I just want to tell you all of them. There are only four. So that you can think, why is it that this happens?

[ 9 : 06 ] The first time is at creation, when we're told in Job, the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. That's the angel choir of heaven singing at the beauty of God's good creation, spoken into existence by the Word of His power.

Then there are multiple passages mentioning angels as a group when God reveals His law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

It's another marvel of God's self-revelation to us. The third is this one at Christmas, when God is revealed, how?

In the person of His Son. And finally, the one you probably can guess, there are references to thousands and thousands of angels celebrating the glory of Christ's return at the end of the age. Those four times, that's it. But here, on this first Christmas night, there is a multitude, a whole army filling the sky, lighting the night, singing the wonder of the incarnation to those unsuspecting, overwhelmed shepherds.

[10:20] What does that mean? The armies of heaven singing in chorus tells us something, doesn't it? It tells us something divinely wonderful, something cosmically important, something absolutely God-revealing is happening.

And God doesn't want us to miss it. That's why all the angels, right? Any of us. He doesn't want a one of us to miss that God is revealing Himself, so He pulls out all the stops.

And what are they singing about? All the singing is focused on Him, on His glory. We see that not only in the fact that so many of them are singing, and that's unusual, but also in the words that they sing.

Glory! That's where it all starts. See, what's happening, you've got to realize on that hillside, that first Christmas night, it's much more than spreading Christmas cheer by singing loud for all to hear. Okay? That's not all that's happening. This concert, to which the shepherds get a front row seat, it's as though God is pulling back the curtain on the very throne room of heaven, just a little bit.

[11:40] He's showing people on earth what happens there in the throne room of God every day, all the time, thousands of thousands.

Kids, that's like a hundred million million gabillion, like it's a lot. That's not a real number. But it's a lot. They're all around the throne singing glory to God.

Can you picture that? What do they mean? Glory means that God is weighty, that He matters most, that He's worthy, that He's deserving of worship.

Even in the highest heavens, there's none other like Him. And here this worship is happening at the birth of a baby. So the author of Hebrews explains that Jesus is even greater than the angels.

They're singing about Him. He writes this in Hebrews 1. When He brings the firstborn into the world, that's Jesus, God says, let all God's angels worship Him.

[12:43] How many angels were worshipping that night? I don't know. But all of them. All God's angels worshipping Him. The divine Messiah is finally here.

Glory, glory, glory. That's what they're saying. Glory. To sing of God's glory means to tell of His incomparable greatness, how wonderful He is, His perfect character, His utter purity.

He's the most beautiful. Like we might call the sun. If you see a beautiful sunrise or sunset, you might say it's glorious. I mean, it's breathtaking just to look at, to behold.

And that's part of glory. But it's also so weighty, so powerful that it can be beautiful and dangerous, right?

You can't just stare into the sun without being overwhelmed to the point of pain and injury, right? Don't try that. If you get too close to the sun, you'll burn.

[13:51] Part of its glory is that you have to account for it all the time, whatever you're doing. It would be like if this morning there was a huge elephant in the center aisle of the sanctuary walking up and down during the whole service.

Some of you would think that was beautiful. Others probably not so much. But regardless, none of you would be able to ignore it. Can you imagine that? You wouldn't be able to see the screen sometimes depending on where it was.

You wouldn't be able to walk out to escape from this crazy circus that's going on in here. You wouldn't be able to do anything without reference to it, right?

It would attract our attention. It matters. It's glorious. In this case, it's not an elephant they're singing about.

God matters above all else. He's beautiful unlike any other and he can't be ignored. His presence changes everything.

[14:55] Christmas, the birth of this child king savior of the world, points people immediately to the praise of God's glory. It's not just the angels from heaven singing this.

Mary begins her song that she sings while pregnant with the promised Savior in chapter 1. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

My soul magnifies the Lord. To magnify something, of course, is to make it bigger, right? But kids, have you ever used a magnifying glass to look at something before?

Like a bug under a magnifying glass? When you look at that through a magnifying glass, does it actually make the bug bigger? Does the bug get bigger? The bug stays just the same, doesn't it? But the bug is bigger in your eyes. The way you see it in your perception, it looks bigger. That's what's happening here. It's what the word magnify means.

[15:58] Mary's not actually making God greater, but she's reveling in God's greatness and she is seeing him as bigger in her own eyes.

See, he's glorious. He matters in her life. He's what truly gives her joy deep in her soul. That's what she says, right? And the whole song is he, he, he.

She keeps talking about what God is doing. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, begins his song the same way. He's being filled with the Holy Spirit, so his heart is directed correctly.

And that is that Zechariah, as cool as you are and as neat a role as you get to play, this is not about you. Even though your son is sent by God, where does the glory go?

Verse 68, blessed be the Lord God of Israel. See, everyone whose hearts are understanding Christmas rightly realizes that the praise, the honor, the glory goes to God.

[17:03] That's the first thing that these Christmas carols show us. But all three of them, the angels and Mary and Zechariah, highlight an aspect of God that is so much at the heart of who he is that it is inextricably linked with his glory.

Over and over and over through the scriptures it is, and especially here at Christmas. It's his grace. Now you may not see that word there immediately, but it is the second half of the anthem that the angels fill the skies with.

After they sing glory to God, on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. To see the grace of this, you have to stop and consider the relationship between God and mankind.

Though created to live in peaceful relationship, when this announcement comes, now for generations, God has been at war, if you will, with man.

Now they have turned in rebellion against his kingship. So don't misunderstand what he's saying here as some sweet Christmas message. Sometimes we hear these famous words, and you perhaps have even heard someone explain them, that God is announcing peace to those who have earned my good will.

[18:29] Peace to the ones of you who have done enough to please me. That's not what the words mean. This is an announcement. Not that God has found some men on earth who are of good will, who deserve for God to be pleased with them, and so to make peace with them.

That's not it. Rather, this is an announcement that God has declared peace towards men who are currently hostile and warring against him.

And he says, peace to you. The armies of heaven are sent to declare an undeserved peace.

As if it were one warring nation, the one with the upper hand in the conflict, all of a sudden declares a ceasefire. And instead of more war and death and devastation, a new union of nations with life and flourishing for all, all of a sudden develops.

Can you imagine? My enemies will be my friends, God says. Those far from me will be brought near. The outcast sons will be welcomed home.

[19:43] Right? Remember last week? It's a free feast. Grace. Because God is coming to pay the tab in full. To cover it all.

That's what the heavenly choir is sent to sing about. Don't miss this. Listen to the grace of what's happening at Christmas. The angels are rejoicing in a message that a savior has been born. Because the sin-sick world they're announcing it to needs divine healing. Humanity has been separated from God. Waiting for a way back to him.

And God has said, not in building a tall tower. They tried that. Not in perfect law keeping. God has said, no. Not in your pretending nothing's wrong and we're just okay no matter what.

Now they tried that. God has said, that's not it. No, you won't find your way back to me. God says, but I'm coming to you.

[20:47] In fact, here I am. Emmanuel. Messiah. Savior on earth. Bringing peace. That's grace.

That's the glorious reality that when we all fall short of the glory of God, God reaches down to us rather than having us reach up to him.

Once again, it fills every verse of Mary's song. Why does she magnify God? What makes him so great and worth singing about? Well, she sings of his mercy. Of his faithful love to the faithless. That's what Mary talks about in that very first verse of her song. Then she goes on to say, he exalts the humble. He fills the hungry. See how he's lifting up those who are low? All his help to his people because of his mercy.

[ 21 : 50 ] I love the way that commentator James Edwards describes this reality in Mary's Magnificat, the name for this song.

He says, It is a hymn not of the proud, but of the powerless. Not of just desserts, but of unexpected grace. Not of a world fully controlled and determined by human powers, but overturned by divine comedy.

And he goes on, God does not turn away from want and oppression, but toward both in compassion and rescuing intervention. In most religions, a meeting with God requires the low to ascend high, sinners to become saints.

The Magnificat reverses all protocol and expectations. God who is high becomes low. Zechariah gives glory to God for the same thing.

He has visited his people to redeem them from their slavery to sin. That's why Zechariah sings. Verse 72, Because of that mercy he promised he will do all these things for his people.

[ 22 : 57 ] And all of it because of his tender mercy. Verse 78, That faithful covenant keeping love against that same word. Don't you love that phrase?

God's tender mercy. You know that's what he's like. Towards you. He's a God who brings salvation. Who offers forgiveness of sins.

Because he is full of tender mercy. Gently and compassionately stooping down to rescue a weak and needy people.

That's grace. Look at how it plays out when the Messiah comes in verse 78. He dawns. Now in verse 79 he comes as a light shining into our darkness.

As a voice of hope singing into the silence of our despair. The fulfillment of all the promises of our merciful faithful God. So connect these dots.

[ 23 : 55 ] This is why they're singing. We sing his glory because of his grace. Glory to God in the highest heavens because on earth he has declared peace where there was war with him.

Sending the peace child. The prince of peace. All the way from the highest heights of glory, power, and privilege to the lowest depths of a dirty manger in a tiny town.

So that mankind would know without a doubt God is one of us. God has come for us to be with us. God is healing us. The God of glory is the God of grace. And that's why we sing. So what?

Should I just sing more? Is that what you want me to do? You just want me to sing more Christmas carols? You want me to go caroling tomorrow night? That's great. If the Christmas story moves your heart that way and you want to sing.

[ 25 : 04 ] But I want, as we wrap up this morning, to apply these songs by following the lead of the shepherds here in Luke 2. They do three basic things I think are important for us to consider when we hear songs like this.

First, they come in wonder. Can you put yourself in their sandals for just a second? They probably weren't expecting a big night.

This was normal. They're out there with the sheep. They had to have been stunned to immobility, right? Like, I don't even know how to handle this.

What's next? But immediately, they say, let's go and see this baby. This Messiah. This Savior. God sent the angels so that these shepherds would not miss Jesus.

Otherwise, can you imagine? They'd have had no idea out there on the hillside that such glory and grace was happening right back in their town. They'd have missed it.

[ 26 : 11 ] And God is saying, shepherds, this is life-changing. Don't miss it. I don't know about you, but it is still really easy for me to miss Jesus on Christmas.

Still today. And you've got a whole Christmas season to think about. But honestly, sometimes that just adds more distractions. Anybody felt that way recently?

You looking at the next 10 days like you'll be focused on Jesus? Or you think you're going to be battling distractions? Plus, life is hard any time of year.

We don't walk around expecting life-changing news every day. It's just the next day. I don't know why you came here today.

But God may have sent you a crazy preacher instead of thousands and thousands of angels to say, come to Jesus. Don't miss Jesus. He's life-changing.

[ 27 : 17 ] He certainly has sent you His Word. He sent it to you today to say, come wonder at the miracle of the incarnation. I was born. Don't let Christmas sneak by you again without wondering at who I am.

The wonder of the glorious one also being the gracious one so that you, no matter how stinky a shepherd you are, no matter how little you expected, anything to change your life today can be near me and welcomed by me and restored by me forever.

How wonderful that is. You can come and wonder at that. As you hear the songs of Christmas in a new way, you can come and see Jesus. And as you see Jesus, as you come to Him, and maybe for you it's really just to check things out a little bit more.

Maybe you'll hear this morning that you could come to ask a pastor some questions that you've wondered about a long time. I'd love that. Maybe you're thinking, you know, I could ask a friend to just listen to my story and share some of my concerns and struggles.

We'd love that. Pick a friend here if you don't have one. But as you do that, as you explore the one whose name names Christmas, seems like a reasonable thing to do this year, I encourage you to stay and worship.

[ 28 : 53 ] We know the shepherds did because they found the child and they remembered the saying that they'd heard about Him. What had they heard about Him?

Savior. Messiah. King. God. Become man. That's what they're remembering. They returned glorifying and praising God.

Can you even imagine processing all of that in just a few hours? The Messiah. The Savior of the world. Right here in Bethlehem.

While our sheep are still out there on the hill. I'm still processing it going on 42 years now. That the glory and grace of God would come together in a baby in a manger.

Honestly, in some seasons of my life, I didn't try to understand. Man. I've had other seasons of my life where I just took that for granted. It was what everybody told me happened.

[ 29 : 54 ] And so, okay. Didn't impact me. And other seasons, I've wondered if it was actually too good to be true.

Like, it was a nice, you know, Christmas idea and feeling. And I love Christmas. And don't we all love Christmas and just feel nice? But actually, Luke is telling us from eyewitnesses.

I don't know. Maybe even some of these shepherds themselves. That when the glory of God shines in the grace of God.

That he's come to me. When that hits you. When I realize that he has come to me. Someone who some days thinks I'm too good to need it. That's the truth about my heart.

It's that dark. And there are other days where, honestly, I get so discouraged. I feel like I'm too bad to receive it. That he couldn't possibly come to me.

[ 30 : 53 ] And when it comes home that, in spite of me, Jesus has come to me full of glory and grace. I'm overwhelmed with joy. Right? That's what happens. With gratitude.

With worship. That's what will come out. I want to encourage you to stay with Jesus this year. Until the wonder at what's happening moves your heart to worship.

To song, even. It's great if you sing. It usually does when our hearts fill. Come, let us adore him. Haste, haste to bring him laud.

Come and worship. Come and worship. Worship Christ, the newborn King. Singing expresses the overflow of our hearts about things that are glorious.

That are worthy. That matter. But when I say worship, I don't just want you to think in this room, this activity on a Sunday morning that we all do together.

[ 31 : 56 ] I want you to think worship means in everything. Y'all, if Jesus is worthy at all, then he is always worthy.

You remember the glory of the elephant? Right down there. Or the sun? You won't see it today, but maybe sometime soon. But it matters in everything.

It can't be ignored safely. That's Jesus. What vision of Jesus do you need to see to realize how glorious he is in every moment of every day with you?

Where do you need to see Jesus? The shepherds saw a baby in a manger, and that may be where your heart needs to stay. You're seeing Jesus in the manger.

But we now know on this side of his living that he healed the sick, and he cast demons out of the oppressed. You may need to see him washing.

[ 32 : 58 ] You may see him washing the feet of those who have failed him, but whom he loved deeply. You may linger at the feet of Jesus just contemplating and seeing him where he sends the accusers of the sinful woman away.

And then he sends her on her way with what? No condemnation. Free to sin. No more. I think many of us would be helped by spending some time gazing on Jesus on the cross.

Blood dripping from the crown of thorns. Agony wrenching his face as he bears your sin. Or you may see him as he is now, risen and reigning with hair white as snow, with eyes a flame of fire, feet that are bronze.

His face shining like the sun at full strength. It's radiating glory. And then he's holding seven stars in his hand.

The powerful hand, a glorious hand that in his grace then he lays his hand on you and says, fear not. I'm the first and the last.

[ 34 : 26 ] I've got this right now. Right where you are. I know where it's going. I've even died. And now I live forevermore. Take some time today.

Stay with a vision of Jesus and worship him. He matters right where you are. At work, at home, in relationships. On Sunday morning, on Tuesday afternoon.

He'll matter December 25th, but he'll matter February 3rd. Stay with him. I'm afraid when people hear me say Christmas should make us sing that they think I mean joy to the world.

And I do. But don't miss that Jesus also meets us, not only in our joy, but in our darkest, lowest moments of pain, of longing, of aching, when we can only cry out, oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel. You don't have to get to joy to the world to worship Jesus. Okay? Where you may be right now and where your heart is, it may be that the only song you can sing sounds like a funeral dirge.

[ 35 : 38 ] You're just aching. You're longing and you're singing a song that says the only one who can rescue you is Jesus. But it's going to take you to him too.

Come, Jesus, to ransom captives and to bring joy and make your blessing flow far as the curse is found. You can sing any of those songs as you worship him.

Finally, third thing I'd like to encourage you towards. If Christmas should point us to sing of God's glory and grace, others should hear our songs.

That will happen. Don't just come and wonder. Don't just stay and worship. While you're doing both, right in the midst of them, go and witness. Verse 17, when they saw it, the shepherds made known the saying that had been told them.

And apparently not just to one person. All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. Can you imagine? They were talking a lot. And they were saying things like, friends, the God you think hates you is for you.

[ 36 : 48 ] He's not against you. You think he's fighting you. He's come to declare peace. Friends, you don't have to be afraid of God anymore. You don't even have to find him. He's come to you.

He's here. He's full of grace. Imagine people hearing that incredible news from unreliable shepherds. You know, they weren't trusted for anything in those days.

I hope you hear that and realize you don't have to worry about your credentials for pointing people to Jesus. Jesus. You can just do that. You sing whether you can carry a tune or not.

Right? That's not the point. You say, I know it sounds too good to be true. But I've got to tell you what the angels said. Even though you're not considered an expert on angels.

You say, I've got to tell you what God's message of hope to us is. Even though I'm no biblical scholar. I just want to share with you what I know. What I know is that he is full of glory and grace.

[ 37 : 51 ] I know that much. Nothing matters more than him. And no one will love you better than him. That's all I know to tell you. God will take care of the dazzling glory.

God will take care of the amazing grace. You just tell people the hope you've been told. The hope that all of heaven finds worth singing about.

The hope that plucked you off a hillside where no one wanted you. And took you to a manger so that you could know you're welcomed into God's family.

Let's pray and ask for his help. Father, what a great news that is for us. What tidings of comfort and joy that we have a Savior.

Would it make our hearts sing? Would celebrating Jesus move us to worship and to witness? Thank you for meeting us in our weakness and our struggle and our sin.

[ 38 : 56 ] And coming with the solution that we need. And that is you. And so keep us bowed before you. Walking with you today and throughout this season.

In Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](http://southwood.org). Thank you.