

The Gift of a Promise

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[0 : 00] Oh, night divine. Some might say it was a bit of a boring night. A night that started off like any other night, let's be honest.

Tending sheeps in the fields and hills outside of Bethlehem is not the most thrilling of assignments. The occasional bleat of a lamb broke the stillness and the cracks of the fire was their only real comfort against the chill of the air.

The stars overhead twinkled faintly, their glow interrupted now and then by passing clouds. The shepherds huddled together, wrapped in their cloaks, their conversation drifting from weather predictions to family tales, the kind of small talk that usually accompanies shepherds as they pass the night.

Not much different from last night, one of them muttered, poking a stick into the fire or the night before that. But things changed later that evening when, according to these shepherds who shared their story with the gospel writer of Luke, their routine was shattered in the most extraordinary way. It began with a light. Not the soft flicker of a fire or the pale glow of the moon, but a radiance so intense it made their eyes squint and their hearts race.

[1 : 28] The sky itself seemed to open, spilling the brilliance of heaven onto the darkened hills. It was as though the stars had been outshone by something far, far greater.

The shepherds froze their hands instinctively, clutching their staves. One stumbled back a step, his voice caught in his throat.

Another shielded his face, terrified to look directly at the blinding light. And then they saw him, an angel.

An angel of the Lord stood before them, majestic and otherworldly. His presence exuding power and peace in equal measure.

The glory of the Lord surrounding them, wrapping them in a light that seemed alive, pulsating with something unearthly. Do not be afraid, the angel said.

[2 : 27] His voice as steady as the calming of a river's flow. Easier said than done. The shepherd needs threatened to buckle, their breaths coming in shallow gas.

But there was just something about these angels' words, something that made their fear loosen its grip, like the sun melting the frost. The angel said, I bring you good news, he continued, that will cause great joy for all the people.

Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you.

You will find a baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger. A Savior? The Messiah?

The words struck like a thunderclap in their hearts. There were these promises they'd heard, whispered in the synagogues, passed down through generations upon generations, that there would be coming a Messiah.

[3 : 37] But could it be true? Could the Deliverer really have come? Well, that evening, before the shepherds could gather their thoughts, the light intensified.

Suddenly, the angel was no longer alone. A host of heavenly beings appeared, a multitude stretching the sky as far as the sky the eye could see.

Their voices rose in unison, filling the night with a song that seemed to pierce the very heavens.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased, they sang.

The melody was like nothing they had ever heard. It wasn't just sound. It was something they could feel in their very souls. The shepherds were swept up in the chorus, the words wrapping around them like a warm embrace.

And just as suddenly as they had come, the angels were gone. The light faded, leaving the hills once again cloaked in the familiar darkness of night.

[4 : 53] But nothing felt familiar anymore for these shepherds. The shepherds stood there looking at one another, stunned, their hearts pounding with a mixture of awe and anticipation.

One of them finally broke the silence. We have to go, he said. Go where? The other asked. Though the answer was already clear in their minds.

To Bethlehem. The first replied, his eyes wide with a mixture of wonder and urgency. To see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

This is part of the Christmas story. I was reading an article a few days ago. And the writer commented that the article based on the verses, Luke 2, 13 to 14, which says, And suddenly there was an angel of multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on peace among those with whom he is pleased.

The writer astutely observed that with the shepherds' experience that faithful evening was a night upon which heaven finally came to earth.

[6 : 17] It was the time when the glory of God, which had existed in heaven, had now come down to earth, to be seen by these young lowly shepherds.

Who tended the sheep. And from heaven they heard the song, glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

Welcome to this Christmas Eve sermon. My name is BK. I have the pleasure of serving as one of the pastors, one of the shepherds of this flock. And this morning I want to just share with you three ideas which encapsulate or encapsulate the Christmas understanding and the experience that these shepherds had that night.

The phrase glory to God in the highest. This exaltation of God, these angels whose voices were heard on high, were ascribing a glory to God.

The glory was seen in the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ. They were essentially saying this plan for men's salvation, that God would have his Son enter into this world, reveals to us that the birth of Jesus brought God the highest honor.

[8 : 00] And let's be honest. You've been living in heaven your whole entire life. Do you think it was a thrill to come to this messed up world?

We might not see the complexities of this world living in beautiful Squamish, but there's parts of this world which magnify the messiness of men.

In fact, one of my friends says when he works in, he has to sometimes work in Las Vegas, he says, when I come home, I even wash the clothes I didn't wear.

It's just, there's a brokenness to this world of messiness. And Jesus did not come into this world as the son of a king, or the child of an earthly king, or the child of a rich merchant, or even a successful politician, if there ever could be such a thing.

But he came to a mom and dad who were carpenters, giving himself absolutely no advantage at all in this society.

[9 : 11] In the highest, which the angels sang, this phrase refers to the heavenly realm where God's glory is most fully manifested.

The angels were declaring that the birth of Christ reflected God's supreme wisdom, God's supreme love, God's supreme faithfulness, and God's supreme joy.

In fulfilling his promises that were spoken long ago by the Old Testament prophets. You see, everything about the birth of Jesus served to only glorify God.

This birth, which we celebrate tomorrow, reveals to us something of God, his character, his mercy, his grace, his power.

And there's only one reason for that. And it's to invite our worship. To come and adore him.

[10 : 22] The phrase, and on earth, peace, has become much a misaligned phrase. I don't know if you guys are familiar, but probably one of the most astounding events that ever happened in the 20th century occurred on Christmas Day in 1914.

It was in the fields of France where there was a war going on in the Western Front. It was World War I where Germany was coming into Europe. We had the British and French.

They were fighting through these trench warfare. It was a horrible war, a horrible time, but yet on Christmas Day, they began singing songs. And on the other side of the trench, they began singing songs.

And history tells us that the Germans, the English, and the French all came together and sang and celebrated Christmas on that fateful day only to go back to killing each other the following day. When it talks about peace on earth, that's not the peace that the writer is talking about right now. The peace that he's talking about is from the Hebrew word would be shalom, which is a Hebrew concept.

[11 : 42] It means to have a state of wholeness, harmony, and reconciliation with God. The peace begins with God.

And peace with God can only happen through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Humanity, estranged from God due to sin, due to foolishness, due to our brokenness, has only one avenue of peace.

And that is through the one whom the angels sang about that night and announced that he had been born, Jesus Christ.

You see, we have been called to have a vertical peace with God. God calls us to a relationship with him. It's only that relationship which leads to peace with the horizontal relationship.

See, political or social peace does not lead to God, but God leads to social peace and political peace. Let's be honest.

[13 : 03] We live in a world presently, right now, where we are craving peace. We crave peace.

We crave to right the wrongness of the ills of our society. We see it all around it. We see it in the truth and reconciliation movement.

We're trying to make up amends for the sins done to the First Nations people. We see it in the Black Lives movement here and in the States.

We see this with university students tearing down statues. What they're doing is they're trying to make peace with their history. They're trying to figure it out because they know they do not have a peace.

Sadly, some people live in this world hope that peace comes through a Donald Trump or Elon Musk or maybe even Bitcoin. But what God offers is a very different peace.

[14 : 14] It is a universal peace and it doesn't matter what color, language, or what country you are from. God tells us right here that peace only comes through a restored relationship with God.

You get that word? Restored. What it means is that we were once at peace with God. The Bible tells us in Genesis 1 that we walked with God. Our ancestors, Adam and Eve, walked with God in a relationship in the cool of the day.

But they chose to serve themselves rather than listen to God and they have brought this messiness into our life which we deal with every single day.

And now, the angels sing among those with whom he is pleased.

This phrase is much debated or it can be interpreted in different ways but it could mean peace among men of goodwill or peace among those of his favor.

[15 : 21] But it points to those who receive God's grace are who are in a right relationship with him. What the Bible teaches is that there is a peace that is offered to all.

Everyone who walks this earth has an offering of peace but it is only experienced by those who respond to God's grace in faith.

It refers to those who are recipients of God's goodwill in God's favor. To those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ whom we celebrate tomorrow.

This phrase underscores that peace comes not by my effort or your effort but it comes by God's effort.

God did the work and it comes to us as a gift of God's gracious will. people. So you see Christmas upon which we celebrate today or this announcement upon which these angels sing.

[16 : 32] Is God announcing that he is now here fulfilling his promises to his covenant people? After 400 years of silence God is now speaking once again through these angels announcing that his son has come.

It's an answer to the prophet Isaiah who wrote 700 years beforehand. He said for to us a child is born to us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called wonderful counselor mighty God everlasting father prince of peace.

You see this Christmas message calls us to three responses. The first one is it calls us to worship God to adore God.

The birth of Jesus is a reflection of God's greatness and his love and his his deserving of all praise.

so great is deserving of his worship that the heavens opened up and the multitude of angels praised his name.

[17:54] My friends the glory of God came down from heaven on Christmas day. The second message that Christmas calls us to is to receive Christ's free offer of peace.

peace. He's calling us to make peace with him. That peace with him will lead to peace in those other areas of our lives. This peace is offered freely but it has to be accepted through faith as Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

For without God's peace it is impossible to offer any type of worship or to honor God in any way. glory. And the third calling of Christmas is that it calls us to share the good news of Jesus Christ. It calls us it reminds us of this angelic message to proclaim the good news of peace to a world. Let's be honest we need peace right? If you don't think this world needs peace your eyes have been blinded.

remember when I said that the writer at the beginning of my sermon astutely observed that what the shepherds experienced that faithful evening was a night when heaven came down to earth.

[19:17] That happened on Christmas day. There's actually two other promises at least two but I'm going to read you two other promises that tells us that there is God's glory is coming again.

And he's not talking about Christmas. In Numbers 14.21 Moses wrote but truly as I live and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.

The glory of God is coming and the question that we need to ask ourselves is am I at peace with God? In the second verse the prophet Habakkuk a very small book with a very powerful message writes for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

That is the promise that is beyond Christmas and is the promise that calls us for us to seek ourselves and ask the question am I at peace with God?

and if not the question is why not and the question is to seek peace through Christmas through the Son Jesus Christ.

[20:39] Would you pray with me? dear holy heavenly father we thank you for this Christmas day this eve upon which we will celebrate your birth we will share gifts we will spend time with loved ones we will just enjoy the day off but at same times let our minds be called to what is the purpose of Christmas it's not called just for us to have peace between ourselves and to share and love one another although those are good and good for their own sake but we're called to a relationship with the creator the God who reigns on high the God who created the beauty of this world the God who created the intricacies of our human bodies the intricacies of the universe God invites us to a relationship with him through his son

Jesus who was born this day father I pray if there's anyone here who does not know you personally I pray that they would continue to seek you to seek out reading your word to coming to church to speaking to their friends that invited them here give them questions to ask let them be fearless in asking questions and just looking at this world and asking themselves how is this world going to be fixed is it really going to be fixed by a government order or a statue being torn down or for young people just to shout to no we need bigger peace than that we need a peace that can only come through the love of a father to a son who loved us who gave us his only begotten son so this Christmas may we explore the story of Jesus and the free gift that God offers to us because we don't deserve

Jesus we've never done anything to deserve Jesus but because of God's great love to us he gave us his son and we ask you these things in your most holy and precious name amen