

Luke 2:8-14

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. We are looking this morning at Luke chapter 2, verses 1 through 20. That's page 857 in the Pew Bible. Luke chapter 2, verses 1 through 20.

Let me read this text for us. In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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.

[1 : 22] And the angel said to them, Fear not. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the 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 swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and unearth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

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 known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and a baby lying in a manger.

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Our God, we are grateful that we can gather this morning together under your grace, as your family, in the bonds of your church.

[2 : 47] And Lord, we thank you that it is your word that causes us to be, that it is your word that calls us into life and gives us spiritual strength.

So, God, we pray that as we attend to your word this morning, you would indeed be speaking by your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, to open our eyes to see you and know you better.

Lord, perhaps even for some of us here to realize and to see you for the first time. God, so we ask that by your Holy Spirit, you would be at work among us, helping us to understand this text before us and to hear the message that you have for us today.

We pray all this, Father, in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen. Well, I don't know about you, but I think that the Christmas season is almost inseparable from music.

On the one hand, I think some of our best music is Christmas music. I don't know about you. Just think of Handel's Messiah. It's not too bad, right? Or some of our great carols that we sing this time of year.

[3 : 56] Some of our best music is Christmas music. On the other hand, I think some of our worst music is Christmas music as a people, as a culture. I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus.

Grandma got run over by a reindeer, which I think I heard every single day on the bus growing up in elementary school during the month of December. And my personal least favorite, the 80s classic, Do They Know It's Christmas Time.

I mean, we could probably all sing it, right? Feed the world. Oh, I think I need to take a shower every time I hear that song. Anyway, whatever your favorite or least favorites might be, it does seem that Christmas time is almost inseparable from music.

And that connection seems to have gone back to the very beginning. This Advent, we've been studying some of the earliest Christmas songs, as it were.

These songs that are found in the opening chapter of Luke's Gospel. Two weeks ago, we studied Mary's song, sometimes known as the Magnificat. Last week, we looked at Zechariah's song, sometimes known as the Benedictus.

[5 : 07] And this morning, we're focusing on the angel song, found here in chapter 2, verse 14. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

Now, consider the context of this song. Jesus has literally just been born. The long-awaited king has come.

The turning point of history is taking place right here, right now. This is it. And suddenly, with these shepherds out in the field, we get a glimpse of what heaven itself is singing at this critical, world-changing moment.

A multitude of the heavenly host, we're told. Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear the word angel or heavenly host, the first thing that comes to mind isn't actually all that awe-inspiring. How about you? I wonder what mental images come to mind when you think of angels. Maybe a gentle-faced woman from the Victorian era in a long white robe with a soft glow just sort of radiating all about her.

[6 : 25] Someone that you might want to make you warm milk and put you to bed, not someone that's going to strike fear into your heart. But that's not actually the biblical image at all. This is a heavenly host, we're told.

What is a host? A host, friends, is an army. These are the forces of heaven. And the rough and tumble shepherds fall down in fear.

Now, shepherds were sort of like the construction workers of today. They were tough. They worked late hours. They had calluses on their hands. They worked, and they were rough around the edges. And what would make a group of guys like that tremble in fear? Probably, humanly speaking, not much. But when the sky rips open and a commander of the army of heaven brings them a message, they are deathly afraid.

And so you see, friends, this song in verse 14 is not the pretty verses of a children's choir. This is the rumbling chant of warriors.

[7 : 33] This is the victory song of soldiers. And they are singing because their king has gone into the field.

He has entered the battle. He has gone forth into the fray. The Lord Jesus Christ has been born. And so the hosts of light sing their song.

God the Son has assumed human flesh. And the armies of heaven sing. And you notice here that they sing of two things.

Our song has two lines. It's a couplet. And these two lines show us what the birth of Christ brings about. What does it mean? What's the point of this thing we call Christmas?

Well, let's look at each of these two lines in turn. First, the birth of Jesus Christ brings about the glory of God.

[8 : 38] The birth of Jesus brings glory to God. Glory to God in the highest, they sing. Now, most commentators are agreed that this phrase, in the highest, is describing not the sort of quality of the glory, but actually it's a way of describing in exalted language the dwelling place of God.

God dwells in the highest of heavens. And to this one, true, awesome, supreme God who dwells on high. And as such, because he dwells on high, he fills all things.

The one in whom we live and move and have our being. To this God the angels sing glory. Because of what they have witnessed in the birth of Jesus Christ.

So the birth of Jesus, first and foremost, is about the glory of God. The supreme purpose, the point, the driving goal of Christmas, friends, is to display God's manifold perfection.

To show how great he is beyond all comparison. Well, how does the birth of Jesus bring glory to God?

[9 : 51] Consider some of the ways that we see that here in Luke chapter 2. First, the birth of Jesus shows us that God is faithful to his word. It's a display of God's faithfulness.

Notice in verse 4 and in verse 11, we're told that Bethlehem, again and again, is the city of David. Luke doesn't want us to miss that fact. And with that phrase, Luke is reminding us of the fact that God, long ago, made a promise.

A promise that one of David's sons would rule over Israel. A promise that this Davidic king would come from Bethlehem, from the city of David. If you go back to the prophet Micah, chapter 5, verse 2, you can read this.

But you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me, one who is to be ruler in Israel. Whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient of days.

God's faithfulness to his word. And of course, this text from Micah is just one of the many overt prophecies that were fulfilled when Jesus was born. But not just specific, explicit prophecies were fulfilled.

[10:59] You see, friends, the whole tenor of the Old Testament points in this direction as well. All the lines, all the threads, all the promises, all the longings, all the hopes. The whole storyline of God's revelation has been leading up to this moment.

And now, at last, God demonstrates his faithfulness. That his covenant will stand and be upheld. That his word will not return void. That it will stand. That unlike the false gods of the nations. And unlike you and I. Who so rarely keep our promises. Unlike us, God keeps every single one. And so the birth of Jesus demonstrates God's faithfulness to his word. But the birth of Jesus displays God's glory because it also shows us God's providential control of his world.

[12:03] The first chapter begins with Caesar Augustus. The first and greatest Roman emperor. And what is Caesar doing here?

He's issuing a decree. A decree that everyone in his empire should be registered. Registered, no doubt, for the purposes of taxation. And here, what is Luke doing? Luke's connecting the story of Jesus to this broader history of the world.

As if to say in no uncertain terms that what happened in Bethlehem. In that far flung corner of the Roman Empire. Was an event of universal proportions. All of history was going to be changed because of the birth of Jesus.

But notice this decree of Caesar. This imperial attempt to control. And to quantify and subdue. This attempt of Rome to administer.

And even to dominate. This decree of Caesar. Was ultimately subservient. To the purposes of God Almighty. For through this decree.

[13:12] Joseph is led to return to his ancestral city. And while there in the city of David. Mary gives birth to Jesus. And the promise is fulfilled. You see what Luke is showing us here?

Caesar intends to control and to dominate. But God uses that same decree to bring forth at just the right time. The savior. The liberator.

The one who frees us from all oppression. The kingdom of man tries to dominate. But God uses that very act to liberate. One tries to oppress. The other uses it to release.

One is there to attack. To tax. And to push down. And to drive into debt. And God uses it to forgive. So the birth of Jesus brings glory to God.

Because it demonstrates God's providential control of his world. Let's make just one more observation here on this point. Of course there are many that we could make.

[14:14] But let's point out just one more. The entry of Christ into the world glorifies God. In his faithfulness. In his power. But also third in his mercy. And don't the details of the text all point ultimately in this direction.

Christ is born and laid in a manger. In a feeding trough. And the first ones to hear the good news of his birth are not the powerful and the important.

But the shepherds. The outsiders. The morally questionable ones. You know this week I was pondering. Why shepherds of all things? And of course commentators sort of speculate.

Well you know David was a shepherd. So maybe this is sort of a way of sort of alluding to that fact. Or you know blah blah blah blah blah. But I think part of it is just.

They're shepherds. They're just regular guys. And it's these regular guys. Going about their work.

[15:15] That God comes. J.C. Ryle. The 19th century English bishop. Put it this way. We see here the grace and condescension of Christ.

Had he come to save mankind with royal majesty. Surrounded by his father's angels. It would have been an act of undeserved mercy. Had he chosen to dwell in a palace.

With power and great authority. We should still have reason enough to wonder. But to become poor. As the very poorest of mankind. And lowly.

As the very lowliest. This is a love. That passeth knowledge. It is unspeakable. And unsearchable. Friends we praise those who give generously.

Don't we? When we hear of how much Bill and Melinda Gates. Give through their foundation every year. We're sort of shocked. And we give them praise. When we hear of people giving their time.

[16:13] And their careers to help people in developing nations. And places of poverty and need. We praise them. And rightfully so. And yet here with Christ. The magnitude of the self-giving is unparalleled.

For the son of God who existed in the eternal equality of the Godhead. With the father and with the Holy Spirit. Did not cling to that equality.

But made himself nothing. And took the form of a servant. As Paul says in Philippians 2. Friends this is nothing short of astounding.

To give that much. To go that low. Is that not the greatest display of mercy and love? And is this not all to God's glory?

Glory to God in the highest. This is what the regiments of heaven sing. That's what the birth of Christ. That's what Christmas is all about. So friends how about us?

[17:18] Does Christmas take our eyes off of ourselves. And our own hunger. For our own glory. And our own worth. And our own praise. And does it redirect our eyes back to the glory of God?

To God's great worth. Glory to God in the highest. I wonder friends. Have you considered that a great many of our problems arise?

Personally. Relationally. Emotionally. Because we spend so much time wanting people to make much of us. To think of us.

To regard us. We spend so much time wanting people to praise us. And make much of us. Rather than making much of God. But here.

At last. Is the chance to get off the hamster wheel. Of needing human approval. Of living your life. Always at the mercy of what other people think of you.

[18:22] Put your eyes on Christ. See him there. In the manger made low. The glory of God. In the flesh.

Because on the one hand. If you're honest. You break your promises. And you let people down. But he is faithful to every word. And you aren't able to keep things under control.

You don't have the power to control yourself. Let alone other people. And your circumstances. But here is one who is utterly in control. Of the entire world. Of all of its history.

And completely under his direction. And you if you're honest. Are not merciful and loving at all times. But look at Christ. Taking up human flesh.

Not for himself. But for you. Not for the insiders. But for the outsiders. Doing it not for the righteous. But for sinners. Take your eyes friends.

[19:20] Off of yourself. And put them on him. That famous opening of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Goes like this. The chief end of man. Is to glorify God.

And enjoy him. Forever. That's what you were created for. And that is your greatest good. And that is what Christmas is all about.

Glory. To God. In the highest. Christ. But of course. We've fallen short of God's glory. Haven't we? We are all guilty of failing to glorify God.

As we should. And if we pause and think about it. That's actually a massive problem. Think just for a moment. If I refuse to acknowledge the worth. Of something of little value.

There's little problem with that. Right? If I throw away a soda can. Rather than cashing it in. For the deposit. I'm losing what? Five cents? Ten cents in Michigan?

[20:21] Or whatever it is? Not a big deal. Growing up. I always was like. Man. I wish we could take these things to Michigan. We get twice as much. For these things. But what if I refuse to acknowledge.

The worth something. Of a little higher value. Say a valuable work of art. I visit a museum. And push over a piece. Of priceless renaissance. Sculpture. Smashing it to pieces.

Well that carries a much greater cost. And a much weightier penalty. Doesn't it? I'm probably going to be fined. A very large sum. And probably not allowed back. Into any museum anytime soon. But what if I refuse to acknowledge.

The worth of something. Of even greater value. What about. A human person say. What if I were to neglect. My children. And refuse to give them.

The honor. And support. And care. That they need. And deserve. That would carry. An even greater guilt. Would it not? I wouldn't just be fined.

[21 : 19] I might be imprisoned. I might never be allowed. To see them again. But what if. Pushing a little further.

I refuse to acknowledge. The worth. Of something. Of infinite value. Would that not carry. An eternal penalty. Would that guilt.

Not be measureless. Would I not owe. An infinite cost. And yet friends. That is who God is. The one of infinite worth.

And value. To fall short. In our glory of him. Carries the supreme penalty. It is to put ourselves. At enmity.

With the very source. Of our existence. And that is why. We need to hear. The second line. Of the angel song. The birth of Christ.

[22 : 16] Brings glory. To God. But second. It brings. Peace. On earth. When we had incurred. God's just judgment.

Because we had rebelled. Against him. Refusing to glorify him. As God. God in mercy. Sent his son. To bring us. Peace. That is. Reconciliation. A right.

Healed relationship. Between us. Sinners. And him. God. And in that peace. To know. That God. Finally. At last. Holds nothing against us.

That he regards us. No longer in anger. But in love. And that he makes us. Outcasts. He makes us his children. Do you know what it is like.

To have that kind of peace. Friends. The peace of a clean conscience. The peace of a meaningful existence.

[23 : 12] The peace of having nothing to fear. Like the peace of the warm sunshine. Through the bedroom window. Early on a Saturday morning. Coming through like a gift.

Unmerited. Undeserved. Bringing light. And warmth. And calm. Where on earth. Could we find that peace?

Perhaps you've tried lots of things on earth. Maybe you've tried moral effort. Being a good person. Maybe you've tried religious activity. That is you know. Spiritual stuff. Going to church.

Praying. Doing some meditation here or there. Why not try it all? Who knows? Whatever works.

Maybe you've tried different religions. Maybe you've tried getting rid of religion altogether. But for all that. Nothing on earth.

Has brought you peace with God. And yet here. The angels sing. Of peace. On earth. Down here.

[24 : 10] In the chaos. And the enmity. Of our confused. And rebellious human hearts. At last. They sing of peace. For unto you is born this day.

In the city of David. A savior. Who is Christ. The Lord. The Lord of all. Born. A human being.

You see friends. If we. Oh God. This infinite debt. Then we as humans. Must pay it. But if it is an infinite debt. Then only God could possibly pay it.

And mystery of mysteries. Here. God the son. Assumes human nature. He becomes fully human. In order as a human. To rightfully pay.

What we as humans owe. But at the same time. Being fully God. He is the one. Who can actually. Pay it. The God.

[25 : 12] Man. Jesus Christ. The Lord. Through his life. Death. And resurrection. Paying. The cost. Of our rebellion. In our place. He is our peace. And that's why the angel.

Told the shepherds. I bring you. Good news. Of great joy. That will be for. For all the people. On the one hand. The peace that Christ brings. Cannot but result.

In great. Unyielding joy. Right? Peace with God. And on the other hand. It is indeed. For all.

People. It is for shepherds. And it is for scholars. It is for parents. And it is for singles. It's for young.

And old. Luke will show us. In his gospel. That it is for Jew. And Gentile. Man. Man. And woman.

For the religious. For the irreligious. For the people who are morally together. And for the people who are complete moral failures.

[26 : 10] It's for everyone. Because we are all sinners. And this peace depends not on our human doing. But on God's good pleasure.

Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. But his good pleasure. Wholly apart from our works. That's how the angel song ends actually.

On earth. Peace. Among those with whom he is pleased. Now you might be thinking that's a little different than I've heard these lines before. I thought it was peace on earth.

Good will to men. Right? That's how it's supposed to go. But that's not actually what the text says. Literally it just says on earth. Peace.

Among humans. Of good pleasure. And that word good pleasure in Luke's gospel nearly always means God's good pleasure. God's good pleasure that he freely places upon us by his own grace, by his own decision, apart from our works.

[27 : 16] So the angels aren't talking about some good will that we as humans might share with each other because, hey, it's Christmas time and we better go feed the world. They aren't talking about some general kindness that God shows towards the world as its creator.

No. Here. They are singing about the redemptive will of God. His saving, gracious, effectual, good pleasure that is for all who place their faith in Christ.

The good pleasure of God that loves us and saves us apart from our works. That found us when we were dead in our trespasses and sins and made us alive together with Christ and granted us peace. That's what the angels are singing of here, friends. Well, let me end with a few points of application first. Friends, you know this peace.

Is Christmas for you merely a time of sentimentality, of presence, of family gatherings, good things all? There's nothing wrong with those things. There's nothing wrong with wanting to do good during this time of year.

[28 : 29] We should probably do a little more of it. But don't you see that it's about so much more? It's about the solution to our greatest need. Peace with God.

Do you think you're too undeserving for that peace? That your background or your moral record puts you out of place for it?

But Luke is showing us here that Christ came for the undeserving. It's not about your merits or your desserts, but it's about God's good pleasure. You bring nothing.

God gives everything. That's how real Christianity works. And the invitation is for you to come and to call upon Christ and to receive this peace.

To receive him who is our peace. Second, for us Christians, consider this song of heaven.

[29 : 27] Take a step back. The glory of God and the peace of Christ for us sinners. I submit to you that the angels in heaven are smarter than us. They are wiser than us.

They see more of the scope of history than us. They have seen more beautiful glories in heaven than us. And yet this is what captures their imagination.

This is what fuels their songs. The glory of God and the peace of Christ. So should we not follow their example? What ought to galvanize us as a church body corporately?

What ought to drive our lives as individual Christians? What should be the theme of our song as it were? Should it not be the glory of God and the peace of Christ?

This is what it means to be centered in the gospel. To not let secondary issues detract us and distract us from the primary thing. To keep the glory of God and the peace of Christ the burning center of all that we do.

[30 : 36] What a mistake to have the church on earth singing a different song than the church in heaven.

Would we not then stop in some sense being the church? And is there not enough in these two themes to capture our hearts for eternity?

If the angels are singing about the glory of God and the peace of Christ, then surely there is enough there for all of our needs. For all our hearts delight. For all eternity. Third and last, if we as the church know the peace of Christ, then we ought to be a people who live lives of peace.

This is the trajectory of Luke's gospel and the whole New Testament really. The peace of Christ you see begins by reconciling us to God. It's a vertical peace first and foremost.

But then it begins to take shape horizontally. It begins to reconcile us to one another. You see friends, if our infinite debt of sin has been paid in full through our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord, then through his Holy Spirit within us, we now have the power to forgive others.

[31 : 57] We've been set free as it were. To forgive in return. After all, what is that offense or that hurt that I've experienced compared to what I've already been forgiven?

If Jesus has gone into the stable for me, if he's taken me, a dirty shepherd, and covered me in his good pleasure, and given me a place in his kingdom, if he's done all that for me, why am I hanging on to these old grudges?

Why am I not forgiving even the great wrongs that I've suffered? Friends, the way of Christ is the way of peace. The peace that he has freely given to you is meant then to change your heart and to be given to others.

And by his Holy Spirit, that is exactly what he is doing in you. So brothers and sisters, what song are we going to sing this Christmas?

There are lots of good ones. There are lots of bad ones. Listen to the hosts of heaven once more. Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace among those on whom his favor rests.

[33 : 17] Glory to God. Peace on earth. Let that be your song. Let's pray. Our Father, as we have glimpsed into the heights of heaven and have heard the song that the heavenly hosts are singing, God, we confess that we only scratch the surface of the great and wonderful mysteries and majesties that are there.

God, your glory and your peace. Oh, Lord, forgive our cold hearts that they are not drawn to these things with wonder and awe and joy.

Oh, Father, by your spirit, we pray that you would kindle in us, renew in us, a love for your glory and great gratitude for your peace.

Oh, Lord Jesus, make us a church that sings this song, that this is the theme of all that we do, the undercurrent of all that we are and say and strive to do.

Your glory, God. Your peace, Lord Jesus. Oh, Lord, help us in this Christmas time, we pray, to be people of peace.

[34 : 50] Lord, many of us are gathering with family and friends, and God, we confess that some of our deepest wounds come from those who are closest to us. Father, we pray for a healing work in our souls, that the peace that you have given us would begin to mend and restore and strengthen and dignify us so that we might then turn and extend peace and forgiveness even to those who have wronged us.

Oh, Lord, heal us, we pray. And may it all be done to the glory of your great name. Amen. Please stand with us one more time as we sing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. He is a redeemed Hark the herald angels sing Glory to the newborn King and fleecy mommy to the newborn King and fleecy Lord the herald angels sing glory to the newborn King glory to the newborn King Xin lǒng with us