

Sunday, December 8, 2024 | Sounds of the Season

Week 2 | Luke 2:8-20 | "Invitation"

"Sounds of the Season" is a four-week holiday series designed to help us delve deeper into the true meaning of Christmas. Each week, we'll focus on a key aspect of the Christmas story: visitation, invitation, emancipation, and redemption. We'll examine a passage of Scripture and illustrate that Sunday's topic with a well-known Christmas carol, helping us to connect with the message in a more profound way.

Last week, Pastor Bob started this series by exploring the Christmas concept of **visitation** and how the God of the universe came and visited us via his Son, Jesus Christ. This is what the carol, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* is all about:

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see

Hail the incarnate Deity

Pleased as man with man to dwell

Jesus, our Emmanuel

At his birth, the Lord was called "Immanuel," which means "God with us." This means the true meaning of Christmas isn't *presents* but the *presence* of God.

READ: Luke 2:8-20 (ESV)

⁸ And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: **you will find** a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ And **they went** with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

¹⁷ And when they saw it, **they made known** the saying that had been told them concerning this child.¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Throughout history, messengers have played a pivotal role. Famously, an unnamed soldier in 490BC ran 26 miles to Athens to announce the country's victory in the Battle of Marathon. During the medieval period of Japan, the Hikyaku, aka "the flying legs," could travel 80 miles in a *single* day as couriers to the Shogunate; because of their swift efficiency, for the first time in its history, the country was connected from Hokkaido, in the far north, to Nagasaki, in the far south. In 1775, an American silversmith and military officer, Paul Revere, rode on horseback in the middle of the night to alert the minutemen of Massachusetts that British troops were on the march.

Angels, the messengers of heaven, appear at key moments throughout biblical history. The titular "death angel" passed over Egypt, killing all the firstborns and leading to Israel's exodus (cf. Ex. 12). An angel conversed with Joshua before entering the Promise Land (cf. Josh. 5). And an angel not only shut the mouth of a lion, delivering the prophet Daniel from certain death (cf. Dan. 6), but one also interpreted his vision of the Apocalypse (cf. Dan. 7).

The point is that whenever a messenger shows up, be they earthly or heavenly, the trajectory of history changes, and, as Christians, we are all called into this very role. As God's ambassadors, we've been sent to bring the Good News to people far and wide to invite them into a relationship with Jesus Christ. And should they accept this message, their lives will be changed forever. Arguably, no story illustrates this principle better than the Christmas story.

I want you to notice **three** things:

i. Vs. 8-14 – The **Proclamation** of the Angelic Message.

This is the *third* appearance of an angel in Luke's account so far: Zechariah, Mary, Shepherds. We know from Matthew's account that an angel also appeared to Joseph. And while the Christmas story gives the impression that angelic visitations are common, they are quite rare. They're beings of great power, and God uses them to exact judgment on multiple accounts (e.g., the angel of death, Ex. 12). **But they are by and large messengers.** In fact, the Greek word from which we get "angel," ἄγγελος (*aggelos*), means envoy, emissary, or courier and is used for more than just spiritual beings (cf. Matt. 11:10; Mar. 1:2; Lu. 7:24; Jam. 2:25).

What's remarkable about this is that these heavenly heralds weren't sent to the High Priest, Herod Antipas, or Caesar. These angelic representatives were sent to **humble** shepherds with a **not-so-humble** message, one that was, and still is, "good news of great joy for all people." To these blue-collar men, the angels proclaimed, "For unto you [emphasis added] is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." This shows that God's message is not exclusive to the powerful, but inclusive to all.

The Shepherds were among the first to attribute these three titles to Jesus: "Savior," "Christ," and "Lord." Their role as the first to recognize Jesus is a reminder of the importance of our own role in spreading the Gospel.

When the angel said the newborn was a "Savior," he spoke about Jesus' **mission**. By his own admission later in Luke 19:10, Jesus said he "came to seek and to save the lost." He did not come to condemn the world (cf. Jn. 3:17). The world was already doomed because of sin. He came to **save** the world (cf. Jn. 3:16).

When the angel said the newborn was the "Christ," he spoke about Jesus' **messiahship**. What often gets overlooked during this time is that Christmas, technically, is as much a **Jewish** holiday as it is a **Christian** one. Mary made this very point in the first Christmas carol, and Zechariah made the point again in his song. Throughout the O.T., the prophets spoke of the Messiah as one who would rule the throne of David. This Promised One would fulfill all the promises made to Israel. Jesus is the one in whom all the O.T. promises are fulfilled (cf. Lu. 4:16-21).

When the angel said the newborn was "Lord," he spoke about Jesus' **monarchy**. While the term "lord" in the Bible can refer to anyone in leadership (i.e., landowner, civil leader, etc.), it almost always refers to God.¹ In fact, the Greek word translated as "lord" is **κύριος**, and of the over 9,000 times it is used in the Greek translation of O.T. (LXX), the term "Lord" refers to God 6,150 times (68%).² Roughly two out of the three times you see the term "lord" is likely speaking about **the** Lord, not a lord. So, when the angel said that this newborn was not only the "Savior" of the world and the promised "Christ," he was also saying that this baby boy born in Bethlehem that night was "Lord," monarch of the Davidic throne.

¹ General Editors, "Yahweh – LORD," June 1, 2017, *The Bible Project*, <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/yhwh-lord/>, [accessed, December 17, 2021].

² Bock, Darrell L., *Luke: 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 218.

The prophet Isaiah foresaw the advent of this Savior-Christ-Lord figure 700 years before the first century:

READ: Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)

⁶For 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.”

⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

What’s more, their message was not immaterial, intangible, or invisible. The angel gave the shepherds a **tangible** “sign” to prove what they said was true: “**You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.**” Mangers weren't used as cribs in the first century; it was unusual even then. But that anomaly was evidence that something out of the ordinary had occurred. **A baby in a feeding trough was proof that the Savior-Christ-Lord had indeed come.**

Lastly, the angels not only gave the shepherds a “sign,” but they also gave them a **song**. They sang, “**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!**” Now, that sounds different from the version we've all heard growing up. You’re probably used to the phrase “peace goodwill towards men.” So, why the change? The majority of the Greek manuscripts record a phrasing that emphasizes God’s agency and not man’s.³ It is God-centric, not human-centric.

Undoubtedly, the angels' message was, in fact, to all men. The angels themselves said that this was “**good news of great joy for all people** [emphasis added].” But it must be pointed out that while God would prefer that no one perish (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8-10), the Lord will only save those who come to him in faith through his Son. This means that when it comes to the angel's song, we should understand that God will only be “**pleased**” with those who accept Jesus as their Savior, Messiah, and Lord. **Thus, while the message of Christmas could bring peace to everyone on earth, in reality, the message of Christmas only brings peace to some.**

ii. **Vs. 15-16 – The Confirmation of the Angelic Message.**

³ Morris, Leon, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Volume 3, (Downer Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 102.

Now, what would you do if you had a host of angels proclaiming the birth of the world's Savior? You'd likely say to your friends, "[Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.](#)" You wouldn't want to wait; you'd go ***immediately*** to find out if what you were told is true. And what did the Shepherds find? Luke says, "[And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.](#)" They had firsthand/eyewitness testimony that they ***weren't*** hallucinating.

When the women came to the tomb of Jesus, an angel appeared to them and said, "[He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay](#)" (Matt. 28:6). When the Lord appeared to Thomas after the resurrection, he said, "[Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe](#)" (Jn. 20:27). Though we will not get a special angelic vision, though we will not see the Lord in this life, **we must still have an experiential knowledge of God than a mere a head knowledge.** Psalm 34:8 says, "[Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!](#)" The shepherd's lives were forever changed that night because they had a supernatural experience with God. They got a peak behind the curtain.

iii. Vs. 17-20 – The **Ramifications** of the Angelic Message.

The angel's chorus and confirmation of seeing a baby in a manger propelled the shepherds to become the **first Evangelists**. Luke tells us that, after they saw the baby Jesus in the manger, the shepherds "[made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.](#)" They could not help themselves. They told everyone they could about what they had heard and seen. So much so that "[all who heard it wondered \[emphasis added\] at what the shepherds told them.](#)" Wonderment, amazement, and astonishment were the effects that the shepherds had on the people. **When men who've met with God share their experiences with others, it has a significant influence on those they interact with.**

Luke tells us that while people wondered at the shepherd's words, Mary "[treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.](#)" Though she was a simple carpenter's wife, she was a deep thinker; she was not the sort who was quick to jump to conclusions but the sort who was always observant. **God wants free-thinking followers—i.e., those who see his works and ponder their meanings, those who read his words and meditate on their conclusions.**

Before moving on, Luke tells us the last thing the shepherds did was to "[return, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.](#)" They glorified and praised God. Worship is the consequence of the Gospel. **Those who receive it and experience it for themselves cannot help but give thanks for what the Lord has done for them.**

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

An **invitation** to know Jesus Christ is the **heart** and **soul** of Christmas.

The angels appeared to the shepherds, and the shepherds found Jesus. Then, those same men went and told others what they had heard and seen. We ought to follow in their footsteps this holiday season.

READ: Romans 10:13-15 (ESV)

¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

Go, tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born

While shepherds kept their watching
O'er silent flocks by night
Behold throughout the heavens
There shone a Holy light

The shepherds feared and trembled
When, lo! Above the Earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed our Savior's birth

Down in a lowly manger
Our humble Christ was born
And brought us all salvation

Video Description:

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SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here:

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: info@GracePointeLife.com

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

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Podcast Details:

Season 40 | 2