

The Christmas Song Luke 2:8-14

This is one of the most familiar texts in Scripture. If you do not go to church or if you are unfamiliar with the Bible you have probably heard this text through some sort of medium or message or even song. We realize that it seemed like any other night. Shepherds were watching their sheep at night. The shepherds would have been hired hands who were given the responsibility to tend and care and feed and protect the sheep. It is always interesting to see whom God chooses to make himself know. Here it is not to kings or those who are influential and powerful but to lowly shepherds. These individuals were usually known not as the most righteous individuals but actually the opposite. They were usually known for their low morals. And it is incredible because the heavenly visitor that is sent to them is not sent with a message of judgment but a message of hope — a message of salvation.

The long awaited Messiah or King of Israel was born that very night. And he came in such humble means also as the text lays out. It is amazing how many prophecies there are in the Old Testament that announce his birth, and the glory of his coming, but how few individuals were really looking for it at the time of his coming. We also realize that Jesus is coming back, but it is amazing how many believers, even though they say they profess it, live as if there is no return of Jesus, or the day of his coming is not nearer than it ever has been. They just live their lives as if this is all there is. They celebrate Christmas as if this is all there is. Just as sure as his coming, there is an appointed day of his return, and are we ready? Are our hearts ready to come into the presence of our beloved? These times every year are to remind us that he did come, and that he is coming back in great glory.

But what do you love about Christmas? I have such fond memories growing up as Christmas approached as a child. I can remember it getting colder which was a sign that the season was getting nearer. I can remember my father would get the decorations out of the basement. We had an artificial tree that you had to put together that really did not look like a tree, but it was sure fun to decorate. I remember the presents under the tree, and the great anticipation of what they could hold. I remember the Sears catalogue coming, aptly called the Wish Book! But one of the greatest joys I had as a child was bringing out the Christmas albums and playing them on the record player. Some of them were corny songs about snowmen and sleigh rides, but others were about the coming of Christ.

Back then I really didn't understand the true significance of what I was singing, and today Christmas is so much more meaningful because of its songs. We sing the truth of these Christmas texts and bring out the wonder and the glory of God coming in human flesh — what we call the incarnation. Think of O Little Town of Bethlehem, **“How silently, how silently, The wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of his heaven. No ear may hear his coming, But in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive him, still The dear Christ enters in.”** Hark the Herald Angels Sing, **“Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die, Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth. Risen with healing in his wings, Light and life to all he brings, Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!**

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Joy to The World, **“No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessing flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.”** O Holy Night, **“Truly He taught us to love one another, His law is love and His gospel is peace. Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother. And in his name all oppression shall cease. Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we, With all our hearts we praise His holy name. Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we, His power and glory ever more proclaim! His power and glory ever more proclaim!”** One of my favourite aspects of Christmas is the songs.

For the last two thousand years the people of God have been composing songs about the virgin birth, his life, death and resurrection, promises, character, and the great hope we have in Christ. Singing is so tied to faith that we cannot help but sing. Now we sing because we have something to rejoice about. And maybe you are discouraged or downhearted, maybe you have been so taken up with all the burdens of life or even this time of year, or maybe you have suffered loss and that is on your mind, or maybe you are just struggling with some particular sin in your life, and maybe you are here today thinking what do I have to sing about?

Maybe that was the attitude of the shepherds that very night. Everything occupied their hearts and minds other than God and the promises of Christ. If that is you and I want you to realize we have something to sing about. I want us to look at the angelic symphony of praise that the shepherds saw and heard in 13-14, and my hope is that we will take our thoughts and heartaches and the things occupying our minds and seek to reorient them to the most wonderful message ever proclaimed. This is only a message and plan and coming that God could have organized, and it is something worth singing about — worth celebrating.

1. We see the person addressed in our singing. Vv. 13-14a.

We often wonder why we sing? It seems in many ways so natural. People who visit or are unfamiliar with going to church expect it in Christian liturgy. It seems like it is expected. For many it is like an interlude before the preaching of God’s Word. Sometimes singing can be upbeat, sometimes it can be more solemn, and there is a place for both of those. But we sing for a number of reasons but let me name just a couple. One is that we are commanded in Scripture to sing. Listen to Ephesians 5:18-19, **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”** This is a direct command. As we are filled or controlled by the Spirit through his Word we are to sing the truths to God and to one another. This is what we profess and this is what we believe. Not to sing or even desire to sing is a sin against God. Don’t take it lightly. There is something wrong in the deepest recesses of your heart.

The second reason we sing is we have something to sing about — our God and his great grace in our lives. There is something really worth celebrating and announcing through song. And one thing our singing should never be. It can be upbeat or solemn depending on the truth being communicated but never emotionless. I think there have been so many badly written songs that carry no truth but are just meant to stir our

emotions without the content of the coming of Christ, the gospel and our great hope. We have something or more directly someone to sing about. With all the difficulties and trials you are going through, aren't you amazed that God sent the Son, none other than God the Son to be born in the stable? He came to live that life that you could never live, and die that substitutionary death that you might have life eternal. Your life has one message above it and that is God's stunning and amazing grace in your life. Now that is worth singing about. Whatever is in our hearts that we hold dear and we treasure wants to come out. We ought to be a singing people that sing a particular message of a particular person.

So look at what the text says here in verse 13, **"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying."** After the message sent to the shepherds by the one angel, that angel is joined by what is called a multitude. How great was that multitude of heavenly hosts? We don't know, but it was a great many who came with a purpose, and this is not one of these times where we are obligated to do this but angels marvel at the message of salvation and how God works in the hearts and lives of individuals, and here is this glorious worship of our one true God, and his ancient plans coming to pass with the coming of Christ and what Jesus will accomplish. And it is worth celebrating and it is worth worshiping our great God. We know his character — his righteousness, goodness and love, and his control and benevolence to people like us. So they come, and the message is so different. Modern and contemporary music wants to praise people and things and feelings. It wants to put the emphasis on us. But this music and praise of heaven is directed to God. Even if we never benefited from God he would be worthy of praise. But we do, and it should overwhelm our hearts in praise.

And this praise has context, and the first line is so important, **"Glory to God in the highest."** Think of what this praise signifies. Think of the message it gives in our lives. So often people are depressed or angry at this time of year because they are seeking their own glory, and they might not know it. They are living for their own kingdom. Husbands and wives fight because they want certain things. They might even be good things, but in the end it is about them. They are living for their own kingdom and want to be king or queen. This praise and song is such a reminder we are connect to a greater kingdom and a greater king. And Christmas and all of our lives are not about you or your family or the perfect experience or memory or whatever. It is about the King. It is about the glory of not mom or dad or husband or wife, but about our God and his plan and his purposes.

Think about it because Christmas is not about us. The angels do not come and say Jesus came because you are so special and God just had to have you in his kingdom. Life and everything in your life is not about you. When you make it about you, then you life is in the confines of your own little kingdom and if you abide by my laws and dreams everything goes well, but watch out if you don't. Ask yourself, who are you living for, whose plan occupies your heart, what kingdom dominates your heart and thoughts? The angels ascribe glory to God. There is none higher and more worthy than this God. And Christmas proves that because of his love and grace to those who have sinned. We have not love him or glorified him. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We have lived for our kingdoms rather than his big and grand and

glorious kingdom, and it has not gone well. He is the one who sent Christ. He is the one who planned our redemption.

Now think of the word “glory” here, Glory to God in the highest, what does glory mean? We know we are to glory in God, and we certainly should glory in him this time of year and every moment of our lives. But what does it mean? And it is one of those hard words to define when it comes to glorifying God. Probably the best way to understand the word glory as it relates to God is read the whole Bible and try to soak in the truths of who he is. There is none like him. Glory speaks of his perfection, his beauty and greatness in all that he is and all that he does. When we ascribe to him glory we recognize something of the worth of God. And here the angels are ascribing that glory of God in the coming of Messiah, the coming of Christ into the world. Glory to him in the highest! This is the such a high manifestation of all that God is and all that he does for sinners. Oh, to not only know God but to see him more and more through the coming and the work of Jesus is glorious. It causes our hearts to look away from self to our great God.

So here is my plea this Christmas. Fill your heart with true glory. Don't be a glory thief. Don't make it about you. The joy and the jubilation of the angelic choir is full of content and therefore is full of emotion. Oh, so often we want life to be us. We want to be hero to our kids and others, but there is only One hero, and he is so glorious. See him, see his character, and see his work in the coming of the Holy One. It will cause you to sing out — glory to God in the highest!

2. We see the message we sing. V. 14.

Folks, I really believe that if we understood this verse and really let it grasp our hearts it would cause us to fall to our knees and humbly and delightfully and astonishingly praise our great Lord and Saviour for what he has done. We let our minds and hearts be taken up with so many things that we often fail to see what he has done and let it be pushed to the background of our thoughts and lives. My brothers and sisters, right here we have so much to rejoice about and sing about that we will be singing and rejoicing about the truths in this very verse for all of eternity. Let these truths grip and take possession of your heart. Think and meditate on them. The Christ of Christmas really will become the controlling delight of your life. We sing because we cannot be silent. These truths cannot be contained.

So look at what he says here because there is a dual message, and both parts belong together. This is why the angels are singing and glorying in God. They proclaim, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace.”** Now look at that word “peace.” The angels are singing and announcing what this little babe would accomplish. He would bring peace. And we realize something of the meaning of that word and the significant hope of that word because we live in a world of hostility. We live where nations rage against one another. You think of all the armed conflicts or all the threats in our world today. Nations arm themselves with nuclear arsenals because this is a dangerous world. You think of the hatred and racial injustice in our world because of a person's skin colour, or the language they speak, or the culture they come from. There is a wall between people and you can feel the tension and hatred. You consider the untold wars in relationships between married couples, families, and children. Every day

there are new accusations along with old ones. Every day there is no rest but a new round of hostilities. We all long for rest. We are weary of all the wars in our lives.

But listen to the titles that are given to the coming Messiah in Isaiah 9:6, **“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.”** We many times concentrate on the other titles but he is none other than the Prince of Peace who came to bring peace. And we often think the greatest peace we need is national or some earthly relational peace, and one day Jesus will do away with all conflict everywhere. But the greatest peace that we need is between us and God. We have sinned and could never orchestrate or implement that peace before God. In fact, we were the enemies of God. But listen to what Paul writes in Romans 5:1, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** It is not we will have but as believers who have place their faith and trust in Christ we have peace with God. We are justified or have this righteous standing before God through Jesus, through the one who came. You see, and we sing about this, that the one who came, came not just to live that perfect life, but came to die. He came to take my place, be my substitute, none other than God himself would die in my place, so that I would forever have peace with him. With all the wars raging right around us, we have peace forevermore with God. The assurance I will be with him is not based on my stellar life because I don't have one, but one was willing to come, live that life, die in my place, and rise from the grave conquering the penalty forever and ever, and thus bringing eternal peace.

Only God could have done, planned, and brought these plans to pass. I had nothing to with it other than my need. This is God's doing, and all glory and praise and adulation goes to him. It is not that we hope for peace but peace has been delivered forevermore. What a gospel, and What a God!

But the second thing we see in this verse is who are the recipients of this peace. Look at the verse again, and think of the glory here, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”** There is a peace that comes through Jesus Christ to a specific individuals. Notice at the end of the verse, **“among those with whom he is pleased.”** Now you could read that verse that God is pleased with individuals because they recognize him or follow him. But then the verse should begin with a praise to us. We have somehow figured it out what we should do or believe. No, this verse is about God's sovereign goodness and delight and selection. It is about his choice. All of us are sinners. There is not one of us who deserves the glories of heaven. All agree on that point. But so many never see how lost in sins night we are, because we are sinners and love sin we would never choose God or want to choose him. No matter how great the light. It is still amazing that most of the individuals that heard Christ preach rejected him. No what we need is the new birth, what we need is God to act. God not only acts but has chosen to send Christ and then work effectively in our hearts to bring us to see our sin and see our need of Christ.

This verse is not talking about God is so pleased in us that he chooses us but that God when God chooses the sinner and works in his heart, he never does it begrudgingly but takes great pleasure in showing us his grace. His grace is freely and delightfully given. We are recipients of none other than the pleasure of God through

Jesus Christ — through the one coming. You didn't self-generate that life in you. The reason why you believed, saw your sin, were humbled by your sin, willfully and enthusiastically trusted in Christ was because of his pleasure on you. Not because of any good in you or anything God needed from you or something that he saw in you, but because God is a God of love and he chose to shine his love on you. It is such a humbling truth because he didn't have to set his pleasure or his grace on any of us.

“Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”

So do you see something of the content and the emotion of the angels and their glorying in the character and the sovereign love of God. Why do we sing? **I sing for I can't keep silent, His love is the theme of my song, And this is my sweetest enjoyment, To sing of Him all day long. I sing for I am so happy, I sing for I am so free; I sing of my dear Redeemer, Who suffered on Calvary's tree; He's building for me a mansion, Where I shall forever be; I sing for I can't keep silent, He shed His own blood for me.”**

We truly have something and someone to sing about. You can imagine the shepherds running to Bethlehem in such joy. They had the same problems but how could they not sing? How can we not sing! What is in us will come out. What is coming out of us this Christmas? Start with your heart, delightfully and wonderfully put these truths of Christ coming and accomplishing in your heart. It will truly cause a different melody in the depths of your soul. This is our new and forever song!