

Grace among Us – Part Three

Joy to the World - Luke 2:8-20

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Dec. 19th, 2021

Intro:

- This morning is the third installment of our four-part Christmas series, "Grace among Us." We have heard the messages given to Joseph and Mary concerning this Son that was to be born. Today we focus on the message given not to this couple but to shepherds outside the place where Jesus was born. From the message from the angels to the shepherds and then to us, we will learn more about God, what He would say to us in our time, and how this makes a difference in our lives.
- As the time approached for this child to be born, Joseph and Mary were forced by government officials to migrate to their town of ancestral origin to be taxed. God used even an ungodly government to fulfill what was spoken long before in His sovereign plan.
- Because of the decree, the town of Bethlehem was swelled to beyond capacity, which forced this couple to deliver the child outside of the inn, presumably in a stable, and to use a manger as a bed for the newborn infant.
- Luke records the next communication from an angel and then a host of angels to some shepherds who were living outside of Bethlehem:

Luke 2:8-11 NIV

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

God's salvation, redemption, and authorization are in His Son

- The good news that will cause great joy is for all people. The good news is in contrast to the bad news – that we are creatures given over to our fallen and broken nature. The great joy is in contrast to the great sorrow – which is the result of our fallen nature. And this good news that causes great joy is for all people, for everyone everywhere, including those they thought were outside the reach of the grace of God. So, what is this "good news" that causes "great joy" for "all people?"
- *The Savior has been born to you* – This is a personal and global savior. He is the one who saves you from the power and penalty of your sin. Salvation is yours because of the Son.
- *The Messiah has been born to you* – Not only does Jesus save us from the justice of God, but He also redeems and restores us to what we were designed to be. We are remade and redeemed because of the Son.
- *The Lord has been born to you* – He is not only the Savior and Messiah, but He is also the Lord. He has all authority in heaven and earth. He saves and redeems, and authorizes. He is the one

who saves us and the one we serve, and gladly so because we also reap the benefits of being a member of His Kingdom, His family.

- What does this give us? The good news that gives great joy to all the people is that in this Son, we are saved, we are redeemed, we are included in the family of the great King. This gives us power over sin and death, to overcome our slavery to sin and its consequences. This gives us peace both with God and with each other, and it gives us purpose to live out our lives in service and companionship with the great King and His quest.
- This good news gives us great joy, and it is for all the people! This news was proclaimed to the lowly shepherds first, and they were the first to know and to find this greatest of all gifts. If this communication was not enough, a company of heavenly hosts broke through the heavens proclaiming "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Luke 2:12-14 NIV

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

God's favor gives us peace

- And whom does His favor rest upon? All those who hear and receive the Son who has been given. Knowing and believing the gospel's good news means that you are favored by God. Now, this does not mean that those who have believed are better than anyone else. It means that we receive the grace of God that covers our sin and the power of God to be conformed in the image of His Son.
- Some have mistakenly believed that having the "favor of God" means having an easy and carefree life. This is not the truth, as scripture bears out. This means that your sins are forgiven, your future is secure, and you have the privilege of knowing this Son and making Him known. This also means that we have given ourselves in service to the great King, and we live in a way that follows and honors Him. Knowing that our reward comes from Him, we live to serve and honor Him in all we do.
- Having His favor gives us peace, peace again with God, others, and ourselves. A peace that comes from living in right relationship, within ourselves, among ourselves and beyond ourselves. The good feeling that you are "right" relationally. Thank God for His conviction and correction and grace to make sure we are in right relationship with all.
- So after these things were communicated to the shepherds, they decided to go and see for themselves what was proclaimed and explained to them.

Luke 2:15-18 NIV

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

God's story is passed on through our lives

- Now the message of the good news could have been proclaimed to the whole town. But God in His providence allowed these shepherds to partner with Him in spreading this message. After they have received, believed, and verified this message, they spread the news of these things to those who would listen. There is indeed a wonder in this.
- God continues to do this with us today. The message was given to humankind, and then the message spreads primarily through us in this time, even though God sometimes continues to spread his message in supernatural ways, even in our time.
- We are to all be witnesses to what we have known and seen. This is how the message is spread, and at times and by some, it is received with great joy, and with others, it is received with a shrug, and with others still, they are openly hostile to this message. As it was then, so it is now.
- After these events took place, Mary "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." And the shepherds returned astounded by what they had seen and heard, and they praised God for it.

Luke 2:19-20 NIV

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

God's messages are not always remembered

- What struck me for the first time while preparing this message is that the identity of Jesus was clearly communicated at His birth. And this by not only one angel but also by many of them. Their words were verified by the reality of what the shepherds saw. But over time, this great revelation was forgotten or lost.
- The last series I did before the merge of our churches was on the book of Mark, which took 54 messages to complete. The big question in the book of Mark is, "who do you say that I am?" If people would have remembered or retained the knowledge of this announcement to the shepherds, that question would not have been a question. Or perhaps they knew this information but had questions as to if it was true. And at some point in our lives, the message of the good news of Jesus seems to fade in our minds. One commentary I read said that we have a "short remembrance of extraordinary events which have no immediate consequences" (Maclaren, Alexander *Exposition of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 9 p. 41).

Conclusion and Communion

- My challenge for us today is not to lose sight of the wonder and the message of the greatest gift that is given. So let's remember the story. Let's ponder its meaning. And let's spread the message, especially now during this Christmas season.
- If you have a manger scene, like many of us do, rehearse the story in your mind, refresh it from the pages of scripture, treasure up, and ponder this message in your heart. Spend some time doing so by the lights of a Christmas tree first thing in the morning.
- Ask God to apply the message of Christmas to your heart, and then ask him for the joy and peace that it brings and for an opportunity to share this message at your Christmas gatherings, perhaps around the Christmas tree or meal table talking about the greatest of gifts ever given. Ask God

for opportunities and perhaps courage and love to do so. I imagine this would be a prayer that God would answer, even within this next week.

- As we have looked again to the story of His birth, we are now going to look toward the fulfillment of His mission, what He did by giving His life to "save His people from their sins."
- Communion.