

**Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-20**

**“Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, & they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!” 15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”**

## **"Good News from the Heavenly Host"**

**The season of Advent is a season of remembering the coming of Jesus:**

- **His coming as the little baby born in Bethlehem**
- **And His coming as the just judge of all... Who comes at the end of history.**

**What I am doing this season is moving through some of the major events that surround the birth of Jesus given to us in the Gospel accounts and this morning we will consider the pronouncements of the Angel Gabriel & the heavenly host! Here at Church of the King we believe Advent is a very important celebration but we are not legalistic or slavish to it or other parts of the Church calendar in how they are handled & celebrated. Many American churches have long ago left the Church calendar behind and that was in part because of abuses in the past: If you look at a Roman Catholic or Orthodox church calendar they have filled every day with some special remembrance of events or Saints!**

**The Church calendar, as with all those Christmas trappings that we considered last week can become very empty if we lose Jesus as the center! Too often the goal of such Church calendars was to give the Saints lots and lots of things to do that would tie them to the Church and remind them that they had to do these things to stay in right standing with their Savior:**

- **It amounted to a sort of Works salvation!**

**But throwing the baby out with the bath water was not helpful because calendars and special days do shape how we think and that is why many of the reformers argued that we should keep the essential feast days of Advent, Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost. Some did this more formally and others were more casual and here in America as most drifted from the faith we were left with what Linda and I knew as Children: Many who went to church only on Christmas and Easter. Without faith and the meat of the Word & Sacraments throughout the year these soon became empty rituals. In our society today, Christmas and Easter are still with us as relics of our Christian past but Jesus has been largely replaced by Santa Claus and the Easter bunny.**

- **These are forces of secularism that we must stand against if your children, & all of us, are to properly understand & celebrate the true meaning of these important seasons.**
- **So we have works-based church rituals on the one side & secularism on the other and thus we must strive to be Biblical in our practices.**

**Here at Church of the King we follow the basic church calendar with an emphasis on Advent & Christmas, Epiphany, the Easter season, and then the Ascension of Jesus & the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. These take us through the major events in the life & ministry of Jesus and then we remember how they impact our daily lives in the marking of ordinary time!**

- **We need to make sure our children grow up understanding and celebrating these important events.**

**If the church calendar is not central, then I can assure you that the world has plenty of things to replace it with:**

- **They would be happy to have them keep a secularized version of Christmas and Easter calling them winter holiday and spring break!**

**Reformation Day or All Saints Day has been replaced by Halloween... And now even the one American Christian holiday of Thanksgiving is fast being replaced by Black Friday!**

- **And of course we have other special holidays that are peculiar to America like Valentine's Day, Independence Day and of course Super Bowl Sunday, which now even many Church have chosen to accommodate!**

**You may be tempted to think, we have heard all this before, but please think of our newer members and growing children, and of course we know that we should never tire of the old, old story & how God chooses to tell it! So today we come to the Third Sunday of Advent which by tradition celebrates the Joy of His coming and where we light the pink candle! It is often referred to as the Shepherd's candle which is very appropriate for our reading today!**

- **And of course how can we look at the history of what happened with those shepherds that night without talking about the angels!**

**We know from our Christmas accounts from Matthew & Luke that the Angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, then to Mary as he foretold the coming of Jesus. We are not given the name of the angel who appeared Joseph in a dream and or the one who came to the shepherds, but I suspect it may have been Gabriel as well! In any case, they were all angelic appearances in the accounts, so let's take a look at what happened that night some two thousand years ago, a night that would certainly change history:**

- **Mary has given birth to the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us!**

**Now if Hollywood were writing this story the birth of the King of Kings would have come with a great deal of pageantry probably right there in Jerusalem or even Rome itself! We all know that was NOT what happened! God chose to have Jesus born in the very city the Prophets said he would be born & in very humble surroundings:**

- **As Francis & Edith Schaeffer rightly point out a smelly stable is not a fitting place for the birth of a King, no less the Son of God, but it is a perfect place for a lamb to be born!**

**And thus the announcement of this important birth was not sent to Caesar or to the High Priest as the civil and religious leaders of the day...**

- **It was sent to humble Shepherds.**

**"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."**

Now it is important to notice the flow in what the angel said:

He brings glad tidings and great joy! He brings this good news because a Savior has been born...

That Savior is Christ the Lord... AND they will know this because he will give them a sign to look for...

- So an honest question to ask is whether God was trying to be a bit secretive about the coming of Jesus?

He has him born in a small village with no announcement in the Jerusalem Post or the Roman Record. And yet we know from Matthew's Account that the religious leaders in Jerusalem KNEW where the baby would be born and told King Herod! We also know that the Wise Men came from the east knowing that a Royal Savior had been born, details of which they may well have had because they were passed down from Daniel or his friends from many centuries before!

- And of course we have the various prophecies of the Old Testament which pointed to the coming of Jesus at this very time in history if we accept the plain reading of Daniel!
- The birth of Jesus was no secret!

It came at the right time and at the right place and even though it was first announced to these rural shepherds, the witness of that Angel and their obedience is today proclaimed around the world with nativity scenes & Christmas carols! Even in some VERY pagan settings!

- And there was a grand celebration that night, but again only for these faithful shepherds...

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, goodwill toward men!"

- As we have often said in our journey through Genesis, God is telling His grand story of salvation and this is certainly one of the high points that brings Him glory.
- And it brings peace on the earth!

Now here is where we have to be very careful to understand the message and those who carried the message! The Bible does not give us a great deal of detail about the angels nor the heavenly hosts. The Hebrew and Greek words translated as Angel means messenger so it can sometimes mean one of the heavenly cherub as in this case, it can mean Church leaders as was the case in Revelation chapters two & three...

- And it can even mean the Lord Himself as when He came to council with Abraham about the destruction of Sodom.

Celestial angels like Gabriel have been an important part of this story of salvation since the end of chapter three in Genesis:

- There we find that man has been driven out of Eden to protect him, for a time, from the Tree of Life, so he would not eat of it and live forever in his fallen state...
- The entrance to that Garden is then guarded by angels and a flaming sword.

We would be left to speculate about how significant that event was...

- But we again see cherubim as guardians as the Law is given and Moses is told how the Tabernacle was to be built.

The Tabernacle and the later Temples were to be dwelling places for Jehovah God just as He was present in Eden. BUT His presence was in the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest could enter once a year after offering sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the people: *But, the people could not enter!*

At the center of this room was the Ark with a mercy seat guarded again by two cherubim, as described in Exodus 25:17 "You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. 18 & you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. 20 And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, & they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat."

We also see these cherubim on the veil that hung in front of the Holy of Holies Exodus 26: 31 "You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim.

32 You shall hang it upon the four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Their hooks shall be gold, upon four sockets of silver. 33 And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil."

Now obviously, Moses had to be given enough detail to instruct the craftsman about how these golden cherubim were to be made to look and to properly picture them on the veil that was hung between the mercy seat & the people.

- We have neither of those images today, nor the detailed instructions: So we have to do some speculating about what angels actually look like!

Almost all the angels we picture have wings so we get that part right because that is how the Bible describes them! The part I don't think that we get right is their majesty and power. As we consider how the angels appear throughout even the Christmas story we should notice a common theme:

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias he had to say, 'fear not' and he did the same with Mary. When the angel appeared to Joseph we again hear 'fear not' and here in our text the angel, even when he was by himself had to tell the shepherds, 'be not afraid.'

- Now these people were not afraid because angels were scary like zombies or orcs!

They were afraid because their appearance was powerful and glorious... And likely because they would have been familiar with their appearance from the very images on the curtains at the Temple...

- So, they knew they were in the presence of God's messengers!

Thus I have to give the word of warning that I try to give each year... Beware of those cute little cherubs!

No one would fear them, but we do not have to throw them all away, just make sure we use them as teachable moments!

Then in our text, the angel is joined by a heavenly host...

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, goodwill toward men!"

At the Table this morning we are going to sing Angels We Have Heard on High which celebrates this event and we should enjoy the other Christmas carols which speak of the heavenly host singing!

- What a glorious sight that must have been and again given only to these few shepherds!

So I want to close with a reflection on why the news proclaimed by angels that night was such good news and it takes us back to the garden.

- At the end of Genesis 3, man has fallen into sin and the way to the tree of life has been barred so man would not live in this fallen state forever and the tree is now protected by Cherubim & a flaming sword.

**This important event is pictured in the Tabernacle and Temple where man's access to God is still blocked by those Cherubim awaiting the sacrifice that could one day take away sin.**

- **We see Angels announcing the birth of Jesus and we see them comforting Jesus in the wilderness & again in the Garden of Gethsemane.**

**We must remember that when Satan quoted Psalm 91 to Jesus as he was trying to tempt Him to sin, it does not mean that the Scripture was not true: Psalm 91:11 reads, "For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. 12 In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone." The angels did comfort and protect Jesus throughout His earthly life...**

- **And as He rightly told Pilate, He could have at any time called upon vast legions of them to help Him.**

**But Jesus prayed to His Father, Thy will be done not mine because He knew that being the sacrifice for sin was the very purpose for which He had come into this world! It must have brought great sorrow to the hosts of angels as they had to watch the Son of God be humiliated & tortured, scorned & beaten, crucified & buried! And yet where do we see the angels again in the grand story of salvation?**

- **That is right, Mary sees two of them standing on either end of the slab on which Jesus was laid: Just like they were over the mercy seat in the Temple!**

**And we must not forget one of the final things that took place on the day that Jesus, who had been that baby in the manger, was crucified... The veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom: The veil that prevented the people of God from approaching His Holy presence with cherubim woven into it to remind God's people of the guards at the Garden who protected them there.**

- **But now the Tree of Life was available to man once again and the ministry of these angels was complete!**

**People could now come to Jesus as their Savior, repenting and turning from their sin so they could now stand in the very presence of our Holy God in the full righteousness of Jesus, the Son in whom the Father was well pleased. We see the heavenly host singing again in Revelation chapter five, but now they are singing, along with the Saints of all the ages a new song!**

**Revelation 5:9 "And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"**

- **That brothers and sisters was the JOY that was proclaimed to those shepherds keeping watch by night!**
- **And why the angels could sing, 'peace on earth, good will to men'**

**Communion Meditation: Zechariah 9:16-17**

**"Jehovah their God will save them in that day, As the flock of His people.  
For they shall be like the jewels of a crown,  
Lifted like a banner over His land—  
17 For how great is its goodness  
And how great its beauty!  
Grain shall make the young men thrive,  
And new wine the young women."**