

December 20, 2015  
Sunday Morning Service  
Christmas  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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**JOY TO THE WORLD**  
**Luke 2:8-14**

According to the news, nearly 93,000,000 people have left the work force in the last five years. Most of them are assumed to be living on some kind of government subsistence, which is offered through your tax dollars. They might be the lucky ones according to some pundits who warn of a massive, unavoidable economic collapse for America in the near future.

But what does it matter that no one has work or can pay their bills if at any moment in any place in this nation a mentally unstable person might decide to shoot up a public gathering or bomb it with pressure cookers. That is bad, but not nearly as bad as a dirty bomb that spreads incurable disease upon masses of people when it explodes. That threat is out there – we are told.

Or maybe the mass killings in our culture will come at the hands of radicalized Muslims. Is this just a foretaste of the future? Is it really possible, as the experts claim, that Islam seeks to take over the free world and establish a world-wide caliphate? We already know from experience that when Islam rules, Sharia law is enforced which is the authority behind Christians having their heads removed. How many years do we have before that is the case even in America?

But maybe we should not even worry about foreign powers taking over our nation. According to our president and other brilliant thinkers, our greatest fear is really global warming. According to them, the Islamic caliphate won't have much world to conquer because the polar ice caps are melting which is going to flood every coastline for miles inland. Being a progressive, forward thinker, I am considering buying some future beach front property in Kansas City.

Joy to the world! Have a happy holiday season! In light of the reports we scan every day, those kinds of greetings ring rather hallow. How can we experience joy in such a chaotic world? Maybe we can answer that question by asking another one. What is the cause behind all this chaos?

Wouldn't it have been great to live in the day when Jesus was born, the day when the angels came from heaven and shouted, "Merry Christmas"? Well actually they didn't shout "Merry Christmas." They announced the best news the world will ever hear. They shouted *good news of great joy to all people*. Wouldn't it have been great to be with those shepherds sharing their quiet, peaceful, chaos-free lifestyle?

Actually, we would be quite deceived to think that the shepherds and their fellow citizens were without their own problems. They had troubles we cannot even imagine. What was it like for Jews to live under the heel of Rome's boot? And what about the kind of personal struggles all humans share? Not the least of which was their struggle with sin. What hope was there of taking some of their sheep to the temple (as if they would be allowed anywhere near the temple) to sacrifice them to cover their offence against God? They probably were well aware of the continuing guilt that plagued the offerers even after they walked away from the temple sacrifice.

And God says to people like them and people like us, "Joy to the world!" He sent us our Savior. He sent us our Lord. Through Him we have peace with our Creator God. Because of Him our Creator smiles on us. That is good news!

**A Common Situation Was Disrupted (vv.8-9).**

Shepherds guarding sheep was very common. Luke commented on that very typical, pastoral setting. *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night (v.8)*. The field was home for these fellows. In fact, the Greek words behind the English literally state that the shepherds were making the field home while they guarded their flock.

The guys sort of hung out together. They were generally among the undesirables of society. Because they worked outside, worked with animals, they were always ceremonially unclean. Rather than

enduring the repeated ceremonial cleansing that took days, they just didn't bother to go the temple. As a result, often the lower class of society ended up in the shepherding business. By the time of Jesus these workers had a reputation for being liars and thieves. In a court of law, the shepherds' testimony was inadmissible. In Jewish society as a whole, the shepherds were on about the same level as lepers and just a notch above tax-collectors. They were probably equivalent to modern day gypsies.

But all that negative stuff aside, they took care of their sheep. Especially in New Testament times the owners of the sheep would typically be found guarding them, feeding them, giving them drink, and protecting them from predators. Hirelings were not always that faithful. This was difficult work because they had to keep moving the flocks to find grass and water. Though the rest of society looked on it as a lowly calling, God esteemed the shepherd's work by picturing Himself as the Shepherd of His flock.

In spite of a bad reputation, whether deserved or not, the shepherds' work was important. Their heritage went all the way back to Abraham—father of the race. Moses, the great deliverer of the nation, had been a shepherd. The greatest king in Israel's history, David, had been a shepherd. The larger portion of Israel was still agrarian even in the day when Jesus was born. Not only did the shepherds' flocks provide food and wool for clothing, but they also provided thousands of lambs for sacrifice at the temple—especially during the Passover celebration.

But the shepherds were most important because God chose to reveal the good news of the incarnation to them first. Why did God choose them? God sending the angels to shepherds pictured His eternal principle of calling and using the weak or unexpected people in life. Paul wrote it like this: *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).*

Therefore, the life and reputation of shepherds really is a good picture of our need, the sinner's need. In the eyes of their peers, few people needed a Savior from sin as much as shepherds did. We are so much like the shepherds of Israel. We are born in sin. We are

consumed by sin. By nature we cannot do anything but offend our holy Creator God. We are by all means spiritually unclean with the result that we all desperately need a Savior from sin's power and penalty.

To people like us, to the shepherds, God kindly sent a messenger with the good news. Of course, as this story reveals, God-sent messengers can be a bit disruptive. *And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear (v.9).* An angel showing up accompanied by God's glory is an abnormality. Granted, it seems like angels showed up quite often in the Bible times. However, because the history of the Bible covers only about 2,000 years of human history, a dozen angelic appearances in that length of time is not that much. Furthermore, according to Hebrews 13:2, it still is not unusual for angels to show up incognito.

Angels might interact with our lives and we are not even aware of it. But an angel suddenly appearing in the full glory of the Lord will arrest a shepherd's attention. What was that situation like? We really cannot imagine what the glory of the Lord looks like. Peter, James, and John fell down like dead men when Jesus gave them a very tiny glimpse of it. This was a common reaction to any display of God's glory because humans are not able to endure God's amazing character. That is why the normal understanding in Old Testament times was that coming face-to-face with the glory of God would spell death. Fortunately for humans, God never approaches them either through angels, or the Son, or in other manifestations in full glory.

No wonder Luke wrote that they shepherds were terrified. The Greek word for "frighten" is repeated twice here for emphasis. The shepherds were terribly frightened by the glory of the Master Creator. Nothing will assist the created being to a right opinion of our Creator like a glimpse of His glory. It was a glimpse of God's glory that caused the Israelites to fear God at Mt. Sinai. It was small sparks of God's glory that caused the disciples to highly respect Christ.

Seeing God's glory will bring about a change in our relationship with Him. The shepherds were going about their work and minding their own business when God's glory interrupted them. They were shaken out of the ease of everyday work. They responded actively to the news that came in glory.

Should it not be true that the more accurately we see God revealed in His Word, we will undergo change? Our love for God will grow when we comprehend the message of His glory. Our trust in God grows as we see more of His glory revealed in His actions toward His creation. Our appreciation for God increases, which drives us to a deeper devotional life.

Almost every evening I look up into the sky and marvel at God's handiwork. I cannot look at the stars without thinking about Psalm 8 and Psalm 19. David wrote, *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:3-4)*. He wrote, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork (Psalm 19:1)*. The longer I look into the sky, the more stars I see. It is an endless array of God's glory. And I know that if I used a telescope, God's glory would appear even more immense. How can we not have awesome respect for such a Lord and Master?

### **Good News (vv.10-12).**

The awesome God whose glory accompanied the angel sent good news for everyone. *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people" (v.10)*. Therefore, the shepherds needed to stop being afraid. But wait! Isn't it good to be afraid of God? As sinners, we ought to be shocked by our sinfulness when we begin to comprehend God's perfection. As sinners, we ought to be terribly afraid to know that our sins have offended this great God, our Creator. As sinners, we ought to be uncontrollably afraid that the God who was so powerful to speak all creation into existence is also powerful enough to punish us for sin forever.

That kind of fear ought to lead us to bow in humility before our Creator and say the same thing about our sins that He says about them. But it is not good to continue to be afraid of God. God's good news changes our terror into awesome respect. God our Creator, who is offended by our sins, brought good news to us. If we understand the good news, we will stop trembling in fear before the awesome God.

The angel told the shepherds that God sent good news that results in great joy. We must stop to think about the fact that the good news God sent is really GOOD news. We tend to use the word "good" somewhat flippantly. We say that a meal was good, or a boss is good, or the musician is good, or the play was good. But good has to be compared to something because it is a measurement or a conclusion based on a measurement. We live in a very special subculture where we have grown accustomed to quality music. No doubt some of you have been in situations while you visited churches in other places where you might have heard some special music. Chances are that the music was not done well, or even close to well. Invariably in that setting, someone will approach you after the service and say, "Wasn't that special good?" In your heart you think, "No, actually it was not good." But you have a different measurement for good than that sincere Christian from back in the hills has.

When God sends good news, it is good based on His assessment of it, not ours. It has to be good news because God sent it. God is good. Whatever He desires or accomplishes must, therefore, also be good. God does not have to ask us if we think the news is good. It is good because "goodness" personified invented it, authored it, sent it.

The angel declared that this is good news for everyone. It was not good news just for the shepherds. It was not good news just for the Jews. It was not good news just for the people living in that day. This is eternally good news because it impacts all people, all things, in all eternity.

At this point in the story, we ought to be feverishly flipping the pages in order to find out what the good news is. Of course the shepherds wanted to know what the good news was. We should long deeply to know what this news is that our Creator sent. This is almost like our parents saying to us, "You are really going to like the Christmas present we bought for you." The child who hears that is going to anxiously beg and beg to know more, get more clues, yea, even tear open the package to see what it is. Do you ever wish that the whole world would be excited to hear God's good news? Maybe if we feared God first, the good news would be even more welcome to us.

Here is the good news the angel introduced: God gave us a Savior who is our Lord. The good news is that the Savior is born to us. *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who*

is Christ the Lord” (v.11). What incredibly good news to hear that unto us is born a Savior. Did the shepherds understand what a Savior is? Possibly they were thinking about a warrior who would deliver them from Rome, save them from pagan, Gentile rulers. Or maybe even though they were outside the acceptable religious subculture, they still understood their sin and need of a Savior.

Where there is no sense of sin, there is no joy in the good news that a Savior has been born to us. Where there is pride in personal ability to atone for sin against God, there is no joy in the news that a Savior has been born to us.

On the other hand, if we are aware that we have offended God, this is good news indeed. We know that we have sinned against our Creator by breaking His law. We know that He will justifiably condemn us to the lake of fire for breaking His law. We know that we cannot “save” ourselves through doing any kind of good work. We, therefore, are incredibly grateful that a Savior has been born **to** us. He is God’s gift **to** us and **for** us **because** of us.

The Savior is no less than Christ the Lord. Christ is the very person of the Triune Godhead who was chosen in eternity to provide salvation. Christ is the eternal Son of God. He is also the Lord. He is coequal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. That means that God Himself, our Creator who we offend by breaking His law, was born as our Savior from the penalty and power of sin.

And the world concludes, “So?” We know from the rest of this story that the shepherds were convinced that this was good news indeed. Luke told us that *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 (Luke 2:15). And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:20).* The fact that the shepherds glorified and praised God reveals that they understood their need of the Savior. It reveals that they understood this was God’s gracious provision. They were thankful for God’s gift.

This is good news only to people who believe that God is and believe what God says. The fearsome, awesome, great and mighty Creator God says, “I have good news for you. I have provided the Savior from sin so that I can justifiably keep from condemning in the

lake of fire for eternity My created beings who offend because of their sins.” But if a person rejects God’s revelation in creation, he or she is not concerned about hell. If a person does not care that he or she offends God, and does not believe in eternal punishment, Christ’s birth is not good news at all. And so the world worships Santa Clause, joy, presents, materialism, and a jolly good time during the “Holiday Season.” They are even afraid to say the word “Christmas” because it smacks of God’s good news about the Savior. They certainly do not want to offend each other by hinting that there is a Savior.

Maybe they struggle because the birth of the Savior is a bit unusual. The angel told the shepherds *“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (v.12).* That is certainly odd. Were the shepherds a bit surprised that Christ the Lord, coequal with God the Father, was a baby in a manger? This is why the world as a whole takes this whole Savior thing with a grain of salt. “How can a baby born in a barn benefit me?” they wonder. Indeed, how can a person born of other humans save me from the penalty of sin?

This was all part of God’s eternal plan. He promised from the beginning that the Savior of creation would have to be born of a woman. When sin entered the world, God said to Satan, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).* The offspring of a woman has to be born of a woman. Furthermore, in order to redeem us who break God’s law, the Savior had to be like us born under the law. So Paul taught, *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4).* Still the good news from the angel eclipses human wisdom. As a result, those who need it often reject it. But it is still the good news.

### **The Eternal Benediction (vv.13-14).**

A benediction is an expressed blessing. That is certainly what the host of angels offered. The heavenly host praises God for eternity because of the good news. In the shepherd setting, *suddenly there was*

*with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying (v.13).* A multitude of the heavenly host would be impressive. We are not sure how many angels make up a multitude, but it was a bunch. If one angel caused fear, what would a few hundred cause?

Likewise, a bunch of angels praising God should be impressive. To praise God is to attribute to God the glory that is due Him. This is a very difficult task for humans who know God very little, and love God even less. Much of what we call praise to God is actually praise to ourselves. It is quite certain if we would have been with the shepherds, we would have been impressed with God's glory.

That God is pleased with people is to His glory and deserving of all praise. Therefore, the angels announced, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" (v.14). God in the highest deserves all glory. In all situations, for all reasons, God deserves a right assessment of His perfect, righteous character. But especially in His provision of our Savior, He deserves to be praised.

The Mighty God gives peace to people who please Him. True peace comes only from the Creator. He gives true peace only to the people with whom He is pleased. What must we do to gain God's pleasure? God has already taken care of that. People who trust what God has done please Him. We believe Him when He says that our sins have offended Him. We believe Him when He offers the sacrifice of Christ to cover our offense. We believe Him when He promises to give us peace. And suddenly we are no longer afraid of God. Because we are right with God, we, unlike most people on earth, have peace with God.

The world is and always will be filled with trouble and chaos as long as sin reigns. Our loving Creator has sent to us the Savior from that sin. By embracing His gift to us, we have peace with God, peace with others, and peace in our hearts even in the midst of the chaotic world. Joy to the world indeed!