



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Sermon Notes

### *Worship the Newborn King!*

Luke 2:1-13; Matthew 2:1-12

December 23, 2007

- I. **The Plans of Men**
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### **Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 2:1-12**

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

“AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,  
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;  
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER  
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.”

Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.”

After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.”

- ❑ Several months ago, a powerful storm came through our area in the middle of the night. That night, as I heard the first strong clap of thunder, I said to Kimberly, “I bet the kids will be coming in to our room any time now.” Sure enough, about 30 seconds after I said that, the door to our room opened, and I saw Elijah walk through the room, and he was upset because he was scared of the thunder. He was crying, but the minute we pulled him up into our bed, and laid him down in between us, he settled down. About five seconds later, he took a deep sigh and went immediately to sleep. Just as I was about to say the same thing, Kimberly said to me, “All is right with the world now.” And for Elijah, it was. He was safe, his mother and father [so far as he understood it] were in absolute control, and it was safe for him to fall fast asleep.

- ❑ Yet, as we read the Scriptures, and specifically the birth narratives of Jesus Christ, we get the same sense. We should realize, as God’s people, that He is in absolute control, and all we need to do is to trust in Him and find our comfort in His Word.
- ❑ Indeed, now that Christ has come “all is right” for those who put their trust in Him. This truth is absolutely clear as we read the events surrounding the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## I. The Plans of Men

- ❑ When read together, the accounts of Luke and Matthew give a picture of the political hierarchy, a chain-of-command, which existed in Judea during the time of Christ’s birth.
- ❑ The most powerful man in the land was the Emperor of Rome himself, Caesar Augustus. Quirinius was governor of Syria, and in the region of Judea, Herod the Great ruled as king of Judea.
- ❑ Yet, Luke and Matthew’s intention for including this hierarchy is, most definitely, to contrast the power and authority of men with God’s omnipotent sovereignty.
- ❑ Augustus may be Casear, but Christ is born King of Kings!
- ❑ It is this contrast that is powerfully clear throughout the entire narrative.
- ❑ **Luke 2** begins, “Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.”

### a. Caesar Augustus

- ❑ Caesar Augustus was born Gaius Octavian in 63 B.C. He was the grandnephew of Julius Caesar and was later adopted as his [Julius Caesar’s] son and designated as his heir.
- ❑ In 43 B.C. Octavian [Caesar Augustus], Lepidus, and Mark Antony were named as the Second Triumvirate, the three rulers who shared the office of emperor. In 27 B.C. Caesar Augustus became the sole leader of the Roman world.
- ❑ He reigned as emperor until his death in A.D. 14. He ruled for more than 44 years – from January 13, 27 B.C. until August 19, 14 A.D.
- ❑ He was a highly effective emperor politically and militarily and put an end to the civil wars which had raged throughout the empire.

- “The reforms of Augustus as well as his long life contributed to the idea that he was something more than human -- **he was certainly a hero, the Romans thought, perhaps even a god.**”  
*The History Guide*

- Throughout the Roman Empire, Augustus Caesar was revered as more god-like than human. Notice the ancient inscription:

**“Divine Augustus Caesar, son of a god, imperator of land and sea, the benefactor and savior of the whole world...”**

- “Augustus reigned during a time of peace and extensive architectural achievements. After his death, the title ‘Augustus’ was given to all Roman emperors. The ‘Augustus Caesar’ mentioned in Acts 25:21, 25, for instance, is not Octavian but Nero.”  
*Nelson Bible Dictionary*

- The reign of Augustus Caesar ushered in a great time of peace, known as the *Pax Romana* (27 B.C. to 180 A.D.)

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- Thus, Caesar Augustus was considered the Sovereign of the land, the one who possessed absolute authority.
- Therefore, when he ordered a census be taken, “**everyone** was on his way to register for the census...”
  - One scholar writes, “The census...signals an unwelcome, alien intrusion into the affairs of the Jewish people, a reminder of the allegiance required of Israel as a conquered people.”
  - Often times censuses were taken to enlist soldiers for the military, but the Jews were exempt from military service.
  - The purpose of the census was likely, to (eventually) levy taxes against the Jewish people.
  - No doubt, the motivation for Caesar’s decree [for the census] was born out of a desire for greater power, authority and wealth.
  - **Yet, this sinful act on the part of the pagan Caesar was the pre-ordained means by which God would ensure the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah!**
  - Yet, Caesar, although the most powerful human figure of the day, was not the only person of authority in first century Judea.

- The king of Judea, Herod the Great, was also plotting, scheming, and planning in an effort [albeit futile!] to gain and maintain maximum power and authority.

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| <b>b. Herod the Great</b> |
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- Herod the Great was king of Judea from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C.
- Herod was not Jewish, rather, his father was an Idumean (Edomite), and his mother was Arabian. He married Mariamne, heiress to the Hasmonean Dynasty in an attempt to appease the Jews.
- He was an effective warrior, speaker, and politician.
  - During the famine of 25 B.C. he melted down various gold objects in his palace to purchase food for the poor
  - He oversaw massive building projects throughout the region. For example, in 19 B.C. he began the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- However, he was also a cruel and ruthless dictator.
  - He was a paranoid king, and he was terribly jealous and suspicious of anyone who threatened his power.
  - Because of the perceived threat, Herod had the high priest Aristobulus (his wife Mariamne's brother) drowned. Herod then funded an elaborate funeral where he pretended to weep for his deceased brother-in-law.
  - He had his wife, Mariamne, and his mother-in-law [Mariamne's mother] executed.
  - He also had three of his sons executed.
  - Five days prior to his death, he had one of his sons executed. Because he knew no one would mourn his passing, shortly before his death Herod ordered some of the most well-respected citizens in Jerusalem arrested and imprisoned. So that there would be mourning in Jerusalem after Herod's death, he ordered that all of these citizens be executed at the very time of his death.
  - Caesar Augustus apparently made the famous statement, "it is better to be Herod's pig (*hys*) than his son (*hios*)."
- Therefore, it should be of no surprise that when the magi informed him of the birth of the "King of the Jews" [Matthew 2:2], that he would be "troubled" [Verse 3].

- ❑ As a result of being “troubled” King Herod consults with the chief priests [Sadducees] and scribes [Pharisees], inquiring of them where the Messiah was to be born [**Verse 4**].
- ❑ Then, quoting from **Micah 5:2**, the scribes and the chief priests inform Herod that **the Messiah, the king of the Jews, was to be born in Bethlehem** [Verses 5-6].
- ❑ Therefore, with a plan to ultimately kill the newborn Messiah, **Herod sends the magi to Bethlehem to search for the Child** [Verse 8].

## II. The Providence of God

- ❑ The planning and working of both Caesar and Herod [and even Nebuchadnezzar (630-562 BC) some six centuries prior to the birth of Christ], as recorded in Luke 2 and Matthew 2, both underscore the ultimate providence and sovereignty of God in orchestrating human activities [even sinful activities] in order to perfectly fulfill the Old Testament promises of the coming Messiah.

### ◆ Caesar Augustus

- In Luke 2:1-7, the Gospel writer describes a decree that went out from Caesar Augustus which required “everyone” to register in their home of ancestry.
- It is clear, however, that Luke is contrasting the “sovereignty” of Caesar with the sovereignty of God. As powerful as Caesar was – he could make *everyone* register for the census, he was still under God’s sovereign control.
- For, it was the Caesar-decreed census which would become the God-ordained means by which Mary and Joseph would arrive in Bethlehem in order for Mary to give birth to Jesus the Messiah.
  - Luke writes [**Verses 4-6**], “Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.”
    - Scholars are somewhat divided (albeit not fiercely) over whether or not Joseph and Mary were truly husband and wife, or whether they were still betrothed. Likely, they were husband and wife, but since they did not consummate the marriage until after the birth of Jesus, Mary was considered Joseph’s “betrothed” or “espoused wife”
    - Further, Luke’s words that “...while they were there [in Bethlehem], the days were completed for her to give birth” demonstrate that not only was it time for Jesus to be born, but

that the timing of His birth marked the culmination of the providential plan of God the Father in sending His Son as Savior into the world.

- One scholar writes, “On one level, Joseph’s journey is the consequence of the almighty decree of Augustus. On another, even the universal rule of Augustus is conceived as subordinate to another purpose, the aim of God. One may call this ironic, as if Rome is made unwittingly to serve a still greater Sovereign. But it is also prophetic, for it reveals the provisional nature of even Roman rule.”

#### ◆ Herod the Great

- Not only do the actions of Caesar reveal God’s providential control, but the plans of Herod the Great do as well.
- In **Matthew 2:7**, after consulting with the chief priests and scribes, Herod sends the inquiring magi to Bethlehem in order to search for Jesus.
- In other words, through this episode [of Herod inquiring of the chief priests and scribes and his sending the magi to find the Christ-child] God providentially accomplished two things:
  1. He demonstrated the fulfillment of the prophecy in Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem; and
  2. **Herod sent the magi to Bethlehem.** In so doing, God used Herod as His instrument in order to demonstrate the drawing of the nations to God Himself through the Messiah. In fact, when the magi arrived in Bethlehem, they worshipped Christ [Matthew 2:11]. NOTE: If the magi came from Babylon, this would have meant that they traveled some nine hundred miles. This type of journey would have taken several months to travel. Thus, if the star appeared at the time of Christ’s birth, the magi would have arrived when Christ was possibly two to three months old.

#### ◆ Nebuchadnezzar

- It may seem strange to think that Nebuchadnezzar [who lived six hundred years before Christ was born] would have been used by God with respect to the birth of Jesus Christ; yet, it is certainly the case.
- To understand this possibility, one must first know the meaning of the phrase magi “from the east” in Matthew 2.
- The phrase “from the east” likely, meant one of three places:
  - Persia (modern-day Iran)
  - Babylon (modern-day Iraq)
  - Arabia (the Arabian Peninsula – modern-day Saudi Arabia)

- Magi were part of the priestly-political class within the Parthian Empire (modern-day Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan)
- Many believe they, like Abraham, came from Ur in Chaldea (modern-day Iraq).
- With this information, one can, then, understand the significance of Nebuchadnezzar with respect to the birth of Christ.

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- In the sixth century, B.C., Judah fell to Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army.
- At this point, King Nebuchadnezzar took captive the Judeans and relocated them to Babylon [modern-day Iraq].
- One of these Judeans; however, was the prophet **Daniel**.
- Because of Daniel’s ability to interpret dreams, he was made “ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon” (Daniel 2:48). [NOTE: In the book of Daniel, we are told that the magi were among the highest-ranking officials in Babylon (Iraq).]
- Daniel came to be highly respected among the magi in Babylon.

**“Because of Daniel’s high position and great respect among them, it seems certain that the magi learned much from that prophet about the one true God, the God of Israel, and about His will and plans for His people through the coming glorious King. Because many Jews remained in Babylon after the Exile and intermarried with the people of the east, it is likely that Jewish messianic influence remained strong in that region even until New Testament times.”**  
**John MacArthur**

- Therefore, because of the deportation of the Judeans into Babylon in the sixth century B.C., word of the coming Messiah providentially spread into a region of the world which would have otherwise remained ignorant of this truth.
- Not only this, but [due in large part to the Babylonian deportation of Judeans]: **“Pagan leaders, both political and religious, were well aware of Jewish religious distinctives, such as Sabbath observance and marital restrictions, and there were significant Jewish centers of learning in Babylon at the time of the Magi. Gentile religious leaders in the east were regularly exposed to Hebrew Scriptures, prophecy, and teachers.”** Michael Wilkins

- Likely, the magi “from the east”, then, would have been familiar with the prophecy in Numbers 24:17, **“A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.”** Thus, the appearance of the star, in connection with this prophecy could have been one of the primary factors that led the magi to Israel in search of the King of the Jews [indicated by “a scepter”].



- Therefore, even though the magi from the east came from a strongly pagan culture, they were likely familiar with the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.
- Furthermore, the magi were **experts in astronomy, astrology, various occult practices, such as sorcery, as well as their ability to interpret dreams.**
- “Magi were usually leading figures in the religious court life of their country of origin, employing a variety of scientific (astrology), diplomatic (wisdom), and religious (magical incantations) elements in their work.”

Michael J. Wilkins

- There are several proposals as to the nature of the star that the magi followed:
  - i. It was a **supernatural astronomical phenomenon** that God used to declare the birth of the Messiah.
    - ◆ It is possible, if this is the case, that no other person could see the “star”, except for the magi.
  - ii. The supernatural phenomenon was **an angel** sent to herald the birth of Jesus.
    - ◆ At times throughout Scripture, angels are referred to as stars (Job 38:7; Daniel 8:10; Revelation 1:16, 20; 2:1; 3:1)
  - iii. It was an **astronomical event, such as a comet, a supernova, or a conjunction of planets** (where they appear to touch)
    - ◆ On May 27, 7 B.C., Jupiter (which, in Babylonian astronomy, represented the primary deity) came close to Saturn (which represented the Jews), in the constellation Pisces (which represented Palestine)
    - ◆ In March to April 5 B.C. Chinese and Korean astronomers observed a supernova (an exploding star)
    - ◆ In September of 3 B.C., Jupiter (“primary deity”) appeared to come close to the star Regulus (which meant “king” to the Babylonians) within the constellation Leo, the Lion (the symbol for the tribe of Judah is a lion, see Genesis 49:9-10)
- ❖ Note: All of these are *extra-biblical* evidence and speculation and, therefore, we cannot rely too heavily on it. We must view the biblical text at face value and accept it, regardless of *how* it may have occurred (although, astronomy does add legitimacy to this account).
- ❖ According to Matthew 2, there are nine aspects of the star that are revealed (and must be affirmed):
  1. It signified birth.
  2. It signified kingship.
  3. It had a connection with the Jewish nation.
  4. It rose in the east, like other stars.
  5. It appeared at a precise time.
  6. Herod didn’t know when it appeared.

- 7. It endured over time.
- 8. It was ahead of the Magi as they went south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.
- 9. It stopped over Bethlehem. [www.bethlehemstar.net](http://www.bethlehemstar.net)

❖ What we do know is this: **The magi were astronomers and viewed something spectacular that led them many miles into Israel to the city of Jerusalem in search of a newborn King.**

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- ❑ Matthew and Luke’s accounts of the birth of Jesus Christ presents one of the great ironies of the New Testament. The most powerful and brilliant men of the first century – kings, in fact – stood in great contrast to a helpless baby. Yet, it was the young baby, born in great modesty [possibly even poverty] to obscure parents, in an obscure town, in an obscure stable of sorts, and laid in a feeding trough, who was the true King – indeed, the King of Kings.
- ❑ This truth is magnified when one considers the condition of a newborn baby, the most helpless and dependent of all mammals for the longest period of time following birth.
- ❑ Yet, God the Father, once again, providentially protected the newborn Christ, His Anointed One.

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| <b>III. The Person of Christ</b> |
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- ❑ As one observes, in Matthew 2 and Luke 2, the plans of men, and the providence of God, what ultimately emerges is the true identity of the newborn baby in the manger – the Person of Jesus Christ.
- ❑ From these two accounts, the identity of the Person of Jesus Christ is revealed as: (1) **Human**; (2) the **firstborn** [of all Creation] (3) the **Davidic Messiah / Christ**; (4) **Savior**; (5) **Lord**; (6) **King** and (7) **God**
- ❑ The first aspect of Jesus’ identity that is clear in these passages is that He is fully **Human**.
  - At first glance, such a truth may seem rather simple, even unimportant; however, the humanity of Christ is absolutely essential for our salvation.
  - The reason for this is because He was able to be our perfect representative [in our humanity] on the Cross.
  - Furthermore, the truth that Christ was conceived in the womb of Mary, was born as a baby in Bethlehem, and lived to adulthood shows that He also sanctified every aspect of our life – from conception to adulthood. As our human representative, He is Lord not only of every aspect of our life, but every stage as well!
- ❑ The next aspect of His identity was that Christ was the *firstborn*.

- Luke writes, “...And she gave birth to her firstborn son...”
  - This phrase is **VERY** significant:
    - Jesus is the possessor of the rights, privileges, and inheritance associated with the Jewish firstborn son
      - Read Exodus 13:2
      - Numbers 3:12-13; 18:15-16
      - Deuteronomy 21:15-17
      - Colossians 1:15

Wayne Grudem states, “Colossians 1:15, which calls Christ ‘the first-born of all creation,’ is better understood to mean that Christ has the rights or privileges of the ‘first-born’ – that is, according to biblical usage and custom, the right of leadership or authority in the family for one’s generation. So Colossians 1:15 means that Christ has the privileges of authority and rule, the privileges belonging to the ‘first-born,’ but with respect to the whole creation.

- Thirdly, Jesus is revealed as the **Davidic Messiah / Christ**.
  - As Jesus’ legal father, Joseph was of the line of David, thus ensuring Jesus’ Davidic heritage.
  - Furthermore, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David.
  - Finally, Christ fulfilled the Old Testament, ensuring His identity as the long-awaited Davidic Messiah [in Greek, *Christ*].
- Fourthly, Jesus is revealed as **Savior**.
  - The angel told the shepherds, in **Luke 2:11**, “For **today** in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior...”
    - The emphasis here is certainly the timing of **today**. So it is with us. Salvation in Christ is something that begins **today...now**. It is not some far off hope, but a present reality.
    - Furthermore, as our Savior, John Gill writes, “hence His name is called Jesus [Yahweh is Salvation], because he saves from sin, from Satan, from the law, from the world, from death, and hell, and wrath to come, and from every enemy.”  
John Gill
- Fifthly, Jesus Christ is revealed as **Lord**.
  - Even as a newborn infant, Jesus Christ was the Sovereign of all Creation. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords – worthy of all praise, honor and glory.

- Hebrews 2:7 states, “You have made Him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned Him with glory and honor.”
- Finally, Jesus Christ is revealed as being **God**.
- **Matthew 2:11** states, “After coming into the house they [the magi] saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”
    - First of all, the magi **worshipped** the newborn Christ. Such an act is due only to God.
    - Secondly, they presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
      - There is tremendous speculation as to what these gifts meant. Many have suggested the following:
        - **Gold**: Symbol of nobility and royalty. **Christ is King.**
        - **Frankincense**: costly, beautiful smelling incense used in royal processions. It was a white resinous gum from a tree in Arabia. It was used in the Temple in the Old Testament and was sprinkled on certain offerings as a symbol of a desire to please the Lord. The early church father, Origen, suggested frankincense represented deity. **Christ is God.**
        - **Myrrh**: a perfume, mixed with wine and used as an anesthetic. It is the sap from a small tree found in Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. Also, it was mixed with other spices for the preparation of bodies for burial, even Jesus’ body. Therefore, myrrh represented Jesus’ humanity, suffering, and death. **Christ was Human.**
  - *NOTE: During the Middle Ages, because of the three gifts given to the Christ-child, legends began to develop that the magi were: (1) kings, (2) three in number, and (3) named Casper (or Gasper), Balthazar, and Melchior.*
    - *A medieval Irish description describes the magi as follows:*
      - *Gasper was “beardless and ruddy-complexioned”*
      - *Balthazar was “black-skinned and heavily bearded”*
      - *Melchior was “an old man with white hair and a long beard”*
  - *Further, they were thought to represent the three sons of Noah, and because of this, one was thought to be Ethiopian (Balthazar) [Note: Ethiopians were descendents of Noah’s son Ham].*
  - *According to Eastern Tradition (Greek Orthodox), there were twelve (12) magi.*

- **Regardless of what the gifts represented, the gifts of the magi were intended for a king, while their reaction (prostrating themselves and worshipping) was appropriate for God alone.**
- These quasi-pagan astrologers come to Bethlehem looking for an earthly king, and what they found was the King of Kings. **God drew them** to a specific place far from their home, for a specific purpose. This beautifully reveals how Christ came to save not just the Jews, but the Gentiles as well.

#### IV. The Plan of God

- Ultimately, the plan of God, as revealed throughout the Scriptures was to send Christ to the earth to save sinners.
- This is the good news of the Gospel. When the angel appeared to the shepherds, he said, "...behold, I bring you **good news** of great joy which will be for all **the** people..." [emphasis added]
  - The word here for **good news** is εὐαγγελίζομαι, or *euangelizomai*. This is our word for **evangelize**.
- The good news is for all **the** people. This is not a reference to Jews and Gentiles. Luke is referring to, specifically, the people of Israel.
  - This is important because it is consistent with the spread of the Gospel from Pentecost onward. It is God's plan for the spread of salvation...to the Jews first and then to the Greeks.
    - **Romans 1:16:** "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

"To the shepherds, the first notice of Christ's birth was given; not to the princes and chief priests, and learned men at Jerusalem, but to weak, mean, and illiterate men; whom God is pleased to choose and call, and reveal his secrets to; when he hides them from the wise and prudent, to their confusion, and the glory of his grace: and this was a glimpse of what the kingdom of Christ would be, and by, and to whom, the Gospel would be preached." John Gill

- Thus, the drawing of the shepherds to the Christ child first is a demonstration of the Gospel spreading first to the Jews.
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- Then, however, as the shepherds looked on, "a multitude of heavenly host" proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men **with whom He is pleased.**"
    - So often, when this verse is quoted, the phrase "with whom He is pleased" is omitted. Yet, this phrase gives the proper context of the words of the "multitude of heavenly host."

- In other words, the “peace” spoken of here does not apply to every individual who ever lived. It applies to those “with whom [God] is pleased.” In short, it applies specifically to believers in the newborn King, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Furthermore, the “peace” is not the absence of conflict [as the world would define “peace”].
  - In fact, at this time in the first century, the Roman Empire was experiencing the *Pax Romana*, or the Peace of Rome.
  - However, all this meant was that the Roman Empire was not at war. Tragically, man was at enmity with God while Rome was experiencing “peace.”
  - The peace that the angels spoke of was something much more significant than simply the absence of physical conflict; the “peace” here refers to the harmonious relationship that can exist [primarily] between God and man; but also, between Jew and Gentile (**Ephesians 2:14-15**). This is a peace that comes only through Jesus Christ: Luke 1:79; 10:5-6; 19:38, 42; Acts 9:31; 10:36.

“God’s peace extends to ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας (*anthropois eudokias*), ‘men of his good pleasure,’ which is almost a technical phrase in first-century Judaism for God’s elect, those on whom God has poured out his favor.”

- ❖ Ultimately, the plan of God revealed here in the birth narratives of Christ was that the Lord Jesus came to save sinners, those near [the Jews – represented by the Shepherds] and those far off [the Gentiles – those represented by the magi].
- ❖ This is the sense that Christ would be the Savior of all the Father gave Him [John 11] – that He would save both Jews and Gentiles, without distinction of race. The drawing of the magi demonstrated this profound truth.

“Matthew’s wise men were a classic case of fish out of water. ‘Like a meeting of Iranian ayatollahs in Nebraska,’ quips Theodore Jennings Jr. of the Chicago Theological Seminary...Indeed, the Magi are sometimes used simply as a way of expressing Christianity’s openness to the far-flung and unlikely.” *Time Magazine*, December 13, 2004

- ❖ **It would be through the work of Jesus Christ that God would draw all His people [the people; “those with whom He is pleased”] to Himself.**

- ❖ **Yet, not only would God draw His people from “near” and from “far off” to Himself through the Christ-child; but, once these individuals encountered Christ, they went back to their homes, whether it be in the outskirts of Bethlehem or in the “east” [modern-day Iraq/Iran]- nearly one thousand miles away! This is the same principle that will occur at Pentecost. God draws His people to Himself, and sends them out! This is truly a great miracle of Christ’s birth!**