

## PROCLAIMED

Luke 2:4-19

What are some of your earliest memories of Christmas? It may be about the bright lights on the evergreen tree. It might involve something about Santa Claus, or getting a Christmas present. As we search in the “ancient history sections” of our minds, we might think about family and meals and fruit cake or a song might come into our memory. Giving gifts, it seems, is what Christmas is all about. Many times, we will argue that giving gifts is not what Christmas is all about, we say “Christmas is about the birth of Jesus.” Well, it **is** the story of God coming to live with the humanity He had created. However, when we consider that God so loved the world that He **gave** His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but has everlasting life, then we understand that this is the greatest gift the world has ever seen. Putting it in that light, makes giving gifts an appropriate commemoration of the event.

It seems that part of the fun of Christmas especially for children (and some adults) is the anticipation of getting a gift. We might wonder whether anyone was expecting or anticipating that God would be giving us a gift of Himself at the time it happened. As it turned out, only a few were really expecting it and anxiously looking for the event although many knew of the hope that Israel had of a Messiah coming one day to save them. The prophecies of old had revealed when and where it was to happen. Daniel (9:25-26) had given information about when, and Micah (5:2) had told where. A few knew that the time was near but most others didn't have a clue. There were a couple of people who knew very well that the time was near.

### Fulfilled – 2:4-7

<sup>4</sup> 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, <sup>5</sup> in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> 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. Luke 2:4-7 (NASB95)

So many things happen and we observe them and think we know what is going on. Things happening in our government and throughout the world such as health care changes, the passage of legislation accepting abortion and homosexual lifestyles, the prohibition of prayer and the reading of the Bible in public functions, the breakup of the Soviet Union, the unrest in the Middle East, the posturing for war by the North Koreans and Iranians, and the outbreak of a viral pandemic are just a few significant changes that we see happening. We think we know what is happening, but we probably do not realize what is really taking place as it relates to God's Plan of Salvation for His creation.

In the days of Mary and Joseph, very few people would have thought that the decree from Caesar that a census was to be taken so all the world could be taxed had anything to do with the coming of God's Messiah, but it did. God knew that this would happen and was the means by which a peasant girl from Galilee would be in Bethlehem of Judea at the right time for the Messiah to be born. God is never late and He is never early. At the *appointed time*, the right events came together and it happened just as it had been foretold.

As we read the events in this brief account, it is amazing how the Holy Spirit inspired the writer to include so much significant information. Joseph and Mary were from Nazareth (the Messiah was to be known as a Nazarene), Joseph was a direct descendant of David, Mary was his espoused wife (the marriage had not been consummated), and Jesus was her firstborn (the firstborn belongs to the Lord and this is also supportive of the fact she was a virgin).

## Announced – 2:8-14

<sup>8</sup> In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. <sup>10</sup> 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; <sup>11</sup> for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> “This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” Luke 2:8-14 (NASB95)

People had raised sheep in this Judean hill country for centuries. Young David shepherded sheep on those hills and learned many lessons about the relationship of the shepherd to his sheep and how these lessons applied to God and His care for us. One of the most beautiful pieces of literature ever written was developed out of David’s recognizing the love that God had for him. We are familiar with the 23rd Psalm, where David wrote, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” During David’s day, the occupation of being a shepherd was a respected one; however, at the time Jesus was born the people of that area had outgrown their roots, in that at that time when Jesus was born shepherding was looked down on. Shepherds were not in the upper echelons of society. It amazes me that people then, as well as now, tend to judge the worth of a person by his or her occupation. In fact, we even see published results of surveys of public opinion polls of what is considered to be the most respected occupations. What a person does to earn a living has nothing whatsoever to do with the worth of the individual.

The gospel message of hope can be found throughout the Old Testament and we know that this message of hope is associated with an individual, a Person, Who would come onto the scene of history. When the time was right, or as the Bible says. “in the fullness of time,” this event happened in the little village of Bethlehem.

All the world needed a Savior, but all in the world didn’t realize their need. The kings and emperors, the princes and priest, the governors and rulers, the rich and proud – all these didn’t realize their need for a Savior. It is difficult or next to impossible to lead a materially successful and proud person to accept the Lordship of Jesus and to know Him as Savior. I’m sure you have friends who are reasonably successful, they think they are happy, they do pretty much what they want to do and they will tell you that they see no need for the Lord in their lives. I think this is why Jesus taught us that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. God knows our nature. He knew that the message of the birth of the Savior would not be properly received by the so-called “successful” people. Therefore, He sent His angels to those who knew they needed help – those who were not puffed up with pride at their own importance.

The account of the appearance of an angel (who suddenly stood by them) at night gives us further information regarding angels. Apparently, there is a radiance or glow associated with the presence of angels. This is termed, by Luke, the glory of the Lord. I think it is safe to say that we don’t understand all we know about angels and we certainly don’t understand this phenomenon. We can read of similar radiance associated with Moses when he came down from the mountain after having been in the presence of God. When Jesus met with Moses and Elijah on the mountain of transfiguration, all three of these were described as “shining.” The appearance of the angel is not nearly so important as what he said to the shepherds. “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”

This statement of “fear not” carries a message that could easily have two meanings. The first and most obvious is to not be afraid of the angel. A second meaning of “stop being afraid” is perhaps more significant considering the message that followed. Since we have a Savior, we do

not have to live our lives in fear – we can stop being afraid. Fear paralyzes, and it causes us to miss out on a lot of living.

In the prophetic passage about the coming of the Messiah from Isaiah 61, we can see that the Messiah would come “to set the captives free.” One of the things from which we can be free is fear. Much of human fear is associated with death and the uncertainty of that situation. Many people are literally afraid to die. These fears are rooted in our Old Nature, the way we were before we were saved. This Old Nature was subject to the power and penalty of sin. The power of sin was such that we could not keep from sinning, the penalty of sin was death. The work of the Savior was such that He redeemed our life from destruction and gave us new life; that is, a New Nature that is not subject to the power of sin. This does not mean that we never miss the mark but it does mean that “sinning” is no longer a way of life for us. And if we do sin, then we know that we have forgiveness because of what our Savior has done for us. The angel said that he had good tidings of great joy in that a Savior had been born. We would all agree with the angel, that is good news.

I’m sure the shepherds were wondering how they would know what the angel said was true. The angel anticipated the question by telling them of the way they could know. Verse 12 says “And this... manger.” When the shepherds found such an unusual thing, they would then know they had found the Christ Child.

Sometimes you wonder why it was necessary that the Christ should be born in such humble surroundings. There He was in a stable (or perhaps a cave) instead of a house, He was lying in a feed trough instead of a crib, and His earthy parents were relatively poor rather than well off materially. I believe that the situations surrounding the birth of Jesus were this humble so that God could demonstrate to us that what we do with our lives is not dependent upon the circumstances into which we are born. Not only does the Savior set us free from fear, He also sets us free from our circumstances.

In one of the many books by Watchman Nee he related a story about “circumstances.” One day an older Christian happened on a younger fellow Christian and as everyone is likely to do, asked the question: “How are things going with you?” His friend replied, “Pretty well, under the circumstances.” The older man asked, “What are you doing down there?” “Down where?” asked his friend. “Down under the circumstances, we should be on top of the circumstances.” Yet, all of us know of situations where people use their circumstances as an excuse for all manner of evil in their lives. A lot of the sociologists try to tell us that the reason for all the crime in the inner cities is because of the environment (circumstances) that the people are in. When we stand before the judgement seat of Christ, that excuse is not going to hold up. He has been there; He knows the humblest of circumstances.

After the message was delivered by the angel, more marvelous things happened when a multitude of angels appeared along with the first angel. They praised God by declaring His glory and they blessed those on earth with a promise of peace for people of good will.

Surely, God is to be praised for what He has done. In sending a Savior into the world that had rebelled against Him, He showed the kind of unique love that He has for mankind. The praise the heavenly host gave was quite simple and yet so meaningful. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” The highest praise and adoration that we have or can imagine should be offered to this loving Father God. As we approach life with this as our highest priority, then we find that we must move SELF out of the number one position. As we do that, we will find that our relationships with others will be greatly improved. If this approach would grow and spread to those around us, then truly there would be PEACE on earth

and GOOD WILL toward men.

After such a happening as this, it would be hard to imagine that the shepherds would simply go back to tending their sheep without doing something. Let's see what they did.

#### Found – 2:15-19

<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. Luke 2:15-20 (NASB95)

The shepherds decided among themselves to go check this out. They wanted to see for themselves. Their response was predictable. Here was something that was for **their** good and they wanted to experience all of it that they could. The response they made took some effort in that they had to go into Bethlehem. The response also involved some risk in that they left their sheep to go see this thing which had come to pass. The effort and the risk were worth the benefit they experienced. As Luke's account relates, they returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen. We would have been amazed if the shepherds had just ignored the whole thing. I'm sure that God is dismayed and disappointed with people who, since that time, have ignored and rejected the good news that a Savior has come and that they can know and experience salvation by responding to the message. It may take some effort to learn more about what they have heard. It may involve some risk to follow Christ. But all who do will tell you that it is well worth the risk, because with Jesus, even in losing, you win.

The shepherds were not disappointed. They found the situation to be exactly as the angel had told them. They found Mary and Joseph and the Child.

We are not given the details of the visit to the stable; however, you have to believe that they admired the Child, they may have even knelt in worship. You just know that they told Mary and Joseph about the angels that they had seen. This must have encouraged Mary and Joseph. There they were in less-than-ideal conditions, 85 miles away from home, there was no one to help with the birth, they were stuck off in a stable. They may have wondered if God cared about what was happening. Had He forgotten and was not aware of what they were going through? The shepherds then came with their story and this, I'm sure, gave Mary and Joseph encouragement that God and all the angels of heaven were not only aware, but also were watching over them. Are we aware of God's caring for us today?

Luke tells us that Mary kept all these things in her heart and pondered them. A lot had happened in her life during the last year. There were other things to come that would impact her life because of this relationship in which she found herself. So, it should be with us. When Christ is in our lives there will be an impact and we will be influenced by His presence. Sometimes it takes a lot of "pondering" things to try to make sense of all the things that happen in our lives.

But let's get back to the shepherds. After they had seen for themselves and had experienced the facts, they told others what had been told to them about the Christ Child. They had what it takes to be a good witness of the gospel. Not only must we hear, we must also believe enough to take steps of faith to experience the truth of the gospel. Only then are we able to properly witness. The shepherds would likely share their experience and the message for as long as they lived. So, it should be with us who have accepted Jesus as Lord and have experienced the new birth. We should share it with others as long as we live. We would be

amazed if the shepherds did not tell everyone with whom they came in contact. Yet, so many of us who have been saved never bother to tell anyone else about it.

There are some significant truths in the events of this story that we can relate to this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

1. The good news will be proclaimed either by angels or by men.
2. Those that hear the good news can check it out.
3. Those that do check it out will find it to be true.
4. Once we have determined the validity of the gospel, we are compelled to share it with others.
5. Everyone who hears the message will react to it. They will either accept it or reject it.
6. The truth that we have a Savior continues to be good news to those that realize their need of Him.

Just as the shepherds went to check it out for themselves, every person on earth needs to determine for themselves whether the claims of Jesus Christ are true. There is nothing of any higher priority for anyone.

As we see the magnitude of God's love for us as demonstrated in the Incarnation and in the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, we too can go out glorifying and praising God for all the things that He has done and is doing even today.