

Joy To The World! The Lord Is Come

Luke 2:1-20

Introduction: 1) One of the things I love about Christmas is the beautiful carols and hymns we sing celebrating the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord. From “Angels We Have Heard On High” to “O Come, All Ye Faithful” I love to hear them performed, and to I love to sing them with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

2) However, it is now the case that these precious advent psalms are fading fast in our post-modern context and losing popularity in our post-Christian culture. The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) released its list of “Top 25 most performed holiday songs.” [Updated 3-6-12] Only one explicitly religious song made the list coming in at #10 and it was the “Little Drummer Boy.”

The top 25:

1. Santa Claus is Coming to Town
2. The Christmas Song
3. Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas
4. Winter Wonderland
5. White Christmas
6. Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow

7. I'll Be Home for Christmas
8. Jingle Bell Rock
9. Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
10. Little Drummer Boy
11. Sleigh Ride
12. Silver Bells
13. It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year
14. Feliz Navidad
15. Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree
16. Blue Christmas
17. Frosty the Snow Man
18. A Holly Jolly Christmas
19. I saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus
20. Here Comes Santa Claus
21. Home for the Holidays
22. Santa Baby (sung by Madonna)
23. It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas
24. Carol of the Bells
25. Wonderful Christmastime

Roman emperor (31 B.C. – A.D. 14). Having replaced the republic with an imperial form of government, he expanded the empire to include the entire Mediterranean world, established the famed *Pax Romana* (“Roman Peace”) and ushered in the golden age of Roman literature and architecture. Augustus (which means “exalted”) was a title voted to him by the Roman senate in 27 B.C. Census: Used for military service and taxation. Jews, were exempt from Roman military service, but not taxation. God used the decree of pagan emperor to fulfill the prophecy of Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

2:2 *Quirinius*. This official was possibly in office for two terms, first in 6-4 B.C. and then in A.D. 6-9. A census apparently is associated with each term. This is the first as Luke makes clear. Acts 5:37 refers to the second.

2:3 *Own town* refers to the town of their ancestral origin. Joseph and Mary, both descendants of David, hailed from Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David to whom God promised a permanent heir (cf 2 Sam. 7:12-17).

2:4 *Bethlehem*, the town where David was born (1 Sam. 17:12; 20:6), was at least a three-day trip from Nazareth (Between 70-90 miles depending upon the route one takes. Minimally, it is a 3 day journey). Bethlehem is generally thought to mean “House of Bread.” Bethlehem is located in what is now Palestinian territory among the Judean hills six miles south of Jerusalem. It is

one of the oldest cities in the biblical world, dating to prehistoric times. Many biblically significant events occurred in Bethlehem. Rachel was buried here (Gen. 35:19); Elimelech and his wife Naomi lived in Bethlehem and then moved to Moab (Ru 1:1-2). Later Naomi returned with her daughter-in-law Ruth. David was raised and anointed as king in Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:4, 13; 17:12); Micah wrote in his prophecy it would be the birthplace of the Messiah (Mc 5:2); and, Jesus fulfilled that prophecy being born in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:1; Lk 2:4-7). In the fourth century A. D. Emperor Constantine built a church over the alleged site of Jesus' birth. Bethlehem is also the place where the church father Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, thus producing what became the standard Bible in the Catholic Church for a thousand years.

Judea: From the tribe of Judah. The Greco-Roman designation for the southern part of Palestine. The north is known as Galilee. Nazareth was in Galilee. Bethlehem was in Judea.

2:5 with Mary. Mary too was of the house of David and probably was required to enroll. In Syria, the Roman province in which Palestine was located, women 12 years of age and older were required to pay a poll tax and therefore to register. Mary was his betrothed wife; they were legally married though the marriage had not yet been consummated. Jesus was conceived by a virgin as Isa. 7:14 (cf 1:31-33) prophesied. She is now near the time of her delivery. An

out of the way, insignificant little town, Bethlehem, would be the birthplace of the King of all kings. The location a humble one. The place the baby would lay a humiliating one.

O Little town of Bethlehem

O Little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie!

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by.

Yet in thy dark streets shineth The Everlasting Light;

The hopes and fears of all the years, are met in thee tonight.

II. Away in a Manger

2:6-7

(Jesus came at the right time)

2:7 Luke begins by describing the nature of the birth (vs. 6-7). *Firstborn*.

Mary had other children subsequent to this. (cf Matt. 12:46). *Swaddling*

Cloths. Strips of cloth that were used to bind a baby tightly. It kept the baby

warm and also from injuring sensitive facial skin and eyes with his or her own

(often sharp) fingernails. It was believed they strengthened the limbs. This is

still the custom in some Eastern culture. The absence of such cloths was a sign

of poverty or lack of parental care (Ezek. 16:4). *Manger*. A feeding trough for

animals. This is the source of the notion that Christ was born in a stable,

something nowhere stated in Scripture. Ancient tradition held that he was born

notes that Jesus comes for the right reason as Savior and Lord. He also teaches us that God delights in surprising us.

- If the shepherd's field is where they were keeping watch that night, it was about 2 miles from Bethlehem. Watching the flocks was possibly for temple sacrifices, but we cannot be sure. Thus the month, date and precise time of Christ's birth cannot be known with any certainty (v. 8). While some have portrayed the shepherds as despised, unclean, and even thieves, the fact they are so often seen in a positive light in the Bible calls for a different assessment. They are the lowly and humble, the unimportant and ignored by the world. But not by God. They are common, everyday people like you and me that are the object of God's love and concern. They are the poor in spirit, and their's will be the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3).
- "Do not be afraid" (a key theme in the birth narrative: Zacharias (1:13); Mary (1:30); *Magnificat* (1:74). Note what is said in each!
- (Vs. 10) Wycliffe translation: "I evangelize to you a great joy." The shepherds are to exchange their great fear for great joy! And what good news of great joy it is. God has not sent a general or judge, a reformer or a governor, an educator or economist. No, he delights in saving us. He has sent a Savior (see v. 11). Interestingly, the idea of announcing good news and a Savior's birth is found on an ancient inscription celebrating Caesar

Augustus' birth. This announcement is all together of a different nature from that one. This Savior is a different Savior, one like the world had never seen or ever will see again.

City of David – Bethlehem because David was born there (v. 4) meaning as we previously noted “house of bread.” Warren Wiersbe says, what “an ideal birthplace for the Bread of Life” (p.23).

to you (v.11) – (dative of advantage) for you and your benefit.

this day – a favorite phrase of Luke noting the significance of this event.

The description of the one born is significant Christologically: “Savior, Christ the Lord” (v. 11). Only here in the New Testament in this form.

Savior – only in Luke in the 4 gospels. Its other occurrence in Luke is 1:47 and is a reference to God! It speaks of a deliverer and in the Old Testament, its primary reference is to God. Augustus was known as a Savior, as were the gods, certain rulers and even physicians. “Jesus’ birth calls into question both the emperor’s status as Savior and the peace of Augustus [*pax Romana*] that gave rise to that acclaimed status” (J. Green, 135).

Christ – looks back as well to the Old Testament and the promised Davidic Anointed One of 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2. He is the Lord’s Anointed, the

culmination of Old Testament promise, hope and expectation. Such hope finds marvelous expression in Charles Wesley's "Hail, Thou Long Expected Jesus."

"Hail, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

"Hail, thou long expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free:
From our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the saints Thou art;
Long desired of ev'ry nation, Joy of ev'ry waiting heart."

"Born Thy people to deliver, Born a child, and yet a King.
Born to reign in us forever, Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit, Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit, Raise us to Thy glorious throne."

Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

Lord – Lord was also ascribed to the Roman emperor. He was so designated by men. The One born this night is so designated by God. This one is Messiah Lord, Messiah-God as the unfolding of Luke's gospel will show so clearly.

- A sign is provided and it is something unusual indeed: not the swaddling cloths, but a manger, an animal feeding trough. The Messiah's crib is a place where animals eat and drool. No child born that day had less hopeful

prospects, a more dismal future. Deity invaded planet earth not as a prince, but as a pauper. Here is the parent's poverty. Here is the Lord's humility. Darrell Bock points out, "Messiah's life will contain an unusual bookend for a king, since he was born in an animal room and will die with robbers" (Bock, 219).

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O Come, Desire of nations, bind All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease, Fill all the world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall Come to thee, O Israel!

IV. **Hark! The Herald Angels Sing** **2:13-14** **(Jesus came with the right choir)**

- For the first time in hundreds of years the visible glory of God was on display. Interestingly angels are said to praise God at Creation (Job 38:7); the Incarnation (Luke 2:13-14) and the Salvation of sinners (Luke 15:10).
- host – a military term for a band of soldiers, now praises the Lord in “the highest way” or “highest place.” Heaven offers praise and humanity is promised peace.
- Glory to God – (praise, worship, adoration, ascribing to God His worth) in the highest possible way, and on the earth peace to men of good will, on whom his good pleasure rest. The Savior, Christ the Lord, has come for all

people (v. 10), but those who receive Him as their Savior are those who will benefit from His coming, men of God's good pleasure; Men like the shepherds not Herod, people like Anna and Simeon, not Augustus or Pilate. Yes, in Jesus heaven and earth come together.

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

“Hark! The herald angel sing, “Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild; God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful, all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic hosts proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
“Hark! The herald angel sing, “Glory to the new-born King;

V. Go, Tell It on the Mountain 2:15-18, 20
(Jesus came to the right persons)

The announcement moved the shepherds to action setting off an evangelistic “chain reaction” (Bock, 221). What they were told they must investigate, and they must do so immediately. They quickly obeyed.

- They talked (briefly I'm sure!) among themselves about what they had seen and heard.
- They responded in faith and “came with haste.” They “hit the bricks” and did so promptly. Like Mary (1:39), they responded immediately, as we should, to God's word, “this thing which the Lord has made known to us.”

- Coming to Bethlehem, they saw exactly what they were told. God was true to His word. There was Mary the mother, Joseph the step-father, and the Babe, the little Lord Jesus, lying in a manger. They saw with their own eyes the Savior, the Christ, the Lord.
- Verse 20 tells us the shepherds now take on the assignment of the angels! Think about it. We do the work of angels when we tell the good news of Jesus!
- Seeing, they start speaking, telling, witnessing, evangelizing! They become the first human evangelists of the good news. They became Christmas evangelists.
- Angels in heaven and men on earth join heart and voice in announcing the good tidings of great joy.
- Most excellent Theophilus (1:1-4) may not be able to consult the angels, but he can track down the shepherds if he likes.
- Others heard and marveled, “wondered” (*ESV*), “were amazed” (*NIV*), at what the shepherds told them (v.18). The message of Jesus will always cause a stir. The response will vary as well.
- You see the Christ born into this world must also be born in your heart and in mine. Some will receive Him. Some will reject all. All should be confronted with Him.

- The shepherds returned from where they came, but they did not return the same! They now had a new song in their heart and good news they had to share. Keep quiet? Not a chance! What did they do? What must we do?
- The shepherds returned to their fields, to their calling and assignment. However they returned not frightened (v.9) or confused. They returned glorifying (cont) and praising (cont) God. Theirs was a life transformed. Having met the Christ, the Savior, the Lord, they would never be the same. They continually glorified the Lord. They constantly praised His Name.
- They glorified and praised God for His gift of revelation, for the gift of hearing and seeing all these things concerning the Christ. God did it, not them. God took the initiative, not them. God sought them out and they responded. Here is divine sovereignty and human responsibility once again wed in matchless, marvelous, and mysterious union.

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Go tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and ev'rywhere;
 Go tell it on the Mountain That Jesus Christ is born.
 Down in a lowly manger The Humble Christ was born
 And God sent us salvation That blessed Christmas Morn.
 Go tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and ev'rywhere;
 Go tell it on the Mountain That Jesus Christ is born.

VI. Mary Did You Know?

2:19

(Jesus came through the right woman)

- Mary kept, she treasured, (imperf.) and pondered (went over the things she had seen and the words she had heard) all these things in her heart. There was ongoing contemplation and reflection, now, and I suspect throughout her Son's entire life as she watched Him grow into a man; "the Savior." She will be the only human with Him from the beginning to the end of His earthly life.
- A.T. Robertson says, "But did Mary also keep a Baby Book? And may not Luke have seen it?" (*W.P.*, vol II, 26). I suspect she did, at least in her heart. We, are the beneficiaries, of her heart's diary.

Mary, Did You Know?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb;
And the sleeping Child you're holding is the great I AM!

Conclusion

- The words were written by the famous English hymn writer (he is credited with some 750 hymns) Issac Watts (1674-1748) and first published in 1719. It was based on the second half of Psalm 98 and though it is one of the most

popular and beloved Christmas hymns of all time, it was written to celebrate not the first coming of Christ, but his second coming at the end of history.

The song: “Joy to the World!”

Joy to the World! The Lord is Come!

Joy to the World, the Lord has come! Let earth receive her King;
Let ev’ry heart prepare Him room, And Heav’n and nature sing,
And Heav’n and nature sing, And Heav’n, and Heav’n, and nature sing,

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat, Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow, Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love, And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Jesus does rule the world with truth and grace. The question for all of us to ask and answer this day: “Does he rule my heart, my life, with His truth and grace?”