

The Christmas Evangelist

Luke 2:8-20

Introduction: 1) One of the things I like about Christmas are the beautiful carols we sing celebrating the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord. From “Angels We Have Heard On High” to “Silent Night” I thrill to hear them performed and to sing them with the saints of God.

2) However, it is now the case that these precious advent psalms are fading fast and losing popularity in our hyper-modern, post-Christian culture. On November 27, 2006 the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) released its list of “Top 25 most performed holiday songs.” Only one explicitly religious song made the list coming in at #8, and it was the “Little Drummer Boy.” The top ten:

1. “The Christmas Song (Chestnut Roasting on an Open Fire)” Nat “King” Cole
2. “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” The Pretenders
3. “Winter Wonderland” Eurythmics
4. “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” Bruce Springsteen
5. “White Christmas” Bing Crosby
6. “Let it Snow! Let it Snow! Let it Snow!” Andy Williams
7. “Jingle Bell Rock” Bobby Helms
8. “Little Drummer Boy” the Harry Simeone Chorale & Orchestra
9. “Sleigh Ride” The Ronettes
10. “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” Gene Autry

Why even Madonna cracked the top 25 with her rendition of “Santa Baby”, and yet the more provocative title of all came in at #23 by Band Aid entitled, “Do They Know Its Christmas?” Yes the world knows its Christmas, they just don’t know what, or who, Christmas is all about!

3) What a difference 2000 years makes. What a difference between a contemporary Christmas and the first Christmas when angels sang to the shepherds, those who would become the Christmas Evangelist, “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (*NKJV*) or as the *ESV* translates it, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

4) These verses are bracketed by references to the shepherds with the good news of the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord at the heart. These humble peasants will herald this good news and justly receive the title, “the Christmas Evangelist.”

Transition: What can we learn from this simple, yet supernatural event, this greatest of all stories, that will inspire us to continue the grand tradition and legacy of Christmas evangelists? Let me highlight 3 basic truths.

I. The Revelation of Good News Invites Our Wonder. 2:8-14

- Luke now moves from the birth of Jesus (2:1-7) to its proclamation. This is the 3rd eyewitness account or announcement (cf. 1:5-25 to Zacharias, 26-38 to Mary) as Luke fulfills his promise to Theophilus to give him “an orderly account... of

those things in which he has been instructed” (1:3-4). What are the wonderful aspects of the revelation by God of good news?

1) God delights in surprising us. 2:8-10

- If shepherd’s field is where they were keeping watch that night, it was about 2 miles from Bethlehem. Watching the flocks: possibly for temple sacrifices but we cannot be sure. Thus the 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 poor in spirit, and their’s will be the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3).
- “Do not be afraid” (key theme in the birth narrative: Zacharias (1:13); Mary (1:30); *Magnificat* (1:74). Note what is said in each!
- (Vs. 10) Wycliffe: “I evangelize to you a great joy.” The shepherds are to exchange their great fear for great joy! And surprising good news of great joy it is. God has not sent a general or judge, a reformer or a governor. No, he delights in saving us. He has sent a Savior (see v. 11). The idea of announcing good news and a savior’s birth is found on an ancient inscription celebrating Caesar Augustus’ birth. This announcement was all together of a different nature. This Savior is a different Savior, one like the world had never seen or ever will see again.

2) God delights in saving us. 2:11-12

City of David – Bethlehem (v. 4) meaning “house of bread,” as Wiersbe says, “an ideal birthplace for the Bread of Life” (p.23).

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

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

The description of the one born is most 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 Davidic Anointed One promised in 2 Samuel 7 and enthroned in 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. This one is so designated by God. This one is Messiah Lord, Messiah-God as the unfolding of Luke's gospel will show.

- A sign is provided and 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 lower prospects, a more dismal future. Deity invaded planet earth not as a prince, but as a pauper. Here is the parents 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).

3) God delights in satisfying us. 2:13-14

- 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 Archelaus. Yes, in Jesus heaven and earth come together. Such a beautiful song finds eloquent expression in a Christmas song written by Charles Wesley and altered by George Whitefield.

"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 angels sing, “Glory to the new-born King

Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time, behold Him come, Offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th’incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel.

Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the new-born King

Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.

Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the new-born King.”

Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

Felix Mendelssohn, 1809-1847

Alt. by George Whitefield, 1714-1770

II. The Proclamation of Good News Inspires Our Witness. 2:15-19

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.

1. Being a witness involves seeing. 2:15-16

- 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.

2. Being a witness involves sharing. 2:17-18

- 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 X-mas evangelist.
- Angels in heaven and men on earth join heart and voice in announcing the good tidings of great joy.
- Most excellent Theophilus may not be able to consult the angels, but he can track down the shepherds if he like.

- Others heard and marveled, “wondered” (*ESV*), “were amazed” (*NIV*), at what the shepherds told them. The message of Jesus will always cause a stir. The response will vary as well, as vs 19-20 reveal.
- 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.

3. **Being a witness involves savoring. 2:19**

- Mary kept, she treasured, (imperf.) and pondered (went over the things she had seen and the words she had heard). There was ongoing contemplation and reflection, now, and I suspect throughout his entire life. 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. From this heart what might she say? What might she sing of this one born in a manger and crucified on a cross?

“O Sing a Song of Bethlehem”

O sing a song of Bethlehem, of shepherds watching there,
And of the news that came to them from angels in the air:
The light that shone on Bethlehem fills all the world today;
Of Jesus’ birth and peace on earth the angels sing always.

O sing a song of Nazareth, of sunny days of joy,
O sing of fragrant flowers’ breath, and of the sinless Boy:
For now the flowers on Nazareth in every heart may grow;
Now spreads the fame of His dear name on all the winds that blow.

O sing a song of Galilee, of lake and woods and hill,
Of Him who walked upon the sea and bade the waves be still:
For though like waves on Galilee, dark seas of trouble roll,
When faith has heard the Master’s word, falls peace upon the soul.

O sing a song of Calvary, its glory and dismay;
Of Him who hung upon the tree, and took our sins away:
For He who died on Calvary is risen from the grave,
And Christ, our Lord, by heav’n adored, is mighty now to save.

Louis F. Benson

III. **The Celebration of Good News Includes Our Worship. 2:20**

- 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?

1) **Glorify God where you live.**

- 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.

2) **Praise God for what you have.**

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. I cannot explain all of it. I dare not deny any of it.

Conclusion:

“Gentle Mary Laid Her Child”

“Gentle Mary laid her Child Lowly in a manger;
There He lay, the undefiled, To the world a stranger:
Such a Babe in such a place, Can He be the Savior?
Ask the saved of all the race Who have found His favor.

Angels sang about His birth; Wise Men sought and found Him;
Heaven’s star shone brightly forth, Glory all around Him;
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight, Heard the angels singing;
All the plains were lit that night, All the hills were ringing.

Gentle Mary laid her Child Lowly in a manger;
He is still the undefiled, But no more a stranger:
Son of God, of humble birth, Beautiful the story;
Praise His name in all the earth, Hail the King of glory!

Joseph Simpson Cook, 1859-1933