



A Savior Who is Christ the Lord, Part 1

Luke 2:8-14

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Luke 2 is a familiar passage to most of us. We read these verses almost every year at our Christmas Eve service. Our family reads this chapter every Christmas morning, we pray together, and then we open gifts. If memory serves me correctly, we have done this every year for the last 19 years.

I can't read this passage without hearing the voice of Linus from the Charlie Brown Christmas special. I watched it every year on TV. I can see the scene in my mind's eye. After being ridiculed for his paltry Christmas tree, Charlie Brown threw up his hands and cried out, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?!"

Standing beside him, Linus replied, "Sure Charlie Brown. I can tell you what Christmas is all about."

Linus walked out on stage with his blanket in hand and recited verses 8-14 of that chapter. When he finished, Linus picked up his blanket and walked off stage to a stunned Charlie Brown and said, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown." Sticking his thumb in his mouth, Linus walked away.

That is what we call a "mic drop."

There is something so gloriously simple about this scene. Not the Charlie Brown scene, but the one described by Luke. It is uncluttered. So plain. So simple. That can be very refreshing at a time of year when our recognition of the birth of Christ can quickly become so very cluttered, complicated, and confusing.

It is the simplicity of Luke's narrative that makes the scene in the Charlie Brown Christmas special so memorable and powerful. Charlie Brown and his friends got caught up in all the pageantry, presents, and pressures of the Christmas season, and in stepped Linus to clear away all the fog and confusion. When contrasted with the bare and simple details of Luke's description of the birth of Christ, our busy and distracted celebrations can appear quite pointless. We can lose sight of the forest because of the (Charlie Brown Christmas) trees.

In this article, I'm going to take a look at verses 8-14 and examine Luke's account of the events surrounding the birth of Christ.

Context is King

Let's first take a look at the immediate context. Here is a quick overview.

Luke begins his gospel, not by talking about the birth of Jesus but by mentioning another important character--John the Baptist. The first two chapters switch back and forth between the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist and the events surrounding the birth of Jesus.

1:5-25 Birth of John foretold

1:26-38 Birth of Jesus foretold

1:39-56 John's Mother visited by Jesus' Mother

1:57-80 Birth of John

2:1-20 Birth of Jesus

It is as if Luke is comparing these stories, switching from one to the other and telling them side by side. We can see a number of contrasts in these early chapters. Most notably we see the obedience and faith of Mary contrasted with the skepticism and unbelief of John's father, Zacharias.

Luke gives the historical details in verses 1-7.

Luke 2:1-7

1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 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, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 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.

The manner in which Luke relates the details is breathtaking in its simplicity. It is only seven verses, and most of that is spent describing the historical events on the geopolitical stage at the time. Really, only verses 6 and 7

describe the birth of Jesus.

When we consider the fact that Luke is detailing the birth of the single greatest man ever born - the incarnation of God - that is a scant bit of info. This baby was the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies regarding a coming Deliverer. This is the Hope of the nation, the Messiah, the long-awaited Son of David. This is the King of Israel!

Two verses?! He was born. They wrapped Him in swaddling clothes. They laid Him in a manger.

The account is unembellished. It is not lavish or detailed. It is humble, simple, and unencumbered by specifics. In a way, that in itself is appropriate to the circumstances of His birth. It was humble, simple, and inglorious. It was the opposite of what me might expect.

That is not to say that the birth was unaccompanied by anything supernatural. The revelation to the shepherds (vv. 8-14) is the type of glorious event that we might expect to attend the birth of such a regal figure. But the scene of the birth was quite plain and ordinary. The glory of the moment was not at the birth itself, but displayed some distance away to shepherds out in the fields at night. That is where we pick it up in verse 8.

In this article we are going to look at two elements of this scene with the shepherds: the **presentation** of the angels in vv. 8-9 and the **proclamation** of the angels in vv. 10-12. We will take a look at the **praise** of the angels (vv. 13-14) in a future newsletter article.

The PRESENTATION of the Angels

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night (2:8).

The birth of the Savior took place in a very insignificant, nondescript village. Bethlehem was notable only because it was the birthplace of King David. It was not a large, bustling city by any stretch.

In Bethlehem, immediately surrounding the Savior-- nothing. No glory. No bright lights. No halos. Other than to Joseph and Mary, the significance of this event was not obvious to any resident of Bethlehem. The normal daily life of the city continued. The residents, visitors, and religious leaders of the city were completely ignorant of what was transpiring.

The humble details of verses 6-7 is contrasted with the glorious announcement to shepherds in nearby fields. The announcement was not to anyone within the city. Not even Joseph and Mary saw the display of glory and the accompanying angelic host. Just shepherds.

During certain times of the year, shepherds would stay out in the fields with their sheep overnight. As night approached, the shepherds would herd their sheep into a common pen and take turns standing guard at the door. This served to protect the sheep from two ever-present dangers:

wandering off, and being stolen by thieves or wolves.

An Unlikely But Appropriate Audience

If you were in charge of the PR department for the kingdom of God and tasked to craft the press release for the birth of the King, you would never choose shepherds as the first recipients of your announcement.

Of all the potential audiences in and around Bethlehem, this is the most unlikely group to receive the news. Shepherds were not at the top of the societal ladder. They were, for the most part, uneducated and unskilled men. They had a reputation of being dishonest, unreliable, and unsavory characters. In some cases they were not allowed to testify in court.

Sheep required constant round-the-clock care, seven days a week. For that reason, shepherds were unable to fully comply with all the manmade Sabbath traditions developed and enforced by the Pharisees. They were viewed as men in continual violation of the religious laws regarding the Sabbath. Consequently, they were always looked upon as being ceremonially unclean. In the eyes of the religious elite, shepherds could never be pleasing to God or acceptable to Him.

God chose a group of nothings, social lowlifes, societal "bottom-rungers" to be the eyewitnesses of this amazing announcement. Men of bad reputation, men considered nothing in the eyes of the world and society, men considered untrustworthy were chosen by God as witnesses for the angelic announcement.

This is not what we might expect. We might expect that Herod would receive the announcement. We might expect that word would come to Caesar Augustus or Quirinius. Those two men are both mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

No. Not to them. Not to the rulers and kings of Rome. Not to the rulers and kings of Israel. Not to the Pharisees, the chief priests, or the religious leaders. To shepherds.

Truly, God's ways are not our ways. It reminds me of **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**.

Not only is the audience devoid of pomp and circumstance, but so is the location. This grand announcement of the birth of the King, and all the glory that accompanied it, took place in a field. The angels did not make this announcement in the temple or a synagogue. They did not come to the Jewish capital city of Jerusalem or the seat of Roman power, Caesarea. They did not bring this news to the religious leaders in the Sanhedrin. This happened out in a field!

Yet, in another sense, God's choice of these shepherds is entirely appropriate.

Remember that Moses, the great Lawgiver of Israel, had been a shepherd. David, in whose town the Savior was born, had been a shepherd, and even God Himself is

metaphorically referred to as “the Shepherd of Israel.” In **Psalm 23**, God is referred to as “my Shepherd.”

Even more significantly, Jesus referred to Himself as the Great Shepherd in **John 10** (claiming a title of God from Psalm 23). He is the Great Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

Though the audience might be unexpected, it is certainly appropriate that the announcement of the birth of the Great Shepherd should be made to shepherds.

There may also be some significance to these particular shepherds. Likely, these shepherds who tended flocks so close to Jerusalem were tending sheep that would be used for sacrifices in the temple. John MacArthur, in his commentary on Luke, notes that according to rabbinic law, sheep kept around Jerusalem and near Bethlehem were subject to being sacrifices in the temple. It might be that these sheep were themselves destined for slaughter as sacrifices.

If that is the case, then it is certainly appropriate that Jesus—who is the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for our sins, our Passover Lamb—should himself be announced to shepherds who were tending sacrificial lambs.

A Night Like Any Other

And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened (2:9).

Since it was at night, there was not a lot happening. Some shepherds would be asleep. Some would be up keeping watch. It might be that the shepherds were sitting around a campfire, playing an instrument, singing or visiting. From their perspective, it was just another quiet, ordinary night.

Verse 9 broke into the “ordinary.” There is nothing ordinary about an angel of God appearing!

The particular angel is not identified here, but in light of the fact that he had appeared to Mary (**Luke 1:11-20**) to announce the birth of Christ and to Zacharias (**Luke 1:26-38**) to announce the birth of John the Baptist, it may very well have been Gabriel who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds.

This angel was accompanied by the glory of God. The darkness of that night in the fields was pierced by a glory that is indescribable. This glory was the presence of God manifested in pure, brilliant light.

Throughout Scripture the presence of God is manifested as light. **1 Timothy 6:15–16** says that God “is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and *dwells in unapproachable light*, whom no man has seen or can see.”

The visible manifestation of the glory of God is brilliant light. We should not think that these men saw the full, unveiled glory of God. They could not see God in all His glory,

for they would have been instantly consumed.

The glory of God is the radiance of His person. It is the expression of the sum total of His attributes. To see the glory of God is to see the radiance of all His attributes. Though they did not see the full glory of God, they did see a glory, a degree of glory that terrified them.

The arrival of this glory is something that in itself is significant. Centuries earlier, after generations of sin and disobedience, the glory of God had left the temple. For over 400 years, the worship of the nation and the life of the people could be described as “Ichabod—the glory had departed.” Suddenly the glory of God appeared!

What is the event that signaled the return of the glory of God? The birth of Christ! This appearing of the glory of God to the shepherds signaled a return of the glory of God in the person of Christ.

Jesus is the glory of God manifested in the flesh. John says that when the eternal Word who was with God and was God became flesh, “we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” To look on Christ is to see the glory of God veiled in human flesh.

Hebrews 1:3 says, “And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Understandably, the shepherds were terrified.

Consistently this is the response of men in Scripture to a vision of the glory of God. Moses was frightened, Joshua was frightened. Prophets like Daniel and Ezekiel fell down. Isaiah came undone, and John fell to the ground. The natural response of a fallen, sinful man to a manifestation of the glory of God is to be terrified.

Sometimes we sing songs about seeing the glory of God: “We want to see your glory” or “show us your glory.” You do not want to see the glory of God. Any God Whose glory you can handle seeing is not worthy of your worship. You want to die before you see the glory of God.

What Is So Terrifying?

What is it about the glory of God that terrifies men? The problem is not with the glory of God. The problem is our own sinfulness.

When Peter saw the glory of Christ, he said, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man.” Daniel was made aware of his own sinfulness. Isaiah came undone and said, “I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.” Those who see the glory of God are made acutely aware of their own sinfulness.

When all we are familiar with is sin, to have a vision of the glory of God and be exposed to pure holiness, pure righteousness is unsettling to say the least. These men were

terrified by the heavenly messenger. A moment like that would make a man realize how insignificant and frail he truly is.

The PROCLAMATION of the Angels

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” (2:10-12).

The angels knew the shepherds were terrified, so understandably, their first words were words of comfort: “Do not be afraid.”

It is appropriate for men to fear God. Godly men have a reverence for God. Although we acknowledge that God is near to those who call upon Him, our Father and friend, and that Christ is our Savior, godly people are not flippant with holy things.

But the righteous do not need to be terrified. It is appropriate for the righteous to have a right and proper reverence for God, but terror is inappropriate since we do not fear the wrath of God. Those who have been redeemed need never be terrified of God as judge.

The fact that the angel encouraged these men to not fear is an evidence that these were probably devout men. They were likely men who had a healthy fear of God. It is difficult to imagine that God would choose a group of irreverent and godless men to receive this announcement. These were probably men waiting for the Hope of Israel, longing for the Messiah, and worshippers of God.

To them, the angel brought “good news.” That is the word for “gospel.” This is the verb form which means to “proclaim good news.” It is good news of great joy which will be for all the people.

Likely the shepherds understood this primarily as an announcement of good news for the people of Israel. Though the announcement of a Savior to Israel was good news to Israel, that good news is not limited to Israel. We know Jesus was a light unto the Gentiles and that through Jesus, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed. Through this Savior, salvation would come to the Gentile nations as well. This was an announcement *to* Israel alone, but not *for* Israel alone.

A Time, A Place, A Person

“For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (2:11).

Notice the angel revealed the time--“today,” the place--“city of David,” and the Person--“Christ the Lord.”

We can easily see why this would be considered “good news.” 400 years of revelatory silence had been broken. The glory of God had come. The fulfillment of all Old Testament hope and expectation had arrived. The long-expected, long-

anticipated Messiah had been born.

Notice also the threefold description of Jesus as “*Savior*,” “*Christ*,” and “*Lord*.”

He is the *Savior*. The angel said to Joseph in **Matthew 1:21**, “you shall call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins.” This One born was the Savior who would deliver sinners from sin and judgment. He was not merely a teacher, an example, a leader, or a guide. He is a Savior. He came to save us.

Many will celebrate the birth of Christ this month by giving gifts, expressing religious sentiments, and singing hymns, but they will not know Him as their Savior. They merely know Him as Jesus, whose birth we celebrate. It is tragic that one may be caught up in this holiday and have no real saving relationship with the One whose birth one supposedly celebrates. For the Christian, Christmas is a rejoicing, a time of great joy.

He is *Christ*. Christ is an exalted title that means “anointed One.” The Old Testament equivalent is “Messiah.” It speaks of someone appointed to a “high office.” It is a term of dignity and exalted status. That is certainly a fitting title. He is King of the Jews, the Preeminent One, the King of Kings. He is the High and Holy One Who sits at the right hand of the Father until His enemies shall be made a footstool for His feet.

He is *Lord*. It is the word *Kurios*. To refer to someone as your Lord was to acknowledge your complete subservience to that person. When used with reference to Christ, that title carries with it the acknowledgment that Jesus is divine. The most fundamental element of Christian confession is the recognition that Jesus Christ is Lord.

“Savior” describes His work, “Christ” describes His office, and “Lord” describes His authority and equality with the Father.

The Sign

“This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” (2:12).

How would they find this Child in all of Bethlehem? The angel gave them a sign by which they might know which Child was the cause of all this angelic celebration.

They were to look for a baby. There is nothing unique about that. There may have been a number of babies in Bethlehem.

They would find Him wrapped in swaddling clothes. Again, there is nothing unique in that. All babies are wrapped in clothes to keep them warm.

He would be found lying in a manger. That is unique! This child would be lying in a trough used to feed animals. That was not something you would see every day.

Notice there is another stark contrast in this passage. They would find this One Who is God, Savior, King, and Messiah as a baby lying in a manger. After hearing that

description, we might expect that we would find this child in better surroundings.

The angel, with the glory of God shining around him, announced the arrival of the Son of David, the long-awaited King of Israel, the Redeemer. This is Christ, the Lord. This is God--God in the flesh, God visiting His people. He is the glory of God incarnate, the radiance of God's glory, the beloved of the eternal Father. He is the eternal Word in human flesh. This is the Christ.

Would they find Him in a flaming chariot descending from Heaven? No. Would they find Him on a throne dropped out of Heaven? No. Would they find Him surrounded by Heavenly angels in glory, lying on a comfortable bed of angel feathers framed in gold and precious stones? Would they find him in a royal palace surrounded by guards and servants? No.

Lying in a manger.

The humble circumstances seem quite out of place for this angelic announcement. But these humble circumstances serve to highlight the immense condescension of the Son. They demonstrate the humble and sacrificial nature of Christ. This is our God.

He existed in the form of God and did not regard that equality with God something to be held onto, but He emptied Himself of those privileges and humbled Himself. He took the form of a bond-servant, and came in the likeness of men. Then He became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (**Philippians 2:5-11**).

Such Humility

He deserved the worship of myriads and myriads of angels. He enjoyed unbroken fellowship with the Father from eternity past. He was untouched by sin and human sinfulness. He was unaffected by this creation and its fallenness. He had the conveniences, pleasures, and joys of Heaven. The glory of that place was His.

If He were to leave that and come to the greatest palace on earth, to be fawned over by thousands of servants and waited on hand and foot, it would be an infinite condescension. If He were to leave Heaven and have His every need met, His every wish fulfilled, and receive the best treatment ever afforded a King, the incarnation would still be an unimaginable humiliation.

He was found in a manger. That is humility!

The description of this baby with these titles and names surrounded by such glory coupled with the humble circumstances of His birth is intended to portray the complete humility of this Savior.

Do you want to learn a lesson from Luke's birth narrative? Here it is: humility.

This one worshiped by angels came into this world in the most humble way imaginable to save undeserving wretches like you and me. The humble birth of Christ is a reminder of

our own unworthiness. We don't deserve a Savior, a Messiah, or a Lord as kind, humble and compassionate as He.

Without Wax-

