

Exordium

Imagine what it must have been like to be the shepherds on that first Christmas night. You are keeping watch over your flock, as you usually do, when suddenly, an angel appears before you, telling you that the Savior of the world has been born. Now, one angel appearing before you would already be shocking enough, but then, the entire sky is filled with angels, all of them singing praises to God for the peace that he has given to men.

If you were one of these shepherds, surely all you would be able to think about were the angels that you just saw in the glory of the Lord and heard singing, right? But what do they do? They immediately shift their attention from the appearance of the angels to seeing the child that the angels told them about. Now, at first, this might seem understandable. After all, if angels were announcing the birth of this child, then surely, he must be something even more spectacular to behold. And yet, there was seemingly nothing special about this child. If anything, he seemed even less remarkable than your average child due to his humble birth. Yet, despite this, we hear that the shepherds made known not that they had seen angels fill the night sky, but what the angels told them about the child. And, on top of that, they returned home “glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, as it had been told them” (Luke 2:20). They were glorifying and praising God for getting to see the Christ child and for what they heard about him.

It might be surprising to us that the shepherds don't seem to give much thought to the angels at all, despite how spectacular the sight must have been. Instead, they give all their attention to the Christ child. But these shepherds had their priorities straight. Even though he probably didn't seem all that remarkable, what the shepherds were looking at was God in the flesh, God who became a man so that he might live and die among us in order to save us from our sins. What could

possibly be more amazing than that? Therefore, let us rise and join in with the rejoicing of the shepherds as we sing Hymn #142: “Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn.”

*Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn!
A Savior unto us is born,
The Christ, the Lord of glory.
His lowly birth in Bethlehem
The angels from on high proclaim
And sing redemption's story.
My soul, Extol
God's great favor; Bless Him ever
For salvation.
Give Him praise and adoration!*

Sermon Text (Luke 2:1–14 ESV)

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Jesus Is the Gift We Need

There is a difference between getting what you want and getting what you need. You might want to have an extra day off of work or school, but maybe not getting an extra day off is what you need to get all of your work done. When you go car shopping, you might want the latest and greatest vehicle, but an older, less impressive vehicle might end up being the one that fits your

needs. There might be a certain present that you want for Christmas, but maybe the present that you end up getting instead will fill a need that you didn't know you have. All throughout history, people have wanted certain things but have gotten other things, and this is even true for the Savior that we got.

Now, the Jews knew that a Savior was coming. Scripture made that perfectly clear. Even early on in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, God promised that a Savior was coming to save mankind from his sin. He spoke to the serpent that had led Adam and Eve into sin, saying, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). However, by the time the Savior was finally born, what he had actually come to do was no longer known by the Jews. They were no longer looking for a Savior from their sins; they were now looking for a Savior from the Romans who would restore the kingdom of Israel.

On the night of Jesus' birth, when the angels appeared in the night sky to the shepherds announcing that the Savior had been born, what kind of sign do you think the shepherds would have expected? Well, if they were among the Jews who were expecting a mighty king, then they might have expected him to have a dignified birth. But what was the sign that the angel actually gave to them? The angel said, "you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (verse 12). When we see nativity scenes, they always seem so nice and beautiful, and it can make us forget what we are actually seeing. We are looking at a baby laying in a feeding trough for animals. That's a humiliating bed to have. Surely, this was not the kind of birth that the Savior of Israel and their future king would have.

Jesus did not just have a humble birth; he also had a humble life. However, Jesus' humble life did not deter his disciples. They still believed that he was the Savior who had come to save

them from the Romans and restore the nation of Israel. Because of this, when Jesus “began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. . . . Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you’” (Matthew 16:21–22).

Well, everything happened to Jesus just as he said it would. Jesus was betrayed by one of his own disciples; arrested by the religious authorities; accused of crimes that he never committed; was mocked, beaten, and flogged; was sentenced to death on a cross, despite doing nothing wrong; and experienced hell itself as he hung on the cross. This isn’t what the disciples wanted, but it is what they, as well as all of us, needed. All of this Jesus suffered on our behalf so that we would not have to suffer, and that sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf by offering up his own life was accepted by God the Father, which was proven by the fact that he rose again from the dead on the third day. The disciples saw Jesus alive with their own eyes, and, if there was great joy felt on that first Christmas night, how much greater was the joy that was felt on that first Easter day! Then, after all of this, right before Jesus ascended into heaven, his disciples asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Even after everything that had happened, after everything that they witnessed with their own eyes, the disciples were still looking for the Savior that they wanted.

What kind of Savior do you want? Do you want a Savior who saves you from the politicians that you don’t like and gives you the perfect nation? Do you want a Savior who only gives you the earthly possessions that you want? Do you want a Savior who accepts you for who you are and supports your lifestyle, no matter what kind of lifestyle it is? Do you want a Savior who will forgive your sins and take you to heaven whether you are sorry for your sins or not? Even though we have

the clear words of Scripture that plainly tell us what kind of Savior we have, we can still find ourselves wanting a different Savior and can even convince ourselves that Jesus is that Savior. However, no matter what kind of Savior we want, it doesn't change the fact that the Savior that we got is exactly the Savior that we need.

Why did God give the first Gospel promise that he did back in the beginning of the book of Genesis? Because we are all sinners in desperate need of someone to save us from our sins. Sure, it would be nice to have a Savior who would give us the things that we want in this life and treat us the way that we want to be treated, but all those things we can live without. On the other hand, if we did not receive a Savior who saved us from our sins, we would be doomed to pay the price for our sins ourselves by being cast into the fires of hell, a payment that we could never pay back. That is how corrupted with sin we are.

Thankfully, Jesus knew exactly what we needed and was born as a man in order to give it to us. Unlike us, Jesus was born without sin and went his entire life on earth without sinning once. Then, after fulfilling the Law in our place, Jesus made the payment for our sins by laying down his own life on the cross. What we could never pay back, Jesus paid for us. And thanks to his perfect life and innocent death, we have exactly what we need to enter into eternal life in heaven. We have the gift of Jesus.

This is the great joy that the angel spoke of to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth. And this joy was not just for the Jews; it was "for all the people" (verse 10). It doesn't matter how bad your sins are, Jesus came to win forgiveness for all who need it, and that includes every single one of us. We may not always realize just how badly we need the gift of forgiveness that Jesus won for us, but Jesus gives it to us anyway because he does realize just how badly we need it. And it is a gift that we can keep coming back to without it ever running out. This Christmas, we may

be receiving a lot of gifts that we want, but Jesus is the only gift that we need. And this gift is not just given to us at Christmas, but also every day of our lives. What better gift could we possibly want or receive than that?