

The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

⁸In the same region there were some shepherds^a staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night^b. ⁹And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them^c; and they were terribly frightened^d. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid^e; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people^f; ¹¹for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord^g. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger^h.” ¹³And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God^a and saying,

^a **2:8 In the same region there were some shepherds.** Why did the announcement come first to shepherds? Only God knows His reasons, but we do know that first century shepherds, by nature of their profession, were often aloof from the religious life of Israel. On the other hand we also know that someone had to raise the sacrificial lambs for the temple.

^b **2:8 staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.** The reason the shepherds were out in the field could have been seasonal. During times of little rain shepherds needed to lead their flocks wherever grass was available. Jacob’s older sons, for example, took Jacob’s sheep about 60 miles from home from Hebron to Dothan when Joseph went to find them (Genesis 37:12-17). If this was the dry season we might rule out December 25 as Jesus’ real birthday.

^c **2:9 an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.** Luke is contrasting the darkness of the fields with the bright light of the angelic display. The glory was so close they could touch it. Angels had a prominent role in the earthly ministry of Christ:

- They predicted His birth (Luke 1:26-33).
- They announced His birth (Luke 2:13).
- They protected Him (Matthew 2:13).
- They strengthened Him (Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43).
- They announced His resurrection (Matthew 28:2, 6).

^d **2:9 they were terribly frightened.** This is the way people always react to angelic visions. It is not that angels are scary creatures but that they are other-worldly. They dwell in another realm of which mortals are largely ignorant.

^e **2:10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid.”** This is what angels are supposed to say.

- It is what Gabriel said to Zacharias and again to Mary (Luke 1:13, 30).
- It was a repeated comfort during Daniel’s vision in Daniel 10.
- An angel said this to Paul the apostle in Acts 27:24.
- An angel said this to the women standing next to the empty tomb in Matthew 28:5.

^f **2:10 I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.** That does not mean all the people would have great joy, but it does mean that the joyous gospel was to be given to all the people.

^g **2:11 today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** Verse ten said the good news was for all the people, but the shepherds were told that this child was born for them. Compare this with Romans 8:31: “If God is for us, who is against us?”

It would be hard to look at even the sturdiest baby boy and think about him staging any kind of a rescue. But, in an even greater way than Zacharias saw baby John through God’s prophetic lens, the angel saw his own Creator in a feed box in Bethlehem.

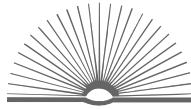
^h **2:12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.** Angelic announcements about babies happened several times in Scripture. Angels

The Gospel of Luke
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^{14a}“Glory to God in the highest^b,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased^c.”^d

visited the parents of Ishmael, Isaac, Samson and John. This is the only time an angel brought outsiders in on the news and this is the only a baby who was introduced as a Savior.

The word translated “sign” here is often used in the New Testament of the miraculous (Matthew 12:38), but its common meaning is simply an identification. The kiss of Judas identified Jesus as the one to arrest (Matthew 26:48). Circumcision identified men as descendants of Abraham (Romans 4:11). Please picture what is happening. An angel wrapped in light is standing on earth talking to some shepherds, but the sign is not the angel. It is a human baby wrapped in strips of cloth. In this case the angel pointed the men to something that would catch their attention so they would know they had arrived at the right place. It wasn’t every day—even in first century Palestine—that you found a baby in a feed box.

^a 2:13 **suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.** This is not the only vision of a large group of angels. Jacob also saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder (Genesis 28:10-17). Elisha’s servant was comforted by a glimpse of the heavenly army when the enemies of Israel appeared to have the upper hand (2 Kings 6:15-17). John, banished to Patmos by powerful human forces, saw the throne from which the true King rules. He was called up to heaven where he saw this:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.” Revelation 5:11-13

^b 2:14 **saying, “Glory to God in the highest.** While we cannot know the tune of this heavenly song, we do know the driving force behind it. Angels, who cannot experience redemption, stood here as witnesses to the unfolding work of the Redeemer (see 1 Peter 1:10-12). They had waited 4000 years to see just how the Father would bring the Sin-bearer into a sin-cursed world. The chief end of angels mirrors that of men: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

^c 2:14 **And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.** A single letter (s) in Greek distinguishes this translation from the reading of the majority manuscript, which can be translated “good will toward men.” The reading reflected in the NASB specifies that peace with God comes by grace alone. God’s favor does not come to those who deserve it. The angels sang of what brings God glory: reconciling Himself by grace to His people.

^d 2:8-14 If you were asked to honestly rank the most exciting news stories you have ever heard, you might not rank this one near the top unless the question was being asked in Sunday School. The reason for that may be because you have not really thought about all that was happening when the angel gave this announcement. Does this historic event touch you in any way? Why was this good news?

1. Because it was the clearest revelation of God’s character He could give. This is why Jesus was called “the word.” This does not take away from the fact that the Bible is God’s precise revelation of Himself. It underscores the way God reveals Himself throughout the Bible: “I am a saving God.”
2. Because it was intended for those who needed it most. For whom did Christ die? Sinners.
3. Because it brought simple people in touch with the glory of God. We have all fallen short of it, which means any contact with it must be an act of God. That’s good news.

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