

## Sunday, December 19, 2021 | Great Joy

Week 3 | Luke 2:1-21 | “The Angel’s Song”

### Announcements:

- Christmas eve, Communion, Carols, and Candlelight, @ 6PM.
  - We’ll be having Bob’s ordination on Sunday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The examination will be on Saturday, January 29<sup>th</sup>.
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A couple weeks ago, we started a new four-week series called Great Joy. This study looks at the Christmas story from the songs sung in the Gospels before, during, and after Christ's birth. As we dive deep into these passages, we'll discover that at the heart of each song lies a hope that the Messiah we'll change the world. And, with any luck, these messages will warm your heart, stir your soul, and challenge you to worship the true Joy-Bringer.

The first song we studied was that which Mary sang after she met her cousin, Elizabeth. Traditionally, this song has been referred to as the *Magnificat* after the Latin translation of the Greek word *meg-al-oo'-no*, translated as "glories" here in our text. The Greek verb *meg-al-oo'-no* is a term that expresses praise and adoration. And that is precisely what Mary does. She magnifies God because of the way he's acted on her behalf, for everyone, and throughout all generations. In this way, **Mary’s song established continuity between the Old and New Testaments.**

Last week, we studied Zechariah’s song. The first verse was a melody of praise, whereas the second was a message of prophecy. But at the heart of this song was an idea about service. **Zechariah’s song established that at the heart of God’s kingdom is a mindset of peaceful pietism, not escapism or materialism.** He explained that the point of the Messiah’s coming wasn’t so that we might go to heaven (i.e., escapism); though, thankfully, you will if you die before he comes again. And Jesus did not come so that we might have a good life (i.e., materialism), though, thankfully, you will if you believe in him. Jesus came so that we would be enabled to serve God as we were always intended to (i.e., pietism). Or, as one commentator put it, “God saves for service.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke: 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 186.

Today, we move on to the angel's song. And, unlike Mary's and Zechariah's, this one is relatively short. Now, short hymns or songs aren't necessarily bad. What matters is not so much about quantity as it is about quality. After all, how many of us can only remember the chorus of a song and not the entire piece (i.e., *Amazing Grace*, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, *Because He Lives*, *Good Good Father*, *Open the Eyes of the My Heart*, *Come Now Is the Time To Worship*, etc.)? And that's precisely where we find ourselves with this 3<sup>rd</sup> song of exultation by an angelic host.

But, like every passage, we must understand the context before understanding a verse in the text. And this context is exceptional as it records the birth of Jesus. Thus, considering this is technically the Sunday before Christmas, I'd be remiss if we didn't read from the beginning of this chapter.

**READ:** Luke 2:1-12 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup>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, <sup>5</sup>to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup>And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

Now, let's stop briefly to make a few comments. Sadly, this isn't a message which focuses on the events leading up to the angel's song. The body of my primary exegesis will be devoted to unpacking that third Christmas carol. However, it would've been a shame to pass by this scene without, at least, a few comments. So, I want you to notice two things about the Christmas story.

First, have you ever noticed how the first Christmas seamlessly mixes both bizarre and banal elements?

For instance, how about the angles? Of all the people they could've come to, Luke tells us that they came to shepherds. They did not go to some "important" world leader, but everyday blue-collar people working the third shift. What's more, the story goes that it wasn't just one Angel that came to the shepherds, but a whole heavenly "host" gave them a midnight concert. The term "host," if you didn't know, is "army" in today's vernacular. Meaning a group honed for combat did not make war but made music! In all of history, has there ever been a military force marshaled to the front lines to sing a song about peace?

Or, how about the manger? A newborn swaddled in their mother's arms is as commonplace as presents under a Christmas tree. But how strange it must've been for shepherds to find a baby not only wrapped but lying in a manger—i.e., a feeding trough. Indeed, no mother would've done that had she any other options.

Yet, stranger still, is the fact that when Jesus—he who made the world—came into the world, the world made no room for him. There wasn't so much as bunk in a Motel 6 for him to lay his head. He spent his first night on earth in a barn.

The most bizarre aspect of the Christmas story is that Jesus' birth was equal parts unimpressive and impressive. Can anyone think of a more uninspired birth narrative with so many unique elements than this? All the great heroes have remarkable beginnings. And while, unlike Jesus, many of these famous people are nothing more than mere fairytales and, thus, their stories should be taken with a grain of salt, it is, nevertheless, worth making a brief comparison between myth and reality.

For example, allegedly, the Buddha took seven steps after being born and said, "I am the chief of the world." Jesus didn't enter the world as a fully matured human being. He had to grow up like any other person. Achilles was dipped in the River Styx, making him nearly invisible. Jesus bled like us. He made himself vulnerable. And like any other child, if not for those swaddling clothes, the Son of God would've been cold that night. Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were raised by wolves. Jesus had a mother who changed his diapers and fed him when he was hungry, and rocked him to sleep when he was tired. Aside from an episode in the Temple when he was 12, Jesus had an ordinary upbringing.

The Christmas story stands apart because it mixes the banal and the bizarre.

Secondly, did you notice how the angel talked about this Promised One? He said, “[For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.](#)” What is the meaning of those three different titles? What do they tell us about Jesus?

When the angel said the newborn was a “Savior,” he was speaking about Jesus’ **mission**. By his own admission in Luke 19:10, Jesus said that he “came to seek and to save the lost.” He did not come to condemn the world (cf. Jn. 3:17). The world, because of sin, was already condemned. He came to save the world (cf. Jn. 3:16).

When the angel said the newborn was the “Christ,” he spoke about Jesus’ **Messiahship**. As we’ve mentioned for the past two weeks, Christmas is as much a Jewish holiday as it is a Christian one. Mary made this very point in the first Christmas carol, and Zechariah made the point again in his song. Throughout the OT, the Messiah was spoken of by the prophets as one who would rule the throne of David. This Promised One would fulfill all the promises made to Israel. Jesus is the one in whom all the OT promises find their fulfillment (cf. Lu. 4:16-21).

When the angel said the newborn was “Lord,” he was speaking about Jesus’ **might**. While the term “lord” can refer to anyone in leadership (i.e., landowner, civil leader, etc.), it almost always refers to God.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Greek word translated as “lord” is **κύριος**, and of the over 9,000 times it is used in the Greek translation of OT (LXX), the term “Lord” refers to God 6,150 times.<sup>3</sup> Two out of the three times you see the term “lord” is likely speaking about **the** Lord, not a lord. So when the angel said that this newborn was not only the “Savior” of the world and the promised “Christ,” he was also saying that this baby boy born in Bethlehem that night was also God in the flesh.

**READ:** [Luke 2:13-21 \(ESV\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

<sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph,

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<sup>2</sup> General Editors, “Yahweh – LORD,” June 1, 2017, *The Bible Project*, <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/yhwh-lord/>, [accessed, December 17, 2021].

<sup>3</sup> Bock (1994), p. 218.

and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

<sup>21</sup> And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Now, even a song as short as this has different points of focus. Specifically, this chorus emphasizes **two** things:

**i. Praise to God.**

**READ:** Luke 2:14 (ESV)

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

The first words the angels sang was “**glory to God in the highest...**” The word “glory” is the Greek term **δόξα** (*doxa*) from which we derive our English word “doxology,” which means a “saying of praise.” Interestingly, the Christmas carol, *Angels We Have Heard On High*, is also entitled *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*. And the English translation of “*gloria in excelsis Deo*” is “glory, in the highest, to God,” and comes from this very passage. Although not in its current form, this song has been a part of our Christmas music since at least the fourth century, possibly earlier.<sup>4</sup>

No matter how impressive of a show this must’ve been, and no matter the purpose for the announcement, first and foremost in the angel's minds is the praise of God. Interestingly, both Mary's and Zechariah's songs began similarly. This tells us that the chief end of all music ought to glorify God. The culture of those who sang this song was heavenly—so it's probably difficult for us to imagine how it may have sounded, but it wasn't meant to tickle the listeners' ears. While indeed an announcement, this song's purpose was to bring glory to God. We can learn from this as people and churches. It's not about us putting on a show for one another but about bringing ultimate glory to our Creator.

**ii. Peace to Some.**

**READ:** Luke 2:14 (ESV)

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<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia contributors, “Gloria in excelsis Deo,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gloria\\_in\\_excelsis\\_Deo&oldid=1058583904](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gloria_in_excelsis_Deo&oldid=1058583904) (accessed December 19, 2021).

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

The second word the angels sang was, “**on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.**” Now, I know that sounds different from the version we've heard growing up. And, admittedly, this new phrasing sounds wrong to the ear because the old version has been so ingrained in us for so many years through various mediums (i.e., translations, plays, books, movies, etc.). And so, you're probably used to the phrase "peace goodwill towards men" rather than "on earth peace among those with whom he is please." So, why the change? Because, technically, the majority of the Greek manuscripts record a phrasing that emphasizes God's agency and not man's.<sup>5</sup> It is God-centric, not human-centric.

Undoubtedly, one could argue that the angels' message was, in fact, to all men. After all, Jesus did come to save the whole world (cf. Jhn. 3:16). So, I wouldn't encourage anyone to disparage the traditional reading of this verse. From a particular perspective, the conventional sense of this verse still rings true, albeit barely. But it must be pointed out that while God would prefer that no one perish (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8-10), the Lord will only save those who come to him in faith through his Son. Meaning, when it comes to the angel's song, we should understand that God will only be “pleased” with those who accept Jesus as their Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Thus, even in this Christmas carol, there is an implied message. Yes, God will be “pleased” with some. But conversely, this means that the Lord's displeasure will undoubtedly rest on all those who reject Jesus Christ.

Though he would reconcile the whole world, if he could, God allows man to retain his free will. And sadly, some do not choose Jesus. Thus, while the message of Christmas could bring peace to every last human being, in reality, the message of Christmas only brings peace to some.

### **So, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?**

Adoration (i.e., praise) of God is **universal**, while reconciliation (i.e., peace) for mankind is **partial**.

**READ:** Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and

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<sup>5</sup> Morris, Leon, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Volume 3, (Downer Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 102.

of those on earth, and of those under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

On that last day, every tongue, be it saved or unsaved, angelic or demonic, will praise the name of Jesus (cf. Rom. 14:11). He alone is sovereign. He alone is Lord. Thus, the worship of God is (from an eternal perspective) universal. However, while all will eventually give glory to God, only those who glorify Jesus in this life will be saved.

**READ: John 3:16-21 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

God loved the world but the world loves darkness and hates the light. As such, many will not be saved. They stand as they’ve always stood, condemned.

**So, WHAT’S THE TAKEAWAY?**

Adoration (i.e., praise) of God is **universal**, while reconciliation (i.e., peace) for mankind is **partial**.

Without a doubt, the angels' message that day was to all mankind. They sang of God's glory, a glory that was not earthly but heavenly. It was a glory that reached the highest heights of heaven itself. But along with that praise, there also came a message. A message that said that God's peace would rest with only the minority, not the majority. He has sent his Son into the world to reconcile the whole world to himself, but he leaves the final decision up to us. We must choose whether to accept this Christmas gift. For those who don't, God's displeasure will rest upon them. But, for those who do, God's pleasure dwells within them. Thus, the message of the angel's song is that adoration (i.e., praise) of God is **universal** while reconciliation (i.e., peace) for mankind is **partial**.

## Video Description

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TEXT: Luke 2:1-21

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Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/Ltxpoxa>