

Reading: Luke 2:8-20

Theme: Good News of Great Joy.

We probably all know and are familiar with the passage we read, as it is one of the well-known Christmas readings and events. There is so much we could look at, but I want us to look the song of the angels, the 4th of 5 songs which Dr Luke records for us in chapters 1 & 2. While we call them songs, none of them appear to be sung - Elizabeth "*exclaimed*" (1:42); Mary "*said*" (1:46); Zechariah "*prophesied*" (1:67); here the angels praise God "*saying*" (2:13) and old Simeon also "*praised God, saying*" (2:28). We are not wrong to call them a song, but they would have been more like a chanted poem. I want us to look at the song of the angels, at both the solo part in v10-12 and the choral refrain in v14 and I'll be using 5 headings to help us look at it:

1. The Comfort and Joy (v10 & 11)

I can't imagine meeting an angel, for from what we read of them in the Bible they are shown as awesome supernatural beings, powerful, pure, holy and serving God instantly. In their service of God, they can become visible and take on human form and appear as people (*theophanies*). All we read of them is nothing like the cute dressing up of children we see in Nativities, nor the adorable cherub like portrayals of them in paintings and computer-generated images. We read that they struck terror, fear into the ones who met them. Here these strong and independent shepherds, the tough rednecks and cowboys of their day on the hills around Bethlehem are terrified as the glory of the Lord shone around them because of **one** angel!

Thankfully the angel comforted them straightaway, showing God's care to such ones "*Fear not*". Gabriel told both Zachariah and Mary not to be afraid (1:13 & 30). Angels know their awesome presence causes fear! If God servants show such care, realise God Himself would not want His people to unduly and wrongly fear and be afraid. We can wrongly fear so much, but God wants us to know His love and power are for us and He will work all things together for good for those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose. We can so easily forget about our God's love and care of us and fear as things happen we were not expecting!

Further comfort, as well as joy was brought as the angel's mission was revealed v10b "*I bring you good news of **great joy** that will be for all the people.*" The angel was bringing good news of joy to all people - including his terrified congregation there on the hills around Bethlehem! The Christmas account still speaks good news of great joy for all people, for there is hope given, there is still this great joyful work of God that the angel went on to speak of. The good news = gospel, which is the good news of what God has done and brought about. We can joyfully remember the good news which truly comes from really understanding what we celebrate each Christmas, but are also able to do so any time of the year. Knowing the gospel and the Saviour it speaks of, we can have an all year "Christmas feeling" based on the truth of that we especially remember at Christmas time.

2. The Newsflash (v11)

Next April there will be a notice put on the gates of Buckingham Palace about the royal baby and the news will

flash out across the world. Reporters outside the hospital, where the Princess of Cambridge will be, will then go into hyper drive after weeks of reporting that nothing has happened! Here the newsflash came not on a palace gate, put there by a royal official, but was proclaimed by an angelic messenger upon the hills around Bethlehem to rough and ready shepherds. It was startling and shocking news to those who had no real interest and certainly no idea of what had gone on that day in Bethlehem. It was local to them, in the city of David, perhaps they could even see some lights down in the town, perhaps they wondered if they knew the family, but no it couldn't be, for they knew no one special like that. This one was so special - the Saviour and yet this Saviour was born to them, the shepherds - who at that time represented all mankind. The Saviour had been foretold - He would come, be born in Bethlehem. The newsflash was declaring that God's promises had been fulfilled and God had done just as He said He would.

It is good to recognise God's faithfulness in all He does. Mary recognised it (1:55), as did Zechariah (1:70 & 73). We are to recognise that God's word is reliable and the promises He has made to us will be kept and fulfilled, especially concerning the Saviour, the salvation He has brought that is offered to us in the gospel and all it will mean and involve for us now and for eternity.

The angel announced the Saviour had come, is the Christ, the anointed one of God and is the Lord - Yahweh, Jehovah. This one was no one less than the one who is God, totally and completely God. The shepherds were the first ones to hear this

truth declared when God the Son was born with a real body. He was born Christ the Lord and did not become such at a later point. Have we seen and recognised that the baby in the manger is fully and totally God who was united with human nature - 1 Timothy 3:16 says "*Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body*". If we were them we'd want to go and see this glorious one who was born in:

3. The Strange Location (v12)

Possibly the shepherds may have expected that such a great one would have a lovely place of birth and be laid as the newborn Saviour and Lord in a fine crib. It must have shocked them to find out it was not so. The sign for them to find Him was that He was wrapped in cloths, swaddling clothes (AV) and lying in a manger, an animal's feeding trough. It is incredible that the One who was the Saviour, Messiah and Lord was put for His first sleep in an animal's feeding trough. As God He was in control of all Creation and all was His, but He humbled Himself to be born in this way and place; as we know He went lower and went through far worse things to be our Saviour.

We learn of this humbling Himself in the book of Philippians - we are told His attitude, mind is to be in us and not to proudly cling to imagining we deserve or know we rightly deserve... We are to be the humble followers of the One who humbled Himself. Proud and arrogant Christians are out of place serving the One who humbled Himself to become a man, to wash the dirty feet of His disciples and become obedient to death, even death on the cross.

The shepherds must have been excited, been ready to rush off and to seek this one - we read in v16 that they did hurry off to find this baby, but it seems that just before the solo of this one angel had finished resounding in their ears, minds and hearts, something most dramatic happened:

4. The Awesome Choir (v13)

Suddenly and instantaneously there was not one, but a multitude, a great company of the heavenly host were there as a massed choir and magnificently, awesomely from the innermost beings they gave this choral refrain, a doxology = a hymn of praise to God. Here is a huge celestial army - remember angels aren't weak and effeminate creatures as so often drawn and pictured, but are mighty and awesome supernatural beings. One children's book I've seen on the Nativity has pictures of angels who looked like they had pumped a lot of iron and look very butch! This host - which is a military term, appear with this first angel. If the shepherds were terrified with one angel, I cannot begin to imagine their horror, the terror as this army choir of angels appeared! Yet even here we see God's arranging and timing, because by now they would have had a bit of time to adjust to an angel's brilliance revealing the glory of the Lord shining all around them; they would have had time to take in the message of comfort and joy and they wouldn't be scared witless or to death by the sudden appearance of this heavenly host! The Lord knew they were but dust and He dealt kindly and gently with them.

I'm so glad our Lord and Saviour still deals gently and kindly and does not give us what we deserve, but cares for us and deals with us as His little children. He is the powerful mighty Lord our Shepherd, but He deals with us so gently. Isaiah in Ch. 40 tells of the awesome and powerful Lord then says in v11 *"He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young."* Thank the Lord often for His kindness and gentleness as He also leads and keeps us. As He does so, He equips and prepares us to move on in our service of Him and to be able to declare who He is and His goodness more and more. We are to be kind and gentle with each other as His people and show such to others He brings us into contact with.

5. The Angels' Adoration (v14)

Here this angelic choir's focus and message was all directed to God, His glory and honour. The angels wanted God and God alone to have the praise, honour and glory of the first Christmas tidings. The work He had brought about, leading to the salvation of men and women who were against Him, was a source of wonder and amazement to the angels. When no fanfare or proclamation was made on earth, the heavenly hosts burst forth in this doxology, adoration and praise to God *"Glory to God in the highest"*.

These angels wanted all creation to join in praising God. If Elizabeth, Mary and Zachariah wanted people to praise God when they only dimly understood what was going on, how much more did these angels want God to be praised, given all the glory - even though they did not know all God was

achieving, but desired to look into these things (1 Peter 1:12). What they knew was that the One they adored and worshipped in heaven was incredibly united with a body, lying in a manger in swaddling clothes and it was all part of God's working to save fallen mankind - not angels, yet that didn't matter. They burst out glorifying God. We have every reason to join them in wonder, love, praise and adoration of the Saviour who was born there for us. He is the One many of us have as our own Saviour and we can all have if we trust Him.

It is an awesome truth the angels declare - whether we use the AV translation "*on earth peace, good will toward men*" or NIV "*on earth peace to men on whom His favour rests*". How can this holy God have goodwill to any man or woman? We are all rebels against Him, are secretly or openly rebels and enemies of His. How can He have goodwill to those who would reject and ignore Him? How can His favour rest on such ones? Thankfully, incredibly the sending of the One born that day was an outworking of that goodwill, good pleasure, was the outworking of His favour, His grace. While people will bask in God's free and indescribable gift of the Son of God and His influence on history, the ones who truly and fully benefit are those on whom God's favour rests and they did not earn or deserve this, but it is of sovereign love and grace that He set His love upon them before time began.

None of us deserve this love, favour or goodwill from God, but it is ours in the gospel, which is the means by which we can know peace on earth - firstly between God and us, then us and God and then that peace can be worked out in our own lives and shown to others. We need the work of the Lord

Jesus, the Saviour who is Christ the Lord, who is the peacemaker, the Mediator between God and man, as well as man and God. He is our peace and has removed that which God had against us - our wrong and sin. The Lord Jesus by His birth, life and especially His death on Calvary has made peace on behalf of all who trust Him as their Saviour and their sin bearer.

Note the order of the angels' adoration - God is always first and man comes next. That order must never be reversed in our lives, praying, desires etc, but always put God first and our needs after that. We are to recognise what God did for us in sending this Saviour, whose birth the angels celebrated on the day He was born and we traditionally celebrate this time of the year. We are to be like the shepherds who quickly went and found Him for themselves and after they had found Him, they went and spread the good news about Him. Tasting, knowing that the Lord is good in salvation is to cause us to desire to tell others of His so great salvation and what a wonderful Saviour He is.

We are to know Him, show Him, live for Him and delight in Him now and at all times in the year. I pray that we will all have a Christmas where, along with others, the sheer joy and wonder of salvation will thrill, bless us again and we would have renewed joy and delight in the wonders God has done in sending such a glorious Saviour to earth. I pray that our hearts would join in adoring this great God who is such a wonderful Saviour.