

**Reading:** Luke 2v8-15

**Theme:** ANGELS

I would like to wish all listening to and viewing this, a truly God blessed and joyful Christmas. It has seemed a long year – last week someone posted on Facebook “*Today marks 5 years we’ve been in 2020.*” Last week Christmas plans seemed threatened and many peoples’ plans were changed, a new Tier 4 now exists and more may have changed since I recorded this! Many stories are written about Christmas, about amazing things that happened at Christmas. Charles Dickens wrote *The Christmas Carol* and tells us how Scrooge meets supernatural beings - the ghosts of Marley, Christmas Past, Present and Future - the book ends with him being a changed man. Yet at the first Christmas we read of real supernatural beings - angels. They seem to be popping up regularly in Matthew and Luke’s accounts of Jesus’ birth - even in our reading of a whole heavenly host - a mighty army of angels who formed a great choir and praised God for the Saviour born there in Bethlehem. I am going to use the letters of the word ANGELS for my headings:

**Announcements:** Angels are messengers of God and are mighty, glorious creatures, were created by God as His servants and messengers. Billy Graham calls angels “*God’s secret agents*”! They were messengers as they announced the birth of both John the Baptist and 6 months later the angel Gabriel told Mary of the son she would have. When Joseph, Mary’s fiancé, found out Mary was pregnant and knowing it was not his baby, he planned to “divorce” her - engagements were legally binding and needed a divorce proceeding. As he thought on this, an angel appears to him in a dream and told him to marry Mary for the child she was expecting was the Son of God and they were to name Him Jesus, as He would save His people from their sins. Shocking announcements by amazing announcers!

**Newsworthy:** when Royal babies are born in UK, the announcement of the birth is made by a royal official and a notice is posted on the gates of Buckingham Palace. It makes news all around the world.

Angels not only made announcements concerning the One to be born, but when He was born, an angel had to break the news! Not at a royal palace, or to waiting reporters, but this angel went to shepherds up in the hills in the fields and told this newsworthy announcement - that Christ the Lord, the Saviour, had been born there in Bethlehem and the shepherds were told where to find Him.

If that wasn't shocking enough for the shepherds, suddenly there's a whole army of angels and these ones burst out in praise to God - "*Glory to God in the highest*". I would love to have been there to have seen and heard that celestial choir singing - that would be newsworthy itself! These angels wanted the good news of Christ the Lord born in Bethlehem to be told, but did not want the attention and focus on them, for the events spoken of were:

**God Centred:** Christmas is all to the glory of God. Our carols draw attention to the note of worship, of glory to God, of adoring Christ the Lord, of praise to God in the highest. Yes, the Bible accounts tell us of people and events in their lives, but its greatest focus is on what God was doing in and through them. Even the angels are quick to draw the attention to God and centre all the glory on Him and what He was doing in this event.

We can so easily be caught up with all the hassle, bustle and enjoyment of Christmas, especially this Covid-restricted Christmas after a hard and difficult year. It could be so easy to fail to be God centred even on Christmas Day and we do not take time to think about these events that have changed history and affect our lives 2000 years or more later. We should take time out today to thank God and think about what was going on there that first Christmas. As we do so we should realise these were:

**Extraordinary Events:** most of us recognise that the baby born, was no ordinary baby, even though He was born to a displaced couple, born in poverty and filth - an animal eating trough is not a very

hygienic bed - if it was in a stable for animals, it possibly had had residual or fresh animal odours – if you know what I mean! Yet these events were not only extraordinary, but supernatural and Divine. We read and are shown that the one born there is none other than the Son of God with a real human body - formed and conceived by the powerful working of God the Holy Spirit and His conception was a miracle. All the announcements, the announcers and events are quite extraordinary. Even the arrival of the wise men guided by a star which stops over the house where the child was is also extraordinary. Then there are OT Scriptures which said, centuries before, of these events and were fulfilled in minute detail. These events are not ordinary, but are quite remarkable and extra ordinary for they are designed and arranged by God and are supernatural and Divine. Why did God do all this?

**Love Motivated:** why did God send His Son into the world in this way? John 3:16 tells us why! There was no reason at all in us as to why God should be moved to do so. He did it because He wanted us to know His love, forgiveness, peace and to be reconciled completely to Him. We know no one is perfect - but God is perfectly perfect! We all have done, said, thought and desired wrong things and are totally not like God at all. God is absolutely pure and holy. That first Christmas, God had planned and deliberately sent His Son into the world in this way, to be the Saviour of people like us to rescue us from the consequences of our wrong against Him. God did not have to do it, but motivated by His love He did so. At the birth of Jesus, the angels announced and gloried in it as it is part of a love motivated rescue plan by God for people like us! That is marvellous, startling and amazing, yet it is so easy to know about all these things, but leave it there, like a piece of attractive, but unwanted, discarded wrapping paper. We need to ask:

**So What?** Imagine Christmas morning came and there was a knock at the door and delivery men were there - they have brought a brand-new car for each of the adults, new bikes, computers and smart

phones for the children; even new electric scooters for the elderly members in the family. Everyone is so excited and says how lovely it is, then they close the door, and get on with what they were doing before!

That may sound ridiculous and foolish, yet that is what so many people do with the best gift God could ever give us! He gave Jesus so that we can have the gift of eternal life and really know life with God here on earth. He loved this world so much at the Lord Jesus was sent to be the Saviour and the Easter events completes this life work - we are always to note the cross at Christmas. So, what is expected of us? We are not to regard Jesus as an interesting aside at Christmas, or consider it a shame that religion gets into things, even at this time of the year! Nor are we to simply close the door on Him and His claims upon our lives and just get on with what we want to do...

Christmas challenges us to question that if God has done all this, at great cost, because He really knew we needed a Saviour to rescue us, then we should make our getting this Saviour as our Saviour as the No.1 most wanted on our own Christmas list! Once He is our Saviour, then Christmas is another great time to focus again on His ongoing love and joy and yet we can continually know that love, joy and peace not just at Christmas, but throughout the whole year. Angels are great to consider, but nowhere near as great as the One who they openly celebrated when He was born at Bethlehem.

I pray that we, our families and friends will know God's richest blessing on us this Christmas and as we go into 2021 and all it brings our way.