

Moments *for* You

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Theme: Good News



GOOD NEWS FROM HEAVEN

Read Luke 2:8-20

I have read this story of the birth of Jesus many times, yet I have never grown tired of it. I love to read it again and again and imagine this remarkable series of events. Picture this event with me.

The scene is an evening in a field where shepherds were watching their sheep—the sort of context that ordinarily wouldn't draw our attention or interest, because nothing remarkable would be associated with it. I love to imagine the quiet of the evening, probably interrupted by nothing more than an occasional cough, or sniff, or whisper from a shepherd, or perhaps the occasional bleat or shuffle from among the sheep that lay scattered on the field around them.

I imagine that the moon hung brightly in the sky, giving a pale highlight to the field, and flocks, and faces of the shepherds. I imagine that a cool breeze blew slightly, and perhaps there was warm, red glow of embers and the smell of smoke from a slowly-dying campfire. My guess is that it would have been very hard to stay awake in such a night-time setting.

But then, I try to picture what it must have been like for the area around the shepherds to have lit up without warning—brighter than stadium lights could make it—with the glory of the Lord. I try to imagine this mighty angel suddenly standing before them, and I try to imagine the sound of his voice as he spoke to them, seeking to calm them down enough to hear his crucial message. I try to imagine what it must have been

like to hear a multitude of angels from heaven praising God: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (v. 14)!

The scene that night went from serene darkness and quiet to unexpected, unearthly brightness and joyous, awesome loudness in a matter of seconds! What a shock it must have been to these poor shepherds! All this was having a traumatic effect on them, but in spite of their great fear, their final reaction to it all was wonderfully positive. They recognized the news that was brought to them as good news of great joy. In fact, they responded to this news by running to Bethlehem in haste to “see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us” (v. 15). And afterwards, they returned, “glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (v. 20).

GOOD NEWS IS NEEDED

As sinners, we desperately need to hear good news from God. But the fact of the matter is that we don't deserve good news from Him. He is a holy God who has a right to expect our obedience and worship. But we've neither worshiped Him or obeyed Him as we should. Instead, we have often withheld the thanks and worship He deserves, have often shaken our fists at Him in arrogance, and have often disobeyed His clear commandments. If anything, we deserve judgment, not mercy.

But that's what's so wonderful about this birth announcement. It's a message from a holy and righteous God, sent by a mighty angel—and it's a message of “good tidings.” This birth announcement is good news of

great joy, because the One who is born is the One who brings us into the greatest experience of joy possible. Because of this Child whose birth was being announced, those who live under the bondage of spiritual darkness can now be delivered and brought into the kingdom of life and light. Because of Him, those who live in guilt and shame because of their sins can now be washed clean and declared sons and daughters of God. Because of Him, those who have lived their whole lives in the fear of death and judgment can now live with hope in the prospect of glory. As the apostle Peter wrote: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9).

GOOD NEWS FOR EVERYONE

Notice, too, that it’s good tidings of great joy “which shall be to all people” (v. 10). It isn’t good news that will result in joy for the shepherds alone—it’s good news to *all* people of *all* nations. There isn’t a different Savior for different groups of people. There is only one. Jesus’ birth is the good tidings of great joy for all nations and peoples, “For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Peace between God and man can’t happen until the cause of the enmity between them is taken out of the way. That cause of our enmity with God is something of our own making—sin. And until the barrier of sin is taken out of the way, we cannot have peace with God—nor any kind of lasting peace with each other.

That’s another reason why this

birth announcement is so significant. It’s the announcement that the Savior from sins has been born. It’s an announcement that the Son of God has been born into the human family to pay the price for our sins on His cross. It’s the announcement that real peace is finally possible: peace, first of all, between man and God, and then peace between people. As Paul wrote, “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

I hope you take some time to read and meditate on this passage of Scripture. As you do, I hope you enjoy putting yourself in that scene and imagining the details. But, more importantly, I hope you will respond to it correctly. It’s a story that demands a response. I suggest that this passage teaches us how we should react to the birth announcement that the shepherds received:

- Like them, we should look into it with great eagerness and excitement. Because, if it’s true, then it’s the greatest news mankind has ever heard.

- We should think carefully about these things, keep them, and ponder them in our hearts as Mary did. We should let the truth of this great Christmas announcement sink deeply into us and transform us.

- We should also make it known to others, as the shepherds did. God has seen our need and has provided us with a Savior. He has come! News this good is too good to keep to ourselves.

- Finally, we should celebrate it. We should go back to our lives as transformed people—people who glorify and praise God for all the things He has done for us through giving us His wonderful Son Jesus Christ.

—Greg Allen

THE BEST NEWS IN THE WORLD

A wife said to her husband, “Shall we watch the six o’clock news and get indigestion or wait for the eleven o’clock and have insomnia?” Someone else put it, “The evening news is where they begin with ‘Good evening’—and then tell you why it isn’t.”

We live in a world filled with tragedy. If there’s anything this hurting world desperately needs, it is good news. Not only the world in general, but individuals need good news because their lives are strewn with suffering and sorrow. The Christmas story as told by Luke offers not only good news, but the best news in the world. The angel told the shepherds, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

The best news in the world is that Christ the Lord has come as the Savior for all.

Maybe you’re thinking, “That’s nice, but to be quite honest, it doesn’t relate to the problems I’m facing. It may give people a brief feeling of hope and peace every Christmas, but then we have to get back to reality. Honestly, this story doesn’t touch the pain I feel or the tragedy I struggle with on a daily basis.”

But if you’re thinking that, you don’t understand the significance of this news as it relates to you personally. The news that “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” is absolutely the best news there is or ever could be.

First of all, this is the best news because it centers on the most unique Person in history. I’ll focus in a mo-

ment on the fact that He is the Savior. For now, consider that ...

JESUS IS THE CHRIST

The word “Christ” is Greek for “anointed one” (the Hebrew is “Messiah”). It means that Jesus is the one sent and anointed by God the Father for His mission of salvation. He was anointed as Prophet to preach the gospel, as Priest to offer Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, and as King to reign. He alone is able to reconcile sinful people to God through His sinless life, sacrificial death, and resurrection.

JESUS IS THE LORD

The same word is used in verses 9, 22, and 23 to refer to Jehovah God. What a mystery, yet true: the Savior born in Bethlehem is God in human flesh. If He had been only a man, He could not have died for the sins of the human race. If He had been an angel, He could not have borne human sins. But He was Christ the Lord—God! God alone is great enough to deal with our sins.

JESUS IS A MAN

He was born in Bethlehem. He didn’t descend from the sky, fully grown. He was conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb and went through the stages of development just like any other human baby. What a wonder! As a man, the representative Man, He could bear the sins of the human race.

As God in human flesh, Jesus Christ is unique in all the world. He alone qualifies to be the Savior of the world. If you doubt the uniqueness of Jesus, I invite you to read the Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) with an open heart, and you will be convinced that He can be nothing other than fully God and fully man united in one person. That makes the news He brings about

salvation the best news in the world, “good tidings of great joy.”

The best part of this good news is not that it is for all people in general, but that it is for you personally: “unto you is born ... a Saviour” (v. 11). That means that this good news requires a personal response. Each person must respond as these shepherds did. They didn’t say, “Wow, that was really some experience, seeing all those angels,” and sit there the rest of the night with their sheep. They didn’t sit around discussing theology after the angel spoke to them. They didn’t say, “Thanks for the news, but we’ve always believed this” and stay where they were at.

No, they responded to the news by believing what God had revealed to them through the angel. Their faith was demonstrated by their going straight to Bethlehem to see it for themselves and then returning, glorifying and praising God (vv. 15, 20). And what did they see? “Mary, and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger” (v. 16). No halo. No angels hovering there. Jesus didn’t look like a Savior. The place smelled like a barn, because that’s what it was. Very common, very simple. They could have scoffed and stumbled over it, as many do.

What about you? Will you scoff or stumble over the simple but profound message that the baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem, whose birth was announced by angels to these simple shepherds, is Christ the Lord, a Savior born for you? That is absolutely the best news in the world, no matter what your situation in life. Jesus didn’t leave heaven and come to this earth and go through the suffering of the cross just to give you a boost or a few tips on how to have a happy life. He knew that you desperately need a

Savior. He alone can save you from the penalty of God’s wrath which is due to your sins.

—Steven J. Cole

GOOD NEWS!

World news bombards us from the internet, television, radio, and mobile devices. The majority seems to describe what’s wrong—crime, terrorism, war, and economic problems. Yet there are times when good news invades the darkest hours of sadness and despair—stories of unselfish acts, a medical breakthrough, or steps toward peace in war-scarred places.

The words of two men recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible brought great hope to people weary of conflict.

While describing God’s coming judgment on a ruthless and powerful nation, Nahum said, “Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!” (Nahum 1:15). That news brought hope to all those oppressed by cruelty.

A similar phrase occurs in the book of Isaiah: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation” (Isaiah 52:7).

Nahum and Isaiah’s prophetic words of hope found their ultimate fulfillment at the first Christmas when the angel told the shepherds, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

The most important headline in our lives every day is the very best news ever spoken—Christ the Savior is born!

—David C. McCasland, *Our Daily Bread*

FAKE NEWS VS. GOOD NEWS

With all the recent controversy surrounding fake news, biased news, and bad news, the Bible still has good news for us. The word “news” is found only once in the King James Bible (Proverbs 25:25), but the idea and concept of “good news” is found dozens of times in the original Greek language of the New Testament.

In English, the Greek word for “good news” is usually translated “gospel.” The gospel is literally the good news. What is the gospel? 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 says: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

The gospel is the good news that God loves us, despite the fact that we are sinners. We have rebelled against God, and yet He loves us, pouring out His love on us by pouring out His wrath on Jesus. The gospel is that Jesus took the punishment we deserve, and if we will trust Him, we can have His righteousness put on our account, and our sins placed on Jesus.

The good news is that when we trust Jesus as Savior, He makes us into a brand new person who is able to do right, empowered by God’s Spirit to do good works. The gospel is that if you are “born again,” you have the right to become a child of

God and thus have a home in heaven when you die.

This news is not slanted, manipulated or fake. It is the undiluted truth of God’s working through Jesus, and the only way it can ever be seen as bad news is if you don’t take advantage of it!

—Joshua Hawm

The good news is not that Jesus lived and died, but that He died and lives.

—Vernon Grounds

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Answer: The word gospel literally means “good news” and occurs 93 times in the Bible, exclusively in the New Testament. In Greek, it is the word *euaggelion*, from which we get our English words evangelist, evangel, and evangelical. The gospel is, broadly speaking, the whole of Scripture; more narrowly, the gospel is the good news concerning Christ and the way of salvation.

FIRST, THE BAD NEWS

The key to understanding the gospel is to know why it’s good news. To do that, we must start with the bad news. The Old Testament Law was given to Israel during the time of Moses (Deuteronomy 5:1). The Law can be thought of as a measuring stick, and sin is anything that falls short of “perfect” according to that standard. The righteous requirement of the Law is so stringent that no human being could possibly follow it perfectly, in letter or in spirit.

Despite our “goodness” or “badness” relative to each other, we are all in the same spiritual boat—we have sinned, and the punishment for sin is death, i.e. separation from God, the source of life (Romans 3:23). In

order for us to go to heaven—God’s dwelling place and the realm of life and light—sin must be somehow removed or paid for.

FORESHADOWING THE SAVIOR’S SACRIFICE

The Law established the fact that cleansing from sin can only happen through the bloody sacrifice of an innocent life (Hebrews 9:22). The gospel involves Jesus’ death on the cross as the sin offering to fulfill the Law’s righteous requirement (Romans 8:3-4; Hebrews 10:5-10). Under the Law, animal sacrifices were offered year after year as a reminder of sin and a symbol of the coming sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 10:3-4). When Christ offered Himself at Calvary, that symbol became a reality for all who would believe (Hebrews 10:11-18). The work of atonement is finished now, and that’s good news.

JESUS LIVES!

The gospel also involves Jesus’ resurrection on the third day. He “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). The fact that Jesus conquered sin and death (sin’s penalty) is good news, indeed. The fact that He offers to share that victory with us is the greatest news of all (John 14:19).

A COMPLETE MESSAGE

The elements of the gospel are clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 15:1-6, a key passage concerning the good news of God. In these verses we notice, first, that Paul “received” the gospel and then passed it on. This is a divine message, not a man-made invention. Secondly, the gospel is of first importance. Everywhere the apostles went, they preached the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Third, the message of the gospel is accompanied by proofs: Christ died for our sins (proved by His burial), and

He rose again the third day (proved by the eyewitnesses). Fourth, all this was done “according to the Scriptures”: the theme of the whole Bible is the salvation of mankind through Christ. The Bible is the gospel.

A POWERFUL MESSAGE

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). The gospel is a bold message, and we are not ashamed of proclaiming it. It is a powerful message, because it is God’s good news. It is a saving message, the only thing that can truly reform the human heart. It is a universal message, for Jews and Gentiles both. And the gospel is received by faith; salvation is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

GOOD NEWS NOW AND FOREVER

The gospel is the good news that God loves the world enough to give His only Son to die for our sin (John 3:16). The gospel is good news because our salvation and eternal life and home in heaven are guaranteed through Christ (John 14:1-4). “God ... hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

The gospel is good news when we understand that we do not (and cannot) earn our salvation; the work of redemption and justification is complete, having been finished on the cross (John 19:30). Jesus is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2). The gospel is the good news that we, who were once enemies of God, have been reconciled by the blood of Christ and adopted into the family of God (Romans 5:10; John 1:12).

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1)! The gospel is the good news that “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

WILL YOU RECEIVE THE GOOD NEWS?

To reject the gospel is to embrace the bad news. Condemnation before God is the result of a lack of faith in the Son of God, God’s only provision for salvation. “God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:17-18). God has given a doomed world good news. Why would anyone reject the gospel? —GotQuestions.org

SPREADING THE WORD

“When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child” (Luke 2:17).

After the shepherds had come to Bethlehem and had seen the infant Jesus, they “spread the word” about what was told them concerning the child. In other words, the shepherds became witnesses of the event.

Can we doubt that the shepherds had something worth telling? Hardly! For if their story was not worth telling, then no story is worth telling, and life is lacking in all joy and meaning.

These men, poor shepherds though they were, had seen God incarnate. They had heard the music of heaven. They had seen the angels and had come to worship the angels’ King. How could their tongues be silent when they had heard such music? How could they refuse to tell what they had seen?

Moreover, not only did these men have something to tell, as we do, but the shepherds also knew of a world that desperately needed to hear their message. The world of the shepherds’ day was much like the world of our day—it needed Jesus. Jesus would later speak of Himself in precise relationship to the world’s condition. He would say that He was “the way”—for a world that was lost; He was “the truth”—for a world that was dreadfully confused; He was “the life”—for a world that was dying. The Way! The Truth! The Life! (John 14:6).

The shepherds took the message, in the only form they knew, to their contemporaries. That is the perfect combination, then—a knowledge of the good news (which is only another name for the gospel) and the people who need to hear it. That combination, when truly understood and seized upon, produces witnesses.

Would anyone want to say that those men were not authorized to spread such a message? Will anyone argue that they were uneducated? Notice that they had the most important authorization of all—possession of good news that had been revealed to them by God. Anybody who knows good news is authorized to tell it, particularly when it is news that will be the means of the salvation of others. The Scriptures say, “Let him that heareth say, Come” (Revelation 22:17). Ultimately, the only essential for preaching the gospel is a knowledge of it. So every one who knows Christ and has become a Christian can tell others of Him.

Here then is the first way to celebrate Christmas, as suggested by these verses. Imitate the shepherds in spreading the word about Jesus.

—From *The Christ of Christmas* by James Montgomery Boice.