

*Jesus*

As we bring this short study series on the Nativity to a close, the last character we will consider is the central figure, Jesus. In the past lessons, we paid closer attention to his parents, who are important, but we would miss the whole point if we did not focus on Jesus. Though it is past Christmas now, the truth of Jesus' birth is worth celebrating today just as it was a few days ago. We must never grow weary of hearing the story of God delivering us from sin.

Please read a classic section of the occurrences surrounding Jesus' birth in Luke 2:8-20. The first figures mentioned are shepherds, who were watching their sheep through the night in the countryside outside Bethlehem. After a long day of tending their flock, they were probably resting at the camp by a fire, taking turns sleeping and guarding the sheep from nocturnal predators. This activity was a normal habit for them every evening. Then, out of the darkness, **“an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear”** (2:9). With a burst of bright light, a terrifying angel appeared in the countryside, surrounded by the glory of the Lord. Throughout the Bible, the appearance of an angel brings terror to the men and women that encounter one. It is not that angels are monstrous or ugly like a scary movie villain that strikes people with fear. Rather, what makes people afraid of the appearance of an angel is the surprising encounter with a supernatural, holy, beautiful being that has tremendous power and belongs to the high court of heaven. These shepherds were experiencing the glorious presence of the Almighty God who is Lord of the blue and star-filled heavens and the green and mountainous earth. He commands everything by his power, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness. He is worthy of fear and worship. Especially in the Old Testament, when people came into direct contact with the Lord or one of his angels, they expected to die because of God's overwhelming majesty and because of their own sin. When we are set before the luminous presence of God, all our sins are clearly detected and obviously heinous. All of this confronted the resting shepherds when the angel and the glory of the Lord appeared to them.

Yet, the angel brought comfort, not condemnation, when he **“said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people”** (2:10). The shepherds were filled with great fear, but the angel told them that he had a message that would fill them with great joy. Truly, the message must be amazing if it can cause the emotions of shepherds to switch from great fear to great joy in the presence of God and his angels. The great joy that the angel proclaimed to them is: **“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a**

**Savior, who is Christ the Lord”** (2:11). The angel told them that a child was born that very day in the nearby city. While any safe childbirth is worthy of celebration, this was more than just any childbirth. A savior, a deliverer, a hero of the people was born. More specifically, the long-expected savior was born: the Christ, or the Messiah. As I have explained before, the prophets foretold of the Christ, who was a man whom the LORD would send to save Israel by setting up an eternal kingdom full of righteous obedience to God. When the Messiah came, even the rest of the nations would turn to God and bow before the King. The Christ was to be a royal descendant of king David, as God had promised. For hundreds of years, the Israelites were longing for this King to come and restore all things. The angel told the shepherds that night the Christ was born at last.

Jesus, the Savior, was born. Knowing him is great joy. In fact, knowing him is the only way to have great joy in the presence of God. Jesus, the Son of David, came and accomplished deliverance for his people, for those who receive him by faith. When he was crucified with “King of the Jews” tacked over his head, he was suffering for our sins, just as God foretold that he would. He bore our sins within his body on the cross, and as he died, our sins were also killed. His running, red blood atoned for our sins so that we might be forgiven by God. He was raised on the third day, triumphing over death and offers refreshing, eternal life to those who love him. Jesus is our noble hero; and although his kingdom has not fully come, it has been established and will surely be completed. But, remember this always, we can only be saved by trusting in him and repenting of our sins. If we do not submit our whole selves to him as our Christ and Lord, then we do not have eternal life.

The angel told the shepherds that the sign which the shepherds were supposed to find was **“a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger”** (2:12). How odd! The rightful heir to the Israelite throne, the promised savior of the world, and the incarnate God was to be found in a stall, lying snugly in a livestock-licked trough, and cared for by peasant parents. Truly, God has given us his best gift in the oddest—yet most magnificent—package. Look at to what earthly depths our Lord was humbled. Although he was in the form of God, he took on the form of man—a child insignificant to the world. The Son was willing to endure so much in order to save you and me from our evil ways and make us children of God. He so passionately desires to save us, that he was willing to be humiliating to a shocking degree, even unto death. The highest glory is reserved only for the Lord Jesus Christ.

God wraps his best gift in the oddest package in order to make us come to him by faith. Only by faith can we see that an infant in straw is actually our Lord and God. The shepherds had faith. They believed the angel and went throughout Bethlehem until they found the child. The shepherds give us an example of what faith does. After seeking Jesus, the shepherds were filled with wonder and returned to their pastures, **“glorifying and praising God”** (2:20). Faith is characterized by worship. The shepherds also told others the angelic message. Faith is characterized by bearing witness. When we believe that all that the Bible says is true, we will worship the Lord as the one true God. Our love for God will spill over into our conversations with others, wanting others to know of his goodness as well. Could you be described as the shepherds were described? Do you worship and bear witness? Do you love him?