

"Really Hear This Time"

Text: Luke 2:8-14

May the birth of the Savior continually fill you with the same wonder and joy first experienced by the shepherds. Amen.

Children and men have one thing in common. Well, according to our wives we have lots of thing in common, but we focus on one thing in particular this morning: we don't tend to listen very well. What makes it kind of funny (at least to men) is the fact that when moms and wives say things to us, it's not as if the reason we don't hear is because there are lots of other deep and meaningful thoughts going on up in our manly minds. Most of the time there's little to nothing going on up there at all – which is pretty much how we tend to like it. When moms and wives are talking, we would just rather go on thinking about nothing than to have to expend the energy to form thoughts and concentrate.

Unless of course there's something in it for us.

Which makes one wonder if that's why the angels preceded the announcement recorded in our text for this morning as they did – with the brilliance of the glory of the Lord. Which also makes one wonder if, had the *wives* of the shepherds walked to that hillside and made the announcement, their men might well have greeted the news with a, "*That's nice honey*" and simply gone about their business. Pretty hard to ignore news that is immediately preceded by the blinding brilliance of the shining majesty of heaven.

You and I will not be privileged with such a "glory of God" introduction this morning, so it might just take a bit more effort to actually *hear* today's message from our God and, hearing, to actually *comprehend* just what our God is saying to us. This task is made all the more difficult by two things. First, by the fact that the world completely misses the true meaning of these words – and continually draws us to their misunderstanding – and, second, by the fact that these words have become so familiar to us. The text that we will strive to actually *hear* this morning, and from which we will seek to learn and grow, is found in the Second Chapter of Luke's Gospel, beginning this morning with the 8th verse:

^{ESV} **Luke 2:8-14** *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

So far the very words of God. We pray: *Remind us often, O Holy Spirit, that these are your words. Fill us with the wonder and glory of the message of these words, and hear us when we pray, "Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!" Amen.*

Dear Fellow Messengers of true and eternal peace, the word never seems to go out of style, does it - "peace." Everyone is for peace, which makes it the perfect wish, the perfect present, and the perfect blessing. Peace. Yet when you actually take a moment or two to splash around in this puddle, the waters get muddied in a hurry. What is this "peace"? How do you get it and how do you give it? Are we talking about world peace (as in the cessation of all war), religious peace, internal peace, marital peace, peace of mind, what?

More to the point this morning, what exactly did the angels have in mind when they announced the birth of the Son of God with those now-famous words, "**Peace on earth**"? As always, we turn to God's Word for answers. We let Scripture speak for itself.

As is so often the case, we begin to first understand a word or a concept by first understanding what it is not. Is the "**peace of God**" or the "**peace on earth**" all about cessation of wars? Jesus was no fan of war, but he himself told us that war did not come to an end with his arrival. In fact in Mark 13:7-8 he said, "**And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.**" So much for the most common understanding of the term as the world uses it. The angels weren't announcing an end to all wars, since Jesus himself said that such things would continue.

If not *world* peace, did the angels mean "general tolerance and acceptance of differing religious beliefs" when they announced the arrival of peace on earth? Jesus again answers for us: **(Matthew 10:34-38) "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the**

earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ **For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.** ³⁶ **And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.** ³⁷ **Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**

³⁸ **And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**" Jesus obviously did not believe in acceptance of all religions as equal. In fact in John 14:6 Jesus said, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** We would all have to agree that this is a pretty exclusive statement, and therefore "divisive" as the world understands that word or concept. No one gets to heaven ("**comes to the Father**") except through faith in His Son Jesus. That's the sort of thing that causes strife, not harmony. That's exactly the sort of thing against which the world rages, obviously therefore that's not that kind of peace announced by the angels.

So if the angels weren't talking about world peace or religious peace through toleration, were they perhaps talking about something as simple as "peace of mind" - the confidence that comes with knowing that you will be "healthy, wealthy and wise" in this life. Again Jesus' words: **(John 16:33) "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."** No, not that either. Christians have no Biblical right to expect an easy time of it during our earthly pilgrimage.

So just what sort of peace were the angels talking about and what exactly did they promise on that hill outside of Bethlehem?

First of all, the angels didn't *promise* anything. What they did is announce to the world three *facts* as decreed by their Creator God. The first announcement or fact was that glory was the possession of God in heaven. The second was that peace *has come* to earth. The third was that mankind now has, as our possession, God's good will.

We examine the first declaration: **"Glory to God in the highest."**

Every gift has a source, and that source is worthy of more than just a thank you. The source is also deserving of acknowledgement. On a very simple level, that means that when you open a gift at Christmas, not only is the person that gave you the gift worthy of a thank you, it is altogether right for the recipient to bring to mind all that the giver of the gift has done – investing thought, time, and money *for you* – and to honor the giver accordingly. In other words, the gift itself takes on greater value when you

consider that the giver thought about you, considered your needs or desires, and then spent the time and money to buy and wrap your present. If you have ever seen the shameful spectacle of a child bragging about what he got for Christmas, you probably have a sense of what it looks like to get this sort of thing wrong. Where is the boasting in *receiving*?

So also on that first (original) Christmas, the holy angels announced the glory of the Giver of the Gift. They drew, as it were, a great big arrow that points away from mankind and to God, the one true Provider. Note especially that they really don't *encourage* mankind to do something here; they make a triumphant announcement of the way things are: **"The glory is God's!"** They do not say, **"Mankind ought to give glory to God,"** but **"All of the glory connected with this great event belongs to God."** By their words they simply acknowledged the reality of the situation and reacted (spoke) accordingly. **"All glory is God's!"** how could it possibly have been otherwise. The angelic announcement was simply that mankind had received an undeserved gift from God himself.

Mankind often has a direction problem. These declarations by the angels seek not only to declare the birth of the Savior, but they do so by also addressing our direction problem. An example from Mary might help to illustrate what that means.

When you hear that the Virgin Mary was blessed, how do you pronounce that word "blessed" and what do you mean by it? The word can be pronounced "bles-sed" or "blest." The first implies that Mary possessed some quality or attribute that makes her special, the second that Mary is the recipient of God's gracious gifts. While at least one denomination promotes the idea that Mary is bles-sed (and therefore to be venerated or adored as if she were herself a goddess), the Bible teaches that Mary was just an ordinary, sinful human being who was blessed ("blest") by her God. She is the recipient, and she acknowledged as much by her reaction: **"My soul magnifies the Lord... He has..."**

You see the direction problem. Man sees a gifted person and wants to praise and glorify the person. What we are supposed to do when we encounter any and every gift is to *praise the God who gave it*. If you happen to be the recipient of such a gift, that means you are to use that gift to glorify not self but the God who gave it. So also here, the angels directed our attention first to the God who gave the Gift, and in

the next two announcements gave evidence why all glory belongs to him alone.

The first of the two announcements made by the angels was that peace has now come to earth. You will recall that the world has a bit of difficulty with the concept of "peace on earth." Let it not be so with us. While every sane human being certainly longs for an end to all wars, mankind actually had a much bigger problem: we were at war with our God.

Make no mistake. God is the *last* person you and I want as our enemy. Jesus himself said in Matthew 10:28, "**And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**" If God is our enemy, nothing else matters. On the other hand, if God is our friend, again, nothing else matters. When the angels announced "peace on earth," they were declaring a state of peace between God and man. It was the announcement that God has extended the hand of peace to mankind by sending the Savior. We had separated ourselves from our God by our wickedness, which meant that a state of war had existed between God and man. God deserves all of the glory in correcting that problem because he himself was the only one who did anything to fix the problem we had created. He gave his greatest possession to fix the problem. Paul more or less paraphrased the announcement of the angels when he wrote to the Corinthians: "**Now all things are of God** (Glory to God in the highest!) **who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ** (peace on earth!) **and has given us the ministry of reconciliation**" (share with others the message of God's good will toward men.) Paul then goes on to explain what sort of peace mankind has been given: "**That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them...**" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

The peace that the angels announced is therefore *objective*. That means that they were describing God's attitude toward man, not man's attitude toward God or man's attitude toward each other. In the place of richly deserved wrath and enmity, there is now good will on the part of our holy God. In Christ Jesus, our God is also now our friend and ally.

That is, in fact, the final announcement by the angels to all mankind through the shepherds – that mankind now has, as our possession, God's good will. Sin was the wall that separated us from our God. Do not here think in terms of the sins of others. Your sin, my sin, separated *you and me* from *our* God. God himself removed that barrier by placing 100% of the blame and condemnation upon his innocent Son. This was the final announcement by the angels – that the sending of Jesus into

the world was the ultimate expression of God's love for sinful, fallen mankind.

What then did the angels promise to the shepherds? Again, they *promised* nothing. They made declarations of truth that would stand for all time: "*Glory is the sole possession of our God, for he has demonstrated his loving attitude toward mankind by restoring our relationship with him through the birth of his Son.*"

The Glory – all glory – is God's! A state of peace now exists between God and man! God's good will now shines upon all mankind! No wonder all creation should rightly rejoice at the birth of Jesus Christ. No greater news has ever been announced, and no one is excluded. The only question: Are we really hearing what the angels announced? Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 7:10-17** Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." ¹³ And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah--the king of Assyria."

^{ESV} **Matthew 1:18-25** Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

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The 4th Sunday in Advent – December 22, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 73 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 7:10-17) When it comes to discrediting Holy Scripture, mankind can be very inventive. That is why a big part of the hardship borne by the believer in the last days will be dealing with the disrespect and condemnation brought by the world against God's Word. So in this lesson the very fact of the virgin birth is today brought into question. For us the question is settled in the New Testament, where our next Scripture reading will settle the question.

The Gospel Lesson: (Matthew 1:18-25) The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself. We need not wonder if Mary's divine conception was in fact a fulfillment of the prophecy we just read from Isaiah 7. The Scriptures themselves tell us it is so. Jesus was and is the One promised of old.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 702 (Stanzas 1-3) (Brown Hymnal)

"As Angels Joyed with One Accord"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 2:8-14 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Really Hear This Time"

The Offertory – Page 22 (Red Hymnal)

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 702 (Stanzas 4 & 6) (Brown Hymnal)

"As Angels Joyed with One Accord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 73 (Stanza 5) (Red Hymnal)

"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time.

To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune – In humble obedience to God's Word, we practice "Fellowship Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others (not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance – Sunday (29) Average (40) Wednesday (16)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Christmas Eve Rehearsal
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship meal
	-12:15 p.m.	– Annual Voters and WF Meetings
Tuesday	-5:00 p.m.	– Christmas Eve Service
Wednesday	-10:00 a.m.	– Christmas Day Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor James Albrecht is considering the call to Berea of Sioux Falls. Pastor John Hein is considering the call to Immanuel Lutheran College. Mr. Jay Sydow has returned the call to Immanuel of Mankato.

In Our Prayers – Myron Schiermeister is recovering at home from a recent heart attack. Bernie Adams is recovering in Minneapolis after a recent back surgery. Please remember both in your prayers.

Christmas Services – Our annual Christmas Eve Service is scheduled for Tuesday evening at 5:00 p.m., and our Christmas Day Service at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday morning.

Confirmation and Bible Class – Parents and students please note that there is no Confirmation Class, and no midweek Bible Study, this week.

Annual Voters & Women's Fellowship Meetings – Both the Voters and the Women's Fellowship are scheduled to meet after the fellowship meal. All are invited to the fellowship meal following the service this morning.