

Bethlehem's Joy

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Luke 2:8-14
Preached on: Sunday, December 14, 2014

I would invite you this morning to take your Bibles and turn once again to Luke chapter 2. This morning I wish to speak to you about "Bethlehem's Joy" as we contemplate the good news of our Savior's birth and all that that means. In light of that, it's easy to understand why Satan is doing everything he can to distort and discredit, even disallow, Christianity in our culture, all the more reason for us to exalt the name of Christ here this morning. The text I wish to focus on is in verse 8, going through verse 12. Follow along as I read, actually going through verse 14, I'm sorry. Beginning in verse 8,

8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased."

Because of sin, Israel has not seen the glorious presence of God since it departed from the temple for some 400 years or more. This is the context of this passage. They have not heard from a prophet. There had been no angelic announcements, only a solemn silence covered the land which fueled their sorrow and now suddenly, the terrifying light of the glory of God illuminates a hillside in Bethlehem and it's fascinating to think that God chose to give this public announcement of one of the greatest events in the history of the world to these lowly, socially and religiously unacceptable shepherds, an anonymous group of men tending sheep. He didn't make the announcement to the religious elite of Israel. It didn't occur in the temple. Herod is nowhere to be seen. Instead, he sends this amazing light of the presence of God to this hillside in Bethlehem and by implication, since thousands of people didn't come running to see what was going on, there is every indication that no one else saw the light. Of course, God never seems to understand how to properly market his ministry but this is how the Lord chose to do it, to come to these shepherders, dirty men. Of course, this was a thankless job, a low paying job, it required no education, very little skill, just a willingness to live with smelly, stupid sheep 24/7. And because of that, they were unable to observe the Sabbath, therefore, they couldn't fully keep the law, much less the myriad of idiotic regulations required by the Pharisees so consequently these were the social and spiritual outcasts of Israel, in fact, so much so that they were unable to even testify in a court of law, just the type of people the Lord

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loves to reveal himself to. Isn't it interesting that the Lord would even call himself the good Shepherd.

To be sure, God's choice of these shepherds for such a supernatural revelation of the birth of the Messiah illustrates his desire to offer salvation to the meek and to the lowly, not just the proud and the lofty. Mary praised God for this very thing in Luke 1:52, she said, "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, And has exalted the lowly," which by the way, is consistent with Isaiah's prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. In Isaiah 61:1, we read, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And the opening of the prison to those who are bound," referring to the spiritually oppressed. In fact, later on in Luke 4, Jesus says, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Now, let's transport ourselves to that hillside. Some of our friends are asleep while others of us are awake. We're watching, guarding our sheep. The nighttime is, of course, the most dangerous time because that's when predators like to do their thing. It's also a time when thieves like to come in and steal and the darkness of night naturally increases the level of anxiety and so if you've been in environments like that, you know that there is a hyper-vigilant sense of protection. You are in dread of doing battle with something that you may not be able to see very well and so your senses are all heightened and it's just the way we're wired, our imaginations begin to play games with us and then suddenly an angel of the Lord appears. Talk about getting your attention. "An angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them." And if that isn't enough, "the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened." Folks, to see an angel, even in midday, would be terrifying enough but to suddenly appear at night and then beyond that, to be enveloped in a cloud of resplendent light, the glory of God? This is just overwhelming. In fact, it would have been so overwhelming that it would have required supernatural intervention just to help these men stay alive and not be terrified to the point of death.

So the angel says to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people." This morning I wish to draw your attention to four categories that speak to this issue of good news of great joy, categories that when properly understood and embraced, it will utterly transform your life and result in eternal life in heaven. I want us to look at the proclamation, the recipients, the source and the purpose of this good news of great joy. So first of all, let's look closely at the proclamation. "But the angel said to them," this is probably the angel Gabriel but we're not sure, "Do not be afraid." Again, they're terribly frightened here. They're paralyzed with fear as this messenger of God comes and speaks to them, especially in the midst of this resplendent holiness of God, the light of his glory, which will naturally evoke fear in any man and here's why: the word of God tells us that every man has an innate sense of

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God's law combined with an innate system that warns them when they violate that law which, by the way, is a knowledge that will ultimately testify against them in the day of judgment. The word of God tells us that God is constantly revealing his wrath against all ungodliness and all unrighteousness of men. Now, he does this both directly and indirectly. He does this directly through the natural consequences of violating his universal, moral law. We see this, for example, in the principle of sowing and reaping but we also see his wrath constantly being revealed in a direct way through his own personal intervention over the course of history. For example, mankind can easily see God's wrath being revealed as he looks back and sees the effect of God's wrath upon sin in the curse that happened in the Garden. He can look back and see the effects of it in the worldwide flood. He can see it through what happened, for example, with the fire and brimstone at Sodom and Gomorrah. He can see it as he looks back upon the plagues in Egypt, the Babylonian captivity and so on and of course, the most graphic display of his wrath and his hatred of sin was displayed in his judgment upon his Son on the cross. Furthermore, every man knows that he is going to stand before a holy God someday and give an account of his life even though he does not want to admit that and he also knows that he is ultimately guilty of offending a holy God but because of his sinful nature, the word of God tells us that he constantly suppresses these truths by steadfastly holding on to his sin.

Well, these shepherds were no different than any of us in this regard. Suddenly they are exposed by the light of divine revelation, all of their subtle strategies of self-protection are suddenly obliterated. Their sin and their guilt is laid bare and so they are terrified. But isn't it interesting, this is not news of judgment, this is news of mercy, this is news of grace and I find it fitting that the first evangelist in the Gospel dispensation would be an angel and likewise, an angel will be the final proclaimer of good news when he heralds the end of the church era and believers will be changed in the twinkling of an eye and removed from the earth at the rapture.

So shepherds now see this angel and the ineffable, terrifying light of the glory of God and yet they survive. Throughout Scripture, we see other examples of those who have survived the light of God's glory, that same glory, by the way, that hovered over the Ark of the Covenant that held the violated law. All of this, of course, depicting the unapproachable holiness of God because man could never enter into the presence above the violated law apart from the shedding of blood that was placed upon the mercy seat that separated the violated law from the presence of God. God gave ten commandments, you will recall, to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai and in that story, we read how the people were not allowed to even approach the mountain without the fear of instant death. The mountain was covered in smoke and the Lord descended in fire. We read how a trumpet began to blare and it got louder and louder and louder and then smoke ascended from the mountain like a furnace, the entire mountain quaked violently. In fact, Moses was required to set a boundary around the mountain to protect the people lest they get

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near it and the holiness of God consume them. So the Lord speaks to Moses in Exodus 19, he says, "Go down. Warn the people lest they break through to the Lord to gaze and many of them perish." Then in Exodus 20, he gives the law and here's what we read, "All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.' Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.'" My friend, God is a consuming fire and his holiness should evoke fear and trembling. The sound of his voice that we can even hear in his word should motivate all of us to instant obedience and worship and praise.

So, the blinding light of his Shekinah is manifested here, the presence of his glory, and the people are terrified. The shepherds are terrified and yet they live. We can look back in Scripture and we can see what happened with Isaiah when he was placed in the presence of the glory of God. He said, "Woe is me, I am disintegrating." He was so horrified, you remember, he immediately confessed his sins and pronounced a curse on himself. In Ezekiel chapter 1, we read how the brightness of the glory of God was so overwhelming that he fell on his face in utter horror. In Matthew 17, Peter, James and John see the effulgence of the glory of Christ as he peels back his flesh and the radiance of his glory shines forth and they are absolutely paralyzed with terror and the text says that "they fall on their face in fear." Paul fell on his face when confronted with the glory of God on the road to Damascus and John literally passed out with fear when he saw the glory of the ascended Christ in Revelation 1:17. So, at some level, they are seeing the presence here of the glory of God and an angel speaking out of the midst of that so naturally, the angel had to comfort them. As a footnote, dear friends, if we could see but a glimpse of the glory of God, it would forever change our attitude toward worship.

But what of this proclamation? Notice verse 10, "For behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Dear friends, he could have come as the Judge of all the earth as he did in the day of Sodom and utterly destroy the people. Or he could have come in terrifying holiness as he did in the day of Sinai when he gave the law. He could have come and given a well-deserved sentence as our righteous Judge, but instead he comes as our Savior to not only offer us pardon but offer us his life. No wonder it is good news of great joy.

Now, I want to ponder this issue of joy for a moment. We live in a very sad world, one that is filled with despair. Very few people feel truly fulfilled. Most people are dissatisfied with life. Many people are depressed. Few people experience true happiness and when they experience some form of happiness it's like a shooting star, it's bright and wonderful

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for a second and then it falls off and disappears. Man tends to define happiness as an attitude of satisfaction and delight based upon present circumstances, based upon happenings or happenstance and he spends his life seeking for those things that are going to bring him some joy but sadly, his joy is always temporary and it typically never satisfies, at least not for long. It often disappoints and many times it destroys. If you think about it, there is not one single pleasure in life that brings lasting joy and satisfaction. Eventually those things we once found simply irresistible lose their luster, even prove to be a disappointment. Somehow they promise far more than they can deliver. We all remember the smell of that new car or truck, how excited we were. Our hearts are filled with joy for a while and then the new ones come out and ours begins to look kind of old. Or if it's not that, it's some new gadget or maybe a new home or a new career, whatever it is but in the end, our souls always clamor for more and often the things we end up pursuing destroy us: pleasure, drugs, pornography, power, prestige, wealth. Just look at the lives of those who have had everything. Think of Solomon and what did he say? "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He said in Ecclesiastes 2:11, "I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted and behold, all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun." As you read what he learned and what he revealed to us under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, you will learn that the only source of lasting joy was something that could not be found on earth and that true joy is always associated with the glory of God. So his conclusion in Ecclesiastes 12:13 is this, "Fear God and keep his commandments."

You see, this is how God intended for man to enjoy his life, the gift of life that he has given to us, to make the most of every opportunity to live for his glory, to live a life of reverence for God accompanied by an awareness of future judgment. But the reality is, the good news that the angel brings is that God has provided a Savior who will deliver us from judgment. It's for this reason that the writer of Hebrews said that Moses chose to endure ill-treatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Isn't it sad that this Christmas season millions of people will be clamoring after things that will only bring them temporary joy, temporary satisfaction, when the source of eternal, soul satisfying joy is right for their eyes, symbolized in the little babe in the manger? My friends, make no mistake: there is no joy apart from Christ and, again, true joy will always be associated with the glory of God. The 17th century hymn writer, John Mason, captured this perfectly in his hymn when he said,

"I need not go abroad for joy,
I have a feast at home.
My sighs are turned into songs,
The Comforter has come.

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"Down from above the blessed Dove
Has come into my breast,
To witness God's eternal love,
This is my heavenly feast."

Dear friends, do you realize that Jesus specifically prayed for us to experience the same kind of joy he experienced with the Father? Knowing the great difficulties that await every believer in this fallen world, just before his death and ascension back into glory, Jesus interceded on behalf of the apostles and ultimately all believers asking the Father that we may have his joy made full in us, John 17:13. And in answer to that prayer, the Father gives us joy through five primary means as we look at Scripture. If I can digress here for a moment, this is so important. Friends, the subjected experience of supernatural joy comes, 1. Through abiding in his love by keeping his commandments, John 15:11. Secondly, through answered prayer, John 16:24. Thirdly, through the confident hope of future fellowship with our resurrected Savior, John 16:22. Fourthly, through faith in Christ who protects our inheritance reserved in heaven as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:5 in verses 8 through 9. Finally, through feeding upon his word. It's wonderful when you think about it, Jesus said, "I have given them Thy word." You see, this is the greatest catalyst to animate the believer's joy. It's for this reason that the Psalmist declared, "I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil." Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found and I ate them and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart." And John said, "These things we write unto you that your joy may be full."

Dear Christian, if you want to experience the soul satisfying joy that our precious Savior prayed that we might experience, the same type of joy that he had, then you have got to get serious about abiding in him through faithful obedience to his will. You've got to get serious about a secret devotion to God in prayer. You've got to learn to set your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. Get your mind off of the things of this earth. You've got to get serious about habitually meditating upon the staggering truths of your salvation that will one day come to perfect fruition. Then with the Psalmist you can sing, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy. In Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." But friends, most importantly, you have got to get serious about systematic, in-depth, Bible study that rightly divides the word of truth and to take those truths and apply them to your life. This is God's recipe for joy, that deep, soul satisfying, abiding confidence that all is well regardless of circumstances, regardless of difficulties, because joy is the permanent possession of every believer. It is not some whimsical delight that comes and goes as chance offers an opportunity. True joy is a gift from God to all who believe the Gospel, being produced in us by the Holy Spirit as we receive the word of God, as we obey the word of God. Now, it's always going to be mixed with trials and adversities, in fact, a believer's joy is most clearly evident in the midst of trials. This is why Paul said in Romans 5 that we exult in our tribulations. Moreover, in the context

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of those tribulations, he went on to say that the love of God that has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us is what is going to sustain us. This is when we're going to experience it most and for this reason, Peter encouraged the suffering saints when he said in 1 Peter 4:13, "To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." Dear Christian, don't forfeit the joy that is yours in Christ. It's for this reason that Peter also said in 1 Peter 1:8 that, "You greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." My friends, if you know nothing of this kind of joy, you know nothing of the Savior who gives it.

So the angel appears to these lowly shepherds and gives this amazing proclamation of good news of a great joy. Now, who are the recipients? 2. Who are the recipients of this thrilling news? He says, "I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people." Now, this is a phrase "all the people" that Luke uses to refer to the people of Israel, however, in verse 14, we will see that the Gospel message is extended to all men with whom he is pleased, which is going to include Gentiles as well as Jews. We know through Scripture that the Gospel was first given to the Jew. It would go to the Jew first but it would also be proclaimed to all of the world consistent with the great commission that our Lord has given us in Matthew 28. In fact, John tells us that salvation is from the Jews, John 4:22. But the prophet Isaiah revealed that it would also be offered to the Gentiles. In Isaiah 60:1, we read, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising." It was in light of this very prophecy that Simeon when he saw the baby Jesus in the temple declared, "For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel."

Now, it is important to note that the good news of the Gospel will even indirectly benefit people who reject it because they will indirectly enjoy the blessings that he bestows on his own. We see that the rain falls on the just as well as the unjust, right? In fact, no despotic dictator can long enslave his people who embrace the Gospel. The chains of oppression and slavery will quickly be broken wherever Christianity rules. By the way, this is why the utopian left in America hates true biblical Christianity. You see, they can only control those who see themselves as victims without hope, those who only live for this world. We can look back in history and see how the blasphemous superstitions of Roman Catholicism could not maintain a grip upon those who learned of the true Gospel of grace in the time of the Reformation. In fact, the United States of America was blessed because it was a product of the Reformation. However, the overflow of blessings on

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unbelievers, those blessings that they experience, will not extend beyond their earthly existence. So indeed, this proclamation of good news is far-reaching.

Now, what is the source, 3., of this soul thrilling news? Well, it's found in verse 11, "For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." This is an irrefutable affirmation of his deity and purpose, to be your Savior. Now, think about this personally: your personal Savior. Your personal Lord. He was born for you personally. It's an amazing thought. Herein is the indescribable gift, a personal Savior. Folks, as we look at Scripture, you must remember that it was your face that he saw before he created you. It was you personally that he loved even while you were a sinner. In fact, it was for you that he descended from heavenly glory. That's what we see here in this text. It was for you personally that he took upon himself the form of a man, lived a perfect life so that he could be the perfect sacrifice for your sin that he bore specifically on the cross for you. I cannot fathom such personal intimate love but I can understand it enough to say with utmost conviction that this Jesus in the manger has transformed every fiber of my being. Every waking moment is filled with the joy of his presence. Every breath he gives me to breathe is another opportunity to magnify his name. He is my source of joy. Is he yours? He is my personal Savior. Is he yours? I hope so. He came as a Savior to seek and to save lost sinners like you and me, people without any hope, people without help, people longing for peace and real joy. So this is the good news. There has been born for you a Savior who is Christ. This speaks of the Messiah. This is the anointed one. And it says, "the Lord." This is kurios in the original language. In fact, this is the divine title that encompasses everything that is implied in the Tetragrammaton, the four letters of Yahweh, the way the Greek people translated the Old Testament. This is the great "I am" of John's Gospel. So what he's saying here is that the preexistent, self-existent, uncreated Creator of the universe, God very God, has come to earth for you.

My friends, I hope you understand that Jesus is not merely the reason for the season, Jesus is Lord. This is the heart of the Christmas story that we need to tell our friends and loved ones: Jesus is Lord. He was anointed. He is the anointed one, anointed by the Father to be prophet, priest and King. He was and is the prophet that proclaims the Gospel of God. He came as a priest to offer himself as the perfect and the final sacrifice, the Mediator between God and man. And he came as King to rule as King of kings and Lord of lords eventually in his glorious kingdom. So again, consider this: the uncreated Creator that made you, the one that you and I have offended in more ways than we can imagine, left the realms of glory to take upon himself our nature and ultimately suffer and die in our stead that we might have eternal life. This was so thrilling to Jude that he said that he is the one who is able to keep you from stumbling and make you stand in the presence of his glory, blameless with great joy. My friend, if this kind of love does not awaken your heart to gratitude, nothing will. If this doesn't cause you to exult in sacred joy, nothing will. Instead, let me tell you what your life will be like: it will be nothing

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more than perpetual cycles of endless disappointment. Happiness and then disappointment. Happiness and then disappointment. And ultimately you will die in your sin and you will be forever separated from any hope of joy, separated from God in the solitary confinement of an eternal hell. So this is incredibly good news.

Notice what else the angel tells the shepherds, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." You know, somehow when you read that it's like, "What?" Don't you know they must have wondered. You know, you would have expected the angel to say, "You will see him seated on a throne of grandeur, surrounded by the heavenly host. He's going to be clothed in purple robes and there is going to be majestic splendor. You'll see him in the temple surrounded by the religious elite of Israel. You must run there and see him." But no, no, no. "Look for him as a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

I have to laugh at this, it's no wonder this unimaginable humility would trigger the response of the heavenly host. Notice in verse 13, "And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God." The heavenly host speaks of just an army of angelic beings. It's as though they are waiting behind the curtains. They are waiting for their colleague to finish his little announcement so that they can jump out on the scene and explode in praise. Now, how many of them were there? We don't know, it just says "a multitude," and a multitude here in Tennessee means a whole bunch. And in this context, it would have been an enormously large group, more than anyone could count. And I have to put myself in the shepherd's place, I mean, it was hard enough to see one angel and the glory of God and you probably still haven't taken a deep breath and then all of a sudden, they're everywhere. Once again, God had to have done something to sustain them. Imagine the scene: these ministering spirits who spend their life in the presence of the Most High instantly and perfectly doing his bidding, these magnificent creatures that are eyewitnesses of the majesty and grandeur of the Triune God and now, because of a love that they cannot understand, they witness a new dimension to his glory in the Incarnation.

So what are they doing? Verse 13, they are "praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.'" So here we come fourth and finally to the purpose of this good news of great joy, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." Now, I must clarify something here: the King James version has an unfortunate translation that can be confusing, it says "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Sadly, many misinterpret this text and often use it out of context. We see it in yard decorations all the time and on Christmas cards, "Peace on earth." It's the idea of, "Well, let's have an absence of conflict here. Let's have an end of all wars. Let's enjoy a relaxed state of mind. Let's have some tranquility here." But all of this is really based upon a

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naïve and inaccurate understanding of what this text says, not to mention, the theology of the New Testament. You see, in reality because of sin, Jesus says that the wrath of God abides upon sinful man. We are separated from God. We are alienated from God but because of Christ, we can now be reconciled to God and have peace with him so they are saying, "Glory to God in the highest," because he has provided a way for sinful man to be reconciled to a holy God so that the war can be over and we can have peace with him.

Note also the phrase commonly used, "with whom He is pleased." In other translations it says "goodwill toward men." Again, you see this in many Christmas cards. I know some of you are probably thinking, "Oh, I hope I didn't send him a card that says that." Don't worry, I understand. But for a lot of people, this kind of means, "Well, let's just all show kindness to one another." It's kind of a sentimental version of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And others even erroneously assume when it says "With whom He is pleased" refers to salvation through works. There are all kinds of silly stuff that can come out of a misunderstanding of these texts but none of this is true. Literally what it's saying is "peace among men of his good pleasure." Peace among men of his good pleasure. So here's what the angels are saying: "Glory to God in the highest, those who are the sovereignly chosen recipients of his grace purely because of his good pleasure can now have peace with God by grace through faith in Christ, the Savior." This is the good news and, friends, this is the heart of the Gospel. All the glory belongs to him. None of it belongs to us, therefore, the angels say, "Glory to God in the highest." Spurgeon had it right when he said, "The only glad tidings that made the angels sing are those that put God first, last, God midst and God without end in the salvation of his creatures and put the crown wholly and alone upon the head of him that saves without a helper. Glory to God in the highest is the angel's song."

My friends, this was the theology that evoked such angelic adoration as it should with each of us. Think about it: these were the same creatures that sang at creation when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. These are the same heavenly host that we will one day experience. In fact, we will one day join in with them and say with a loud voice according to Revelation 5:12, "'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.' And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.'" And of course, this is what fueled all of these truths, really fueled the hymnists who put it this way,

"Angels from the realm of glory,
Wing you're downward flight to earth.
Ye who sing creation's story,

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Now proclaim Messiahs birth.

Come and worship,

Worship Christ, the newborn King."

My friends, I pray that this is the attitude of your heart, not just this Christmas but throughout the remainder of your life. I would challenge you to jettison all of the phony religious and superstitious things that tend to shape this holiday season. I would even caution you with what you put on your Christmas cards, with what you put out in your yard, with how you decorate your house. And I would challenge you to take some of these eternal truths. I have given you things, these study questions, use some of these. Make them your own so that somehow whether it's in the beauty shop or the barbershop or when you're having lunch with your friends, drop some of these great truths. They may not like it but believe me, you'll spit in their soup and they will never enjoy it as they once did and they will think about these truths and by God's grace, the power of his word can penetrate that hard heart and cause them to come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Isn't that the way he worked with us? Of course he did and so let's be evangelists like the angel and give our friends and our loved ones the good news of the Gospel.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths that are so transforming and I pray once again, that if there be anyone within the sound of my voice that knows nothing of the joy of a felt Christ, that soul-satisfying joy of knowing that sins are forgiven and that we are absolutely heaven bound, Lord, I pray that by the power of your Spirit, you will so overwhelm them with conviction that they will repent and that they will place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, their only hope of salvation. Lord, we give you all the praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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