



Meditation

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Good tidings of great joy

And the angel said unto them, 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

Good tidings of great joy!

The world looks for joy in possessions and pleasures and power and whatever else they set their hearts on. Their idols promise happiness; but they never deliver. And when one's idols prove themselves empty—as idols invariably do—they are replaced with other idols equally unable to satisfy.

In contrast to the empty joy of the world, there is great joy for all who know salvation in Christ the Lord. The shepherds experienced that joy some two thousand years ago.

The good tidings of great joy came to poor shepherds on the outskirts of the humble town of Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary, having found no room in Bethlehem's inn, ended up in a stable on the edge of civilization, in which stable Jesus was born. Though He was the King of kings, Jesus was born far away from any royal palace, in a place fit for animals. Instead of velvet or fine linen, He was wrapped in strips of cloth. Instead of a luxurious bed, He was laid in a feeding trough. Christ's lowly birth in Bethlehem, to our human eyes, does not seem like the most joyful of circumstances.

Fitting those lowly circumstances, the news of the King's birth was not delivered by courier to the kings and princes of the world. God did not send angels to the high and mighty of the world. He chose to send the news of Christ's lowly birth to humble shepherds dwelling with their sheep, even farther from civilization than the stable. Shepherding was the lowliest of occupations. Watching the flocks at night time was even more undesirable. But God chose to send good tidings to shepherds, whom most would consider to be least deserving to receive such tidings. God's grace works that way.

The words of the angel were, "I bring you good tidings!" Tidings, not just that a baby was born, as people

might rejoice in the birth of any child, but tidings of salvation. Exactly because the angel brought the good news of the gospel, he tells the shepherds, "Fear not."

Why must they and why must we not fear? Because a "Savior is born, which is Christ the Lord." The good news is not merely that a Savior would one day be born in the future. The good news is that the Savior *has been* born, the very Seed God had promised since the Fall of Adam and Eve. Just as God promised, Christ was born in the line of David, in Bethlehem, the city of David.

Our Savior did not come merely to save from physical oppression as, for example, the Jews were experiencing at the hands of the Romans. The Savior did not come merely to save us from hunger, disease, poverty, wars, drug addiction, low self-esteem, depression, injustice, racism, or any host of societal ills. To be sure, our final salvation will include deliverance from these things.

But our Savior gives us much more than that. His salvation is not only deliverance from the effects of sin as we experience them in the world; it is also deliverance from sin itself and the eternal torments that our sins deserve. The Savior not only delivers us from the greatest evil; He also confers upon us the greatest good—He brings us into covenant fellowship with the Father.

The Savior born that day was fully human, being born of a woman. And yet, He was much more than a man: the Savior is "Christ the Lord." He is the *Christ*, that is to say, the Anointed one, ordained and equipped to save us. And, He is God *the Lord*, having all power and authority to save His people to the uttermost. Jesus' lowly birth cannot be separated from His exalted rule. Even the wise men, who later visited Jesus, understood that He was King at His birth. The mystery of Bethlehem is that the Infinite took on finite form; the Almighty God took upon Himself weak human flesh; the Eternal bound Himself up in time.

These good tidings give us every reason for great joy because they answer to our deepest need.

That great need is brought out by the fact that the

shepherds were “sore afraid.” When they saw the dazzling glory of the Lord shining round about them, the shepherds were not unlike Isaiah when he saw the glory of the LORD emanating from the throne of God. Seeing that glory, Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Is. 6:5). When the shepherds saw the glory of the Lord shining round about, they feared what might happen to them because they knew they were sinful creatures of the dust who deserved God’s wrath.

In response, the angel says to them, “Fear not!” The same word applies to us when we consider the glorious righteousness of God and our despicable sinfulness. God says to us in the gospel, “Fear not!” Why? Because of the good tidings of great joy.

The world may manifest a certain kind of joy. They might laugh at jokes and rejoice at their temporary and insignificant possessions and accomplishments. They might have companions who gladly join them in their worldly pursuits. But the world seeks its joy apart from God in the superficial things here below. And, when they have to answer God on the judgment day, their superficial joy will turn into deep-seated and dreadful fear.

Thanks be to God, we have reason for great joy this season as we contemplate the glorious truth that our Savior was born with a special purpose. He was born in order to purchase our salvation with His precious blood. He was born to deliver us from our greatest misery and make us His own precious possession as adopted brothers and sisters. When we understand just a portion of our glorious salvation, we rejoice. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ! We know God’s Fatherly love as we stand in Christ! What greater reason for joy could there be in the entire world?

Every child of God faces sorrows of one sort or another in this valley of tears. We experience sorrows in our families and marriages, loneliness, difficult work circumstances, grief over the loss of loved ones, guilt for past sin. But, God’s word to us is, “Fear not! A Savior is born!” We are loved by God for Christ’s sake. That gives us perspective no matter what darkness we face. Not that this joy erases the very real sorrows we experience. But joy runs deeper than our sorrows!

This joy is the personal, subjective experience of God’s children. Not that we experience that joy in its fullness at every moment, but we do have this joy because the Savior came for us personally. The angel’s

announcement to the shepherds was not merely, “A Savior is born,” a Savior who might be the Savior of others but not necessarily their own personal Savior. Rather, the angel says, “*Unto you* is born this day...a Savior.”

This announcement was first made unto the shepherds. Although the text does not say specifically that these shepherds were men of faith, we know they were from their response to the good tidings. When the angels left, these men delighted in the glorious message and made haste to visit the Christ child lying in a manger in order to worship Him.

Of course, the words “unto you” announced by the angel were meant not only for the shepherds who first heard them; they are meant for all believers. That is why the angel says these good tidings of great joy “shall be to *all people*.”

However, these good tidings are not joy for every person that has ever existed. These tidings were not a source of joy for wicked Herod when he came to learn of Jesus’ birth. Nor are they a source of great joy to the wicked reprobate in general. Literally, the angel says that good tidings “shall be to all *the* people.” This joy is for a specific group of people. There is joy for the whole nation of God’s people; these good tidings are for all of true Israel who were looking for God to send the Redeemer. “All the people” includes people from every nation, tribe, and tongue elected by God from before the foundation of the world. Great joy shall be to all God’s people because that little baby lying in a humble manger would one day be humbled unto death as He was nailed to the rugged cross.

Great joy is given to us today by the Spirit of Christ, who bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. As the Spirit gives us life and shows us our need of a Redeemer, He also gives us eyes of faith to see that the Son of God humbled Himself and took on human flesh to suffer hell’s torments in our place. There is great joy knowing that our faithful covenant God loved us before the foundation of the world, that He manifested His love in the sending of His only begotten Son, and that He acted upon His love and took us into fellowship with Himself. That same God will never leave us nor forsake us, and will one day take us into glory.

What good tidings of great joy to consider this season!

May the good tidings of Christ’s birth and death, and now His reign in heaven, give us joy in this season and every day of our pilgrimage.