



## **Luke 2:8–14**

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12

This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.’

## **Reflection**

Zechariah sings. Mary sings. Soon Simeon will sing. And today a whole company of angels sing praises to God in the night sky over a little town called Bethlehem. Luke introduces the birth of Jesus and the fulfilment of all God’s promises in the Old

Testament in him with songs of loudest praise, sung by common people and angels, to common people. They sing about one born poor, a commoner like the rest of us, through whom billions would one day become rich. Today the angels sing to *shepherds* of all people; but why not? So far we've seen God at work almost exclusively in the lives of ordinary people: an elderly couple, a teenage girl, a carpenter from the wrong side of the tracks and now low paid workers from the rough end of town working a night shift. Think council workers with tattoos, muscles and cigarettes building a road under lights, doing good honest work in the middle of the night while their loved ones sleep at home. Luke continues his narrative of the birth of Jesus in today's passage from Luke 2:8–14,

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peace to those on whom his favour rests.’

Perhaps two miles outside of Bethlehem, in what has come to be known as ‘Shepherd’s Field’, shepherds are keeping watch over their flocks; protecting them from wild animals and robbers. Their’s was a poor man’s profession, and according to early Jewish writings, in the ancient world shepherds were despised. Their nomadic lifestyle meant they were separated from human communities and culture for long periods of time. Much like gypsies, suspicion and distrust soon grew. You’d as soon socialise with lepers and tax collectors as you would with shepherds. And yet it was to them that an angel of the Lord chose to appear. And not just one angel, but the whole heavenly host.

In ancient times the birth of an emperor was celebrated by poets, bards and court orators inside palace walls. Jesus' birth is celebrated by angels, not in palace halls, but in open fields; and not before lords, but shepherds. And once more just as Isaiah had prophesied, good news is proclaimed to the poor (Isa 61:1).

A warrior-messenger from God appears to them. Verses 9 to 11,

and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to

you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

They're terrified. His words bring some measure of comfort. And then a moment later the dark night sky is ablaze with glory.

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

Their night eyes are almost blinded as darkness turns to blinding light. A great company of heavenly host appears. These are military terms: company and host. The

sky is filled with a great army of God's warrior-messengers here not to bring war but to announce the prince of peace. The army is huge, regimented and marshalled for praise and the purposes of God, deployed this time not for war but for peace.

Milton imagined them lined up in ranks outshining the stars,

The helmed cherubim,  
And sworded seraphim,  
In glittering ranks with wings displayed ...

The stars with deep amaze  
Stand fixed in steadfast gaze

Job tells us that at the creation of the world 'the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy' (Job 38:7). Now



the angels once more join their voices at the greatest creation of all – the incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the world.

Abraham was shepherd, Moses was a shepherd; each at points in their lives. As was David, most importantly, who went on to become king. In the town of David, announced to these shepherds, a new king is born. One from the line of David, right now lying in the feeding trough of an animal, perhaps even sheep. Like David this one too will leave behind his humble origins and as the Messiah, God's anointed king, will go on to reign on the throne of David forever, his kingdom having no end.

The angel's response to this good news is instructive for us. The song they sing

is upward and outward. So should our response be to the Gospel. Firstly they sing upward, glorifying God, rejoicing and praising him for salvation's outworking as God's saving plan breaks into the world in the person of Jesus. And then they sing outward, pronouncing peace on all those with whom God is pleased. Hear their words again, verse 14,

14 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

And so again today we see God miraculously at work in the lives of ordinary people; the humble, the lowly and the despised. An elderly couple, a teenage girl, a carpenter from a country town, and today

poor working class shepherds of ill-repute. Soon it will be tax collectors, lepers, women and slaves and many more who lived on the margins of first century society. As Paul will later on reflect in 1 Corinthians,

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

## Think & Pray

Through Jesus, ordinary people go on to do extraordinary things. And the not-so-secret truth of Christianity is that in the end no matter the family we were born into, or the education we've had, the money in our bank account or the title on our business card unless we see ourselves as spiritually poor before God then we can never truly receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. It is to the humble and the poor in spirit that Jesus comes and on whom God's favour rests.

And the natural response of our hearts must follow Zechariah, Mary and the angels. For those who've genuinely received the good news of Jesus Christ into their

hearts the response of their lives is upward and outward praise – lives that are lived in vocal and active praise of God both upwardly and outwardly; praising him with our whole lives as our act of worship and declaring his praises to anyone who will listen. Listen to the angels one last time,

14 ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.’

There is peace available to those on whom God’s favour rests – eternal peace with God in heaven through humility enough to acknowledge our sinfulness, repentance, and trust in the only sufficient saviour Jesus Christ who became poor so that we might become rich.

Praise God this morning in prayer like those angels. Respond in obedience to him like those shepherds. And treasure Jesus like Mary and Joseph cradling the son of God and saviour of the world in their arms.