



Luke 2:15–21

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were

amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. 21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Reflection

Luke's Gospel – a meticulous, historical work, investigated, written and recorded with scientific precision – opens by documenting multiple eyewitness accounts of the sighting of angels. Angels. War-

rior-messengers sent from God. Their otherwise very rare appearances in Scripture usually mark momentous turning points in the Bible – the annihilation of cities and armies; or world-altering, earth shaking prophecy delivered directly from the throne room of God.

It's the middle of the night, a band of shepherds are torn between abject terror and adoration. Sheep all but forgotten, they blink to recover their night vision, as the glory that lit the countryside fades and the constellations begin to reappear. Their ranks outshining the sun, moments earlier the dark night sky over Bethlehem was filled with a great company of heavenly host – military speak for a great army of God's warrior-messengers – regimented, marshalled and deployed to deliver

a message from their king. The message was this,

‘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.’

‘Good news’ – the Gospel.

‘a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.’

Message delivered, they burst forth into glorious praise, rejoicing, praising and giving glory to God for salvation’s outworking,

as his saving plan breaks into the world in the person of Jesus.

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

And then they were gone. Luke’s narrative picks up today as the shepherds recover themselves after this life-defining moment. Reading from Luke 2:15–21,

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the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. 21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Fear of God – that is, thinking of him as we ought, with deep reverence and in the

highest esteem – always leads to obedience and faith. And this is quickly evident in the shepherds. Theirs' was one of the lowliest and most despised professions in the ancient world, so much so that their testimony was inadmissible in court. Which, incidentally, is another huge tick for the historicity of Luke's gospel. If you were making this story up, you would not have angels appearing to shepherds. Or lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes or women for that matter – but clearly someone forgot to tell Luke and Jesus. Again we're reminded that Jesus came to preach good news to the poor who so often also are the 'poor in spirit', and thus in the only possible spiritual state to receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

The despised have been greatly hon-

oured. And their fear and deep reverence of God gives way, as it always does, to obedience and faith, verses 15 & 16,

‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

They didn’t just obey, they hurried to do so. We imagine them running, leaping over low Judean fences, checking stable after stable, humble dwelling after dwelling, looking in animal slop after animal slop until finally finding the Saviour of the Universe in the feeding trough of an animal, under the watchful care of a village carpenter and a very washed-out looking

teenage girl.

The night sky filled with an army of boisterous angels and a feeding trough. What a powerful and unthinkable sign! So impossibly and divinely incongruous, signaling the arrival of the one who would later teach of the first becoming last, and the last becoming first and the greatest amongst us becoming the servant of all. The greatest to ever walk amongst us begins his journey in a feeding trough, born out of wedlock, a 'bastard' to speak crudely of what no doubt would later be whispered, to a 'teenage virgin' from the disreputable town of Nazareth. It boggles the mind and challenges us to our deepest core that the God of the universe would take on these clothes and make his grand entrance into our materialistic world in this way.

But the shepherds were sold. Not only were they eyewitnesses of the great army of angels now they have seen the sign for themselves. And as you can imagine they can't contain themselves. Verse 17,

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Think & Pray

We too should stand amazed at the testimony of the shepherds as Luke has faithfully recorded it. We too should treasure up all these things with Mary, pondering deeply in our hearts what Jesus' incarnation and humble birth reveals about the nature and character of both God and humankind. And we too should follow the shepherds' response. They returned to their day jobs (few of us go into full-time paid ministry), but they did so glorifying and praising God for all that he had revealed, lives no doubt forever changed.

Do you stand amazed at our God? Do you treasure Jesus and ponder his incarnation and humility in your heart? The universe was created through Jesus. He never had

a beginning and never will have an ending. Right now he is upholding all things, holding all things into being through the power of his word. He is infinitely powerfully. And yet, here he lies in a manger, born a helpless babe. So he could walk a mile in our shoes. So he could relate to us and us to him. So he could teach us about true greatness found in humility and the service of all. So he could live the life we should have lived. And so he could die the death we were all destined to die as the only one sufficiently qualified to exchange his life for ours. It's breathtaking. Awe-inspiring. And demands a response. What response? The response of the shepherds: obedience, action, spreading the good news about Jesus, and the remainder of life lived glorifying and praising God.

Ponder these things in your heart this morning. And pray that the good news of Jesus would affect you in the same way. Our passage closes with the child being named 'Jesus' – a name that means 'God saves'. Every time we say or read the name Jesus is it a reminder that God saves. It is essential to his character. Our God saves. Jesus is salvation. There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. Pray with all your heart today for someone in your life who needs to be saved. And ask God the part he would have you play.