

"Are You Hearing This?"

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 tend to have something in common. Well, according to our wives we have lots of things in common, but we focus on one thing in particular this morning: children and men 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 we don't actually hear what they're saying because there are lots of other deep and meaningful thoughts going on up in our manly minds. Most of the time there's 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 rather just go on thinking about nothing than have to expend the energy to form thoughts and concentrate, let alone remember.

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

Which almost makes you 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 you 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 watching their sheep graze. Pretty hard to ignore news that is delivered by an angel and immediately preceded by the blinding brilliance of the shining majesty of heaven.

You and I will not be privileged with such an introduction this morning, so it might just take a bit more effort to actually *hear* today's message from our God and, hearing, actually comprehend just what our God is saying to us. This task is made all the more difficult by the fact that the world completely misses the true meaning of these words – and continually draws us to their misunderstanding. 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 – words also made all the harder to really *hear* because they are so familiar to all of us:

NKJ(Luke 2:8-14) Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring

you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!"

This is God's Word. We pray: *Remind us often, O Holy Spirit, that these are your words. Fill us with the wonder and glory of these words that we might listen and truly hear. So also we pray, "Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!" Amen.*

So just what exactly did the angels promise when they made their announcement to the shepherds?

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 – three facts that we will struggle to actually *hear* this morning. The first announcement or fact was that glory was the possession of God in heaven. The next two announcements verify or prove why God is deserving of all glory: peace *has come* to earth and mankind now *has*, as our possession, God's good will.

We need to examine the first declaration of the angels ("**Glory to God in the highest.**") so that we can truly *hear* exactly what they there announced.

Every gift has a source, and that source is worthy of more than just a thank you. The source is also deserving of acknowledgement. That means, for example, that when you open a present at Christmas, not only is the person that gave you the gift worthy of a thank you, it is appropriate for the recipient to recognize 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 maybe even wrap your present. If you have ever seen the shameful spectacle of children bragging about what they got for Christmas, you probably have a sense of what it looks like to get this sort of thing wrong. There is no boasting in *receiving*. There is certainly no bragging when we receive something *from God*.

So also on the night Jesus was born, the angels proclaimed 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 also that they really didn't *tell* mankind to do something; they made a triumphant announcement of the way things are: "*The glory is God's!*" They didn't say, "*Mankind ought to give glory to God,*" but "*All of the glory connected with this great event belongs to God.*"

Mankind often has a direction problem. These declarations by the angels seek not only to announce the birth of the Savior, but they do so by also addressing our direction problem. How we refer to Mary is probably the best example of getting the direction wrong. 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 means that Mary possesses some quality or attribute that makes her special, the second that Mary is the recipient of God's gracious gifts. While some promote the idea that Mary is bles-sed (and therefore to be venerated or adored as if she were herself something of a goddess), the Bible tells us that Mary was just an ordinary, sinful human being who was blessed ("blest") by her God. She was the recipient. God alone blessed her, which means that he alone deserves the credit, praise, and glory.

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 a gift in another human being is to *praise the God who gave such gifts to men*. If you happen to be the recipient of such a gift, your job is to use what you have been given to glorify not yourself but the God who gave you that gift. So also here the angels directed our attention first to the God who gave the Gift, and then with the next two proclamations they gave evidence as to why God is worthy of all glory.

The first reason the angels announced that God was worthy of glory was because he had sent "***peace on earth.***" "Peace" is certainly a popular word in this and every other society. 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? We hope to take a more in-depth look at the word "peace" in a midweek study, but for now we'll just do a quick overview.

As is so often the case, we begin understanding 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 or absence 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 wars would continue.

If not *world* peace, does the Bible mean "general tolerance and acceptance of differing religious beliefs" when it speaks of peace? Jesus again answers for us: (***Matthew 10:34-36***) "***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.***" 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.***" Hard to imagine a more exclusive – and therefore divisive – statement. No one gets to heaven ("***comes to the Father***") except through faith in His Son Jesus. That's an absolutely necessary truth, but it is also the sort of thing that causes strife, not harmony.

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 should expect hard times.

What sort of peace did the angels then announce? The very best kind. As terrible as war and strife among men can be, mankind actually had a much bigger problem: we were at war with our God.

Make no mistake. God is the *last* person any human being could want as an 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

your enemy, nothing else matters. On the other hand, if God is your friend, again, nothing else matters. When the angels announced "peace on earth," they declared that God had extended the hand of peace to mankind by sending the Savior. We had separated ourselves from our God by our wickedness. Since mankind's fall into sin, a state of hostility had existed between God and man. All glory is God's first of all then because by sending Jesus he is the one who acted to correct our most desperate problem. Paul basically 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!) Paul then goes on to explain what sort of peace mankind has been given: **"In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."** (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

The peace that the angels announced is *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 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. Mankind now has, as our possession, God's good will. Sin was the wall that separated us from our God – including especially our own sin. Your sin, my sin, separated us 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 ultimate act of reconciliation and *good will* has been initiated by God in the sending of his Son as our Savior.

What then did the angels promise to the shepherds? Again, they *promised* nothing. They made declarations of truth that would stand for all time. Their message: *"All glory is God's. A state of peace now exists between God and man – in Christ Jesus. God's good will has thereby been poured out upon all mankind."* All creation should rightly rejoice at the birth of Jesus Christ. No greater news has ever been announced. Are you hearing this? Really *hearing* this incredible news? It is certainly worthy of our undivided attention. Don't rob yourself by giving the priceless angelic proclamation anything less. Amen.

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.

NKJ **(Luke 2:8-14)** Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² "And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!"



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The Fourth Sunday in Advent – December 18, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 66 (Stanzas 1-2, 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes!"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

The Old Testament 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 also in this lesson, as 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 remove all doubt.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 24 (Supplement page 25)

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 1:18-25) The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself. We need not wonder if the sign God promised to King Ahaz was that a *virgin* would conceive or just a young maiden. 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 Savior promised by God.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 90 (Stanzas 1-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising"

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

"Are You Hearing This?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 55 (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Thou Precious Ransom, Come"

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn - 95 (Stanzas 1,3,5,7) (Red Hymnal)

"Savior of the Nations, Come"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (37) Average (35) Wednesday ()

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Christmas Eve Rehearsal
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-TBD	– Weather Dependent
Saturday	-5:00 p.m.	– Christmas Eve Service
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Christmas Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Rob Sauers has accepted the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Pastor Timothy Daub has returned the calls to Redemption of Lynnwood and Ascension of Tacoma. After a successful procedure, Pres. Eichstadt was able to return home and to resume his duties.

Voters Meeting Notes – 11 voters were present for the Annual Meeting last Sunday. Dalton Loeb, Justus Naumann, and Jamison Strege were accepted into voting membership. The 2022 Membership List was approved with 69 communicant members and 20 pre-communicants. Through a combination of salary and expense reductions, the 2023 budget was approved with a 1% decrease. The CLC Cooperative Budget Estimate was set at \$13,000. Mark Johnson was elected to the Board of Elders and Mark Johnson and Timothy Meyer were elected to the Church Council. In a subsequent meeting, the 2023 Council organized itself as follows: Mick Johnson – President, Timothy Meyer – Vice President, Phil Pfennig – Secretary, Keith Mantz – Treasurer, Gary Miller – Financial Secretary, Mark Johnson – Trustee Coordinator. The next Council meeting is scheduled for 1/22.

Christmas Schedule – Although we had hoped to conduct both Confirmation Class and our final midweek Advent service this Wednesday, the weather may have other plans. Please confirm with Pastor Roehl beforehand. Our Christmas Eve service is scheduled for 5pm on Saturday and Christmas Day worship for 10am on Sunday. There is no Sunday School or Bible Class on Christmas Day.