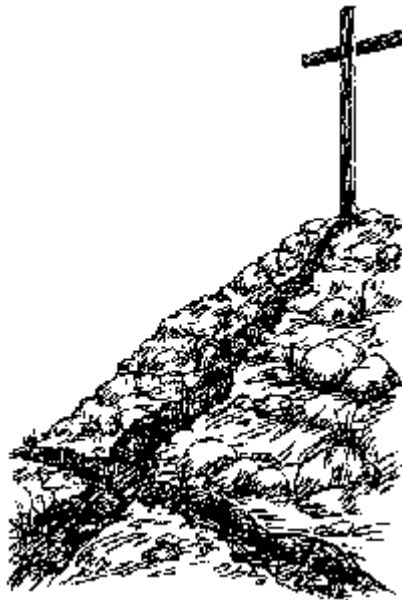


Message From a Manger

Luke 2:8-14



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(Luke 2:8-14 KJV) " And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. {9} And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. {10} And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. {11} For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. {12} And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, good will toward men."

1. The Message Went First To The Shepherds

Why were shepherds invited to view the Christ child as He lay in a manger? We expect the magi, the three wise men from the East, bringing gifts fit for a King. The **wise men make sense (Matthew 2:1)**. After all, shouldn't the King of all Creation have a royal witness when He comes among us? The three wise men brought **gold**, **frankincense**, and **myrrh**, all expensive gifts, and lay them before the baby Jesus. That makes sense. But why shepherds?

The Bible says:

(Luke 2:8 KJV) "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

These shepherds were living among their sheep, abiding {**agrauleo** [pronounced ag-row-leh'-o] Present Active Participle}, staying with their flocks. The shepherd's job was a lonely job. It was a **job often given to the smallest or least of the family** - the least important, the least in size, the one considered farthest from a position of honor. Larger families appointed their **slaves** to be shepherds, whereas smaller families sent the youngest son. The shepherd's job was a hard job, for they all had to be diligent lest the sheep wander away, or the wolves attack the flock.

Why did God invite the shepherds to His entrance into humanity? **One reason** is because Christ came as a **fulfillment of God's promise to another shepherd**. God promised King David (himself a shepherd boy when he was young) that his throne would be an *eternal throne*.

(Psalms 89:3-4 KJV) "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, {4} Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah."

God established an eternal Covenant with David, that his throne would rule forever. I can imagine these shepherds, banded together – for misery does love company! - at the

end of a hard and thankless day. I can imagine these men sharing the miseries of the day. “Michael, I ran wolves away from the herd at least four times today”. “Yes Joseph, but at least you ran them off. I found two sheep dead from their attacks.” Ah, these men had little to look forward to but another day chasing sheep and working in the elements. Then, perhaps, one brought up the shepherd who became King of the Jews. I can imagine that was a favorite story of these bedraggled men.

God promised David, the shepherd who became King, that his throne would be forever. When **Israel divided in civil war under Solomon's sloppy rule**, many thought that David's throne – a throne in the family of Judah – would be destroyed. As Israel was scattered because of her disobedience and idolatry under **Assyria and Babylon** the **promise that God made to David seemed to be fainter and fainter**. And now that heretic Herod sat on the throne, a puppet king ruled by Rome and Pilate.

This would be the **grand theme of Christ's ministry**, the calling of the sinner, the weak, the desolate, the lonely, the diseased, the downtrodden, the lowest of society to repentance and salvation. **Jesus did not come to seek and save the self righteous or the self contained**. He did not come looking for the ones who were at the top of life's wonders. Jesus came to seek and save the *lost*. He told the **Pharisees** who persecuted Him:

Matthew 9:12-13 (KJV) ".... They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. {13} But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not

sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

God came and told the shepherds about the Christ child because *the shepherds* needed the Christ child. Those who would be King were told nothing of Jesus. Herod wanted to find out where Jesus was so he could kill Him. Jesus was not revealed to the would be kings, the great ones, the leaders of His day. Jesus is revealed to the sick, the weak, the needy – to those who suffer in the night. God says:

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 (KJV) "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; {28} And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: {29} That no flesh should glory in his presence."

Christ came for the suffering, for the helpless, for us, Beloved!

God hears the suffering, and manifests Himself to the needy. Israel cried out in the midst of their Egyptian bondage and God heard. Daniel cried out in the midst of the lion's den, and God heard. God hears the cries of our hearts and answers our need with His superabundant Grace. God comes when we least expect Him and brightens our day, if we would only call.

Application: Are you a shepherd, a seeker in the night, someone looking for God? Then **seek**. Call on the name of Jesus, and God will reveal Himself to you. God waits to come where you are – and even now stands in your midst. But you must turn away from the arm of flesh and your own efforts and turn to God our Savior.

There is salvation in the Savior. There is salvation in Jesus!

2. The Message Said "Fear Not"

Luke 2:9-10 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. {10} And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

The Bible tells us that "the angel of the Lord" brought the message of Christ's birth. This was God Himself, personally come to tell them about the Messiah. When this angel appeared the shekinah glory of God

glory of the Lord shone round about them

glowed all around. When God comes from the streets of Heaven, when He comes down to walk among men, the "light that shall never perish" comes with Him. Just as the miner brings the residue of gold in his clothing, or the farmer dirt on his boots, God brings with Him His

glory. The shepherds knew that this was God Himself, for they said:

Luke 2:15 (KJV) "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

What did God say to these shepherds as they tended their flocks by night? God told the shepherds:

Fear not

The Present Middle Imperative of phobeo {pronounced fob-eh'-o}, which literally means "do not allow this message nor My presence to cause you fear". I looked in my Bible and found that the phrase "fear not" is used *sixty three times in Scripture*. When we are in turmoil it is natural that we fear. Fear is an emotional response that God has put inside of us to help us avoid trouble. We fear the unknown. We fear things greater than we are. We fear death. But God's Message to us is *fear not*.

When **Abraham** feared that he would have no heir, no firstborn **son** to pass on his family name God came to him and said *fear not (Genesis 15:1)*. When Abraham cast Ishmael, Hagar's son, out of his house, God told Hagar *fear not (Genesis 21:7)*. When **Jacob**, that old patriarch, was told that he had to go down into **Egypt**, God told him to *fear not*, for God would use Egypt to

make Israel a mighty nation (**Genesis 46:3**). When God told **Israel** to go into the **Promised Land** to take it as a grace gift from God, the Lord said *fear not (Deuteronomy 1:21)*. God told **Joshua**, that mighty warrior, to *fear not (Joshua 8:1)*. When **Gideon** saw the angel of the Lord and feared for his life God said *fear not (Judges 6:23)*. When **Joseph** discovered that his intended **bride Mary was pregnant** the angel of God told him to *fear not*, but take her as your wife – for the child she bears in her virgin womb is Jesus (**Matthew 1:20**). And on the third day following His death an angel stood at the mouth of the empty tomb and told **Mary Magdalene** to *fear not*, for **Jesus had risen** from the grave (**Matthew 28:5**).

Those who have not seen God revealed in the manger and on the Cross need to fear. Those **without a relationship with God through Christ should fear**. They should fear death, for after death **judgment** is sure, and **hell** fire is looming. Those who have a relationship with God through Christ Jesus our Savior *need not fear*, for God is their Father, and our Father will not despitely use those for whom the Son has died. As the Scripture says:

1 John 4:17-19 (KJV) "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. {18} There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. {19} We love him, because he first loved us."

Why remain calm? Why *fear not*? Because the Message that the Lord brought was a wonderful message, a joyful message, a comforting message, an assuring message. The angel of the Lord said:

I bring you good tidings of great joy...

or, as the New American Standard puts it:

I bring you good news of a great joy ...

The Lord did not want the shepherds fearful because of His message, but instead them to be overjoyed with happiness. The long awaited Savior was now here. Further, this Savior did not just come for the shepherds, but He was given

which shall be to all people

Jesus came for the Jew first – for the Jews were promised the Messiah. They were promised His salvation, they were promised His throne, they were promised His rulership. But Jesus didn't come just for the Jews, but:

Romans 1:16-17 (KJV) "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. {17} For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

We who are Gentiles can barely understand the joy that the message of the Christ child brings. From the time of Moses Israel had been in bondage to both the Law as well as to other nations. The Law smote Israel, and held up her every failure in righteousness. The Law offered no salvation, but just increased the fear that we felt. How can fallen man stand in God's righteous presence? How can I, condemned by my every imperfect work, hope to enter Heaven?

I cannot hope to stand before God holy. My every work is flawed, imperfect, not good enough to assure me of salvation. Under the Law I fear, for under the Law I am condemned. I need a Savior – and that Savior is Jesus Christ. The message of the angel of the Lord was:

Luke 2:11 (KJV) "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Praise God, for God offered a solution where none could be found. Salvation has come – not by the Law, which is holy and just – but through God Himself. God cloaked Himself in humanity. He is Christ, the Anointed Messiah, *the Lord*.

This baby in the manger was not just another prophet, not just another man. This baby was the fulfillment of prophecy, the promised Messiah, the God-Man Jesus Christ. The three wise men came to worship Jesus (Matthew 2:2, 11). The lepers (Matthew 8:2) worshiped Jesus, recognizing Him as God in the flesh. When Jesus calmed the seas (Matthew 14:33), the disciples worshiped Him. When Jesus resurrected from the grave

and gave us our Great Commission the disciples worshiped Him – though some doubted:

Matthew 28:17-20 (KJV) " And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. {18} And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. {19} Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: {20} Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Even today men doubt Jesus. Men look for power in money, in the acquisition of things, in relationships, in whatever the strength of our hands bring us. Yet God manifested Himself to us in a manger, and entered creation to die for us in the lowliest of forms.

Application: Doubt puts God's power on the back burner in our lives. We need not doubt the message of the Manger, nor the message of the Cross. Do not doubt, but believe!

3. The Message Is Child Centered For a Reason

Luke 2:12 " And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a

manger. "

God could have entered this life fully formed, completely mature as Adam was in the Garden. But God entered as a baby in a manger. Why is this? God came to us as a child in a manger so He could fully live as Man. God came and suffered as we suffer, lived as we lived, and died an extraordinary death – for us. Christ had to take on humanity so He could become our High Priest:

Hebrews 4:15 (KJV) " For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Christ cloaked Himself with flesh, becoming man, becoming Christ Child so as to be our Savior. If we want to be blessed then we must step down from our own desires, our own wants, our own control, and receive Him as little children.

Matthew 18:2-3 (KJV) " And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, {3} And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Mark 10:15 (KJV) " Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

Luke 18:17 (KJV) "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."

Here is the **mystery of God**: God cloaked Himself in the form of a Baby in a manger so He could live and work among us. **He became a helpless Child so He could die for our sins.** We, just like Jesus, must **become like little children** to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. We have to put aside our reasoning, our wants, our desires, our abilities. We must come to Christ as we are – not in our own power, but *confessing our powerlessness*. We must come to Christ as a little child would come to his earthly father.

So many **people have missed the blessing of salvation because they approach God as if they have much to offer and much to give.** Beloved, God gave up His throne in Heaven for a time to come and be with us. We must give up our little thrones, the gods and goddesses that we cherish. We must give up the notion of our self sufficiency, and say with the Apostle:

2 Corinthians 3:5 (KJV) "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;"

We have no sufficiency outside of God. We come to God as little children saying, "I believe – help mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). We come to God as little children,

forsaking pride, for God came to us as a little Child in a humble manger. God lived a humble life among us, and died a humble death between two thieves so that we can live.

This you must do if you want to live. You must surrender all that you think valuable to Christ. Surrender your will to Christ. Surrender your life to Christ. Believe on Him, and commit your ways unto Him – and you will be saved.

Conclusion

Application: Has your life been surrendered to Jesus? God was born a Child in a manger so we could be Born Again. God suffered death on the Cross so that we who believe would never die. God came in a different package among men so our lives could be repackaged, blessed, for Him. The Psalmist David wrote:

Psalms 36:5-7 (KJV) "Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. {6} Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast. {7} How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."

The recording group Third Day put these words to music, and said:

**Your love, oh Lord
Reaches to the heavens
Your faithfulness stretches to the sky
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains
Your justice flows like the ocean's tide
I will lift my voice
To worship You, my King
I will find my strength
In the shadow of your wings**

In the name of Jesus Christ:

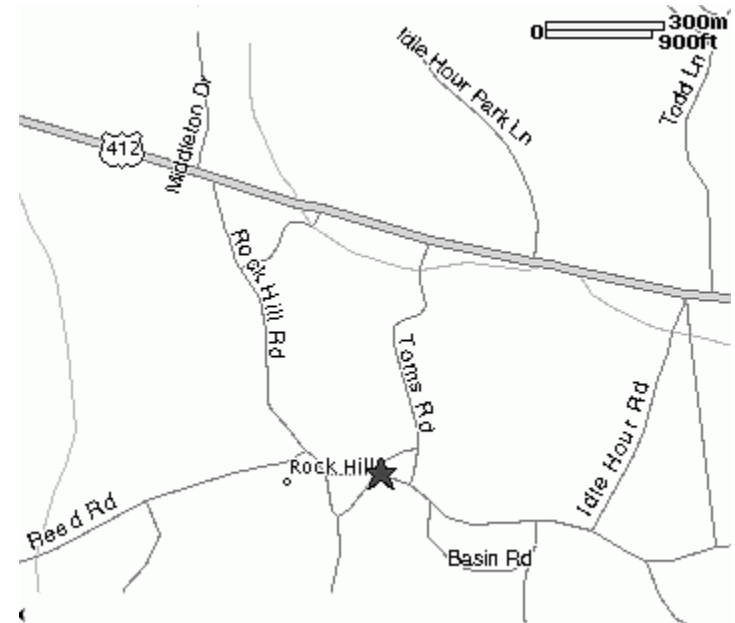
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