

# Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2016

Theme: Glory to God in the Highest!

- I. He fulfilled his promise
- II. He gives peace to all
- III. He changes us

INJ It is difficult to keep the focus on Jesus at Christmas, isn't it? We do lots of things to get ready for the holiday. Buy and wrap presents. Make cookies. Cook dinner. Decorate, travel, socialize. Emotions get roiled up. There isn't enough time. Were you stressed and weary as you came to church tonight? Are you still? What is next in your schedule? Tear into the presents. Devour the food. Hang out with family. Now that you mention it, Pastor, would you hurry up – we have more to do!

Before you walk out the door, I want you to think about why you came in. Did you get what you were looking for when you came to church tonight? What is it you were anticipating? Time with family? A familiar ritual? Something more? God gives us more. Did you hear it? God did a miracle so sinners are forgiven. The message is for you to have and treasure and ponder. Jesus is at the center of it, yes, at Christmas, but also always. At worship we receive God's good news. Don't rush past it! God has revealed our Savior to us. Let us join the angels singing for joy: "Glory to God in the highest!"

The Christmas Gospel is familiar to many. Some have Luke 2 mostly memorized from all the Christmas Services we and our children have been involved with. Yet, translations are changing. Our memory isn't always clear. Let us consider what those words mean. First, that God fulfilled his promise at Christmas: he sent his Son to save. Glory to God in the highest!

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered." God used a heathen ruler and his oversized ego to fulfil the plan of salvation. Caesar's decree brought Mary and Joseph to their ancestral home, to Bethlehem. There God had promised he would bless his people and all the world. This history really happened. Luke makes it plain that this is not "Once upon a time in a far away land." He says, "This was the time. This was the place. These are the people. Check out the history. You can be sure that God has fulfilled his promise." God still works all of history to fulfil his promises. It is a good thing to remember, as we are living in crazy times, too!

Other details of the Christmas account increase our awe at God's wondrous working. A virgin was carrying a baby. It does not happen that way! Not unless God performs a miracle. He did. This child of Mary, this descendant of David, this infant – is God, our Savior. He is the Son of the Most High. God had promised to be Immanuel, God with us. Now he has fulfilled his word. After ages of waiting, "to us a child is born, to us a son is given ... and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace. There will be no limit to his authority and no end to his peace."

The historical facts show us that when God speaks, he also fulfills. The inspired words show us the deep love that God has for his people. His love is not just a feeling, but an action. God loved, and left behind his glory to take on humanity. God loved, and walked to the cross, so that we who deserve only punishment might have forgiveness. God loved, and Jesus was born our Savior.

Jesus didn't take an easy path. The King of kings lay in a manger, for there was no room in the inn. The Almighty had to learn to roll over and crawl. He cut new teeth and had diaper rash. Rather than command the heavens and earth to obey, he lay helpless, wrapped in swaddling cloths. God loved us and humbled himself to rescue sinners. He humbled himself all the way to death on the cross! Glory to God in the highest!

For all the importance of the birth in Bethlehem's manger, few knew about it. With the hustle and bustle of the census and visitors and commerce, Jesus may have gotten lost in the shuffle. Sound familiar? Yet God saw to it that Jesus was not forgotten among all the commercialism. He announced the birth and told of its meaning. You have heard it yourself this evening. We sing with the angels, glory to God in the highest, for Jesus gives peace to all.

Shepherds watched their sheep outside Bethlehem. They had a lonely night ahead of them. Everyone else was safe and warm in town, but they were out in the dark, guarding against unseen animals and treacherous thieves. Luke says, "An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified!"

How would you react if the "glory of the Lord" appeared to you? This glory was a reflection of God's holiness. It was a sign of his mighty determination to save sinners. When the "glory of the Lord" was revealed to Moses, his face glowed with radiance afterward. The people who saw just that remnant of glory begged Moses to cover his face – they were so frightened. The "glory of the Lord" filled the temple at its dedication, so none could enter it. Sinful shepherds out in their fields were terrified when

the glory of the holy God shone around them!

We should be terrified because of our sin! Sin is not just little marks that barely are noticeable. We rebel against the Almighty. We trash his name and misuse his words. We treat him with disrespect and ignore his commands. Even when we try to do better, all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. The Holy One ought to appear in righteous anger and obliterate us. We should be terrified at the glory of the Lord.

Don't be afraid, for the Lord brings you good news. "Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord." A Savior to rescue you from the condemnation you deserve. To bring peace with God – the kind that reconciles us to himself. We are at worship tonight because God proclaims peace to us in this baby. Don't be afraid! In the manger, born for you: your Savior. You have peace with God!

"Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to mankind.'" The angel army could not hold back any longer. The multitude shouted and sang and praised God. Can you picture what that might have looked like? Will you join their praise? This Savior is for you. He brings peace with God. Nothing is greater! Glory to God in the highest.

I can see those shepherds, hurrying to find the baby. When they arrive, they see Mary and Joseph, the manger and the surroundings. Their eyes land on Jesus, and he holds their attention. With all the excitement and talking that went on, I am sure Jesus never fell out of their sight. How could their eyes ever leave the one who brings peace to sinners? How can our eyes ever leave him today?

Yet they do. We get distracted by so many things. We stubbornly insist on our way, not God's word. Confused because of life's trials, we choose to walk apart from the Lord and follow other paths. Busy, we just don't give God any of our time. Christmas can become just another dark, cold and gloomy time of year. How can I be joyful when my life is as it is? I have so many troubles! So many things going on!

My friends, do not take your eyes off the baby. He is your God. No trouble is too great for him. He changes things. He changes us. He changes all who hear his message and believe it so we can shout with all our might, "Glory to God in the highest!"

You can see a change in the shepherds. They heard the message, believed it, and went off to see the Christ. Then, they headed back to their flocks and told everyone they met what had happened. They could not keep the good news in. Luke records, "All who heard it were amazed

by what the shepherds said to them." Those shepherds did not just share a hollow jingle or a catchy phrase, they told the meaning of all these things. God's promises were fulfilled, and they saw God's peace. He is Jesus, a baby – yet God our Savior, who blesses all the world with his forgiveness. Glory to God in the highest. The message changed the shepherds!

Perhaps it is important what else the shepherds did. They went back to the sheep. They told the good news in the place most natural for them to tell it. At home. At work. With their friends. They had been changed by God, and you knew because of what they said and what they did. Glory to God in the highest!

Mary was changed, too. She "treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." What a treasure she had! Jesus the Savior was in her arms. God, the eternal and all wise and all powerful was cuddling her. He brings peace to all by his humility, by his perfect obedience, by his innocent sacrifice, and by his glorious resurrection. Mary thought about God's promises regularly, pondering them in her heart. Her life would be different now. She had been changed – not in some unique way, though. God had changed Mary's stubborn and sin-filled heart into a willing and forgiven heart. She was a believer in Jesus. Her steps were steps of faith, motivated by the Holy Spirit. Mary joins the angels: "Glory to God in the highest."

We have been changed. Like the shepherds, we have good news to tell. Like Mary, we have awesome truths to ponder. God has changed us in baptism to be his children. His words keep us in the Christian faith, and we are filled with his love and peace and joy. Our steps are moved by the Spirit, too, producing fruits of faith. We rejoice at the Nativity of our Lord and tonight we cry out with all our might: "Glory to God in the highest!"

If you did not come to church this evening expecting amazing things, you got them. God did miracles, and he has told you about it! Christmas stress and weariness and the tension that builds won't obscure Jesus, will they? Come back to the words of God when those things weigh heavily on you. Jesus is born – your Savior! The words show you that he always fulfils his promises. He has given you peace. He changed you. Now you trust him and you want to sing and shout and praise God. "Merry Christmas" hardly says enough! To Jesus be all glory to God in the highest! SDG Amen.