

Our nature is such that we seek the new and different. That isn't necessarily a bad thing. It brings the seeker to the answer of our heart's longing, Jesus. Even when we find forgiveness of sin, that desire to seek out new and different things can lead us deeper into the knowledge of God in His word. But like all good things, that desire must be kept in the boundaries of truth and righteousness. (Psalm 43:3) We should never tire of the good things of God, but grow in appreciation of them as we continue to plumb the depths of that goodness. (Psalm 145:3)

When it comes to the Christmas story, we should never tire of each part. There can never be a greater mystery than the God of creation entering into His creation to show us His love. Eternity invaded time! If we are bored with the story, it's not that the story is boring, but that we have neglected to see the riches and dive into its depths. The things of man do get boring over time, but the depths of God are unsearchable and His ways past finding out. (Romans 11:33)

So this morning, let's go a little deeper into the song of the angels, perhaps a little deeper than you have gone before. Let's see if God will open our eyes so that we can behold wonderful things out of His law. (Psalm 119:18)

God sent angels to shepherds when it was time to announce the birth. If you were a father waiting on the birth of your only son, would you run out the minute he was born to tell the garbage man or janitor?

Recently there was a commercial for a phone that enabled you to easily share pictures. It showed a proud father in a hospital sharing a picture of his new baby with the orderly who was pushing a cart of dirty linens. I thought to some degree it captured God's heart when Jesus was born. Just because the world sees certain jobs lowlier than other jobs, does not mean that God does. The shepherds were the only ones up at that hour of the morning. God doesn't care what level of society your job is considered to be. He sees His image in you. (Genesis 1:27)

The choice of announcing the birth to the shepherds may have a deeper significance than God's lack of favoritism. (Romans 2:11) Those fields were where Levite boys would learn about raising sacrificial sheep and how to spot the blemished ones. Later they would serve in the Temple to examine the lambs that were brought for an offering to see if they had blemishes. It was as if God was saying to them, "Come see the real thing! You boys have to find another job because the absolutely perfect Lamb of God has come into the world at long last!"

Commented [Paul1]: Psalm 43:3 (ESV)
³ Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!

Commented [Paul2]: Psalm 145:3 (ESV)
³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

Commented [Paul3]: Romans 11:33 (ESV)
³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Commented [Paul4]: Psalm 119:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Commented [Paul5]: Genesis 1:27 (ESV)
²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Commented [Paul6]: Romans 2:11 (ESV)
¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

Even if they were Levites, they were serving in the humblest of Levitical capacities. The good news is for the humble who have an ear to hear. (1Corinthians 1:26-29) Let's return to the text and see how that is played out.

Luke 2:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.* ⁹ *And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.* The "same region" is the shepherds' fields in Bethlehem. The text tells us they were indeed awake watching out for the flock. One of the Lord's angels appeared and glory shone around the shepherds. We've seen in Exodus that glory is often demonstrated in the form of light or fire or clouds. (Exodus 16:10; 24:17) It represents the attributes of God including justice but especially holiness. So we can imagine these sleepy shepherds suddenly engulfed in a supernatural light and the presence of one of the Lord's awesome angels.

The angels in Scripture are never lovely ladies or little chubby babies but powerful beings unlike anything we have ever encountered. This was definitely a close encounter of the third kind. Like other angel encounters in Scripture, the audience was trembling in fear. (Judges 13:6) It's a sudden awareness that what we see is not all there is and that we have no idea how we should react. Are we about to die? Should we kneel? Do we worship? Do we run? Can you run? Let's now see exactly what it was that the angel said.

¹⁰ *And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.* The angel first answered the fear. "Fear not!" It's the same way the angel began the conversation with Mary. (Luke 1:30) If we are going to hear the announcement, we have to get past the immediate fear we feel in the presence of the supernatural being, calm our hearts and listen. Why? Because it is good news, not the angel of death. It is good news of great joy!

The world desperately needs good news. The economy may go into another deeper slump. North Korea and Iran are about to have nuclear bombs. Afghanistan seems to be filled with corruption. Iraq isn't much better. The Sunnis want to kill the Shias and the Shias want to kill the Sunnis and they all want to kill us. 150,000 Christians are martyred on a yearly basis. I think we could use some good news, don't you? And good news with great joy is even better. And if it is good news that isn't just good for today but is good for all eternity, should we ever tire of hearing it? That's why we can sing the same carols year after year after year, and tell the same story over and over. This story is good news of great joy forever!

Commented [Paul7]: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (ESV)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Commented [Paul8]: Exodus 16:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ;

Commented [Paul9]: Exodus 24:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.

Commented [Paul10]: Judges 13:6 (ESV)

⁶ Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name,

Commented [Paul11]: Luke 1:30 (ESV)

³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

You've probably heard it explained that joy is more than happiness, but I think we need the reminder. Happiness depends on conditions. Joy is a condition of the heart in spite of outside conditions. This good news the angel came to announce brings a great joy that is not dependent on our happiness. It's an abiding joy that sees us through all the trials of life. (1Peter 1:8) And the fact that it is a great joy doesn't mean that we just get by, but rather that we are more than conquerors in life. (Romans 8:37)

It is good news for ALL people, all Jews, regardless of their standing, residence, adherence to the law, or conformance to the traditions. We see that in the reputation of Jesus being "the friend of sinners". (Matthew 11:19) Those who were outcasts in Israel of that day were not considered any less by Jesus.

Even more than that, this good news is for the world. (John 3:16) The Messiah is a light to the nations. This wording was very Messianic. The people of that day saw the work of Messiah going beyond the borders of Israel because of the prophecies of Isaiah. (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6) The revelation of God had sometimes gone to other nations through the prophets, but now the angel is declaring it is to go into the entire world. Christianity is a faith for the world. It is not exclusive in the way some religions are. True, we must come through the one door (John 10:9), Jesus, but you don't have to be in a certain class of people as in Hinduism or speak a certain language as in Islam, to get the fullness of the faith. And isn't that exactly what you would expect from the God who is creator of all mankind?

Now for the good news that brings that great joy. *11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* The city of David is Bethlehem, meaning the house of bread. Spiritual food for the world came in a city called "house of bread". It is where David tended his father's flocks when he was a boy. The wording brings to mind the promises that a son of David will reign forever. (Isaiah 9:7) Solomon did reign over the height of the nation's glory, but he certainly did not reign forever. Son of David was the long awaited king that would fulfill the prophecies. The descendants of David had gathered for the census in Bethlehem. That means this baby is a son of David.

A Savior! Isaiah gives God the title of Savior in Isaiah 43:3 and 45:15. Is the angel hinting at baby's deity?

Christ the Lord is a combination of titles. Christ is Messiah, the anointed one, meaning king or high priest, but it also held Messianic implications. Lord was the title of any leader or ruler. "Jesus is Lord" became an early declaration of faith by the church. The Roman world said "Caesar is lord". When the expression is used in such a general way, it meant over all. In fact, that is the way Luke will describe Jesus in Acts 10:36.

Commented [Paul12]: 1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

Commented [Paul13]: Romans 8:37 (ESV)

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Commented [Paul14]: 1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

Commented [Paul15]: John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Commented [Paul16]: Isaiah 42:6 (ESV)

⁶ "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,

Commented [Paul17]: Isaiah 42:6 (ESV)

⁶ "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,

Commented [Paul18]: John 10:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.
⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Commented [Paul19]: Isaiah 9:7 (NIV)

⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Commented [Paul20]: Isaiah 9:7 (NIV)

⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Commented [Paul21]: Isaiah 45:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.

Commented [Paul22]: Acts 10:36 (NIV)

³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

The Jews had come to use the word "lord" (adonai) in place of the sacred name of God (YHWH). They had an even more reverential use of the title. Since this word is spoken to Jews (probably Levites), "Lord" also implies deity.

This is the central theme of the announcement. The Messiah is born! He isn't just an anointed ruler but is also the Savior of mankind and Lord over all! This is the fulfillment of that amazing prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

It is almost as if the angel abbreviated the prophecy in one verse by mentioning David, Savior, Christ and Lord. That is the good news of great joy. The One born of a woman that will crush the serpent's head has been born. (Genesis 3:15) Salvation is at hand. The fulfillment of all the shadows and types is here. The Lamb of God that all the sacrificial lambs pointed to has come. The kingdom is at hand. That is great news! That is the reason for great joy. The way, the truth and the life, full of grace and truth, the incarnation of the Word, the fullness of God, the express image of His being has come! (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:2) The zeal of the LORD of hosts has done it!

And wonder of wonders, this long awaited Mighty One is "wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Before the shepherds had time to get over the shock of what was just said, the glorious One as a newborn in a manger, a whole choir of angels appeared. The expectation of that day was that the Messiah would suddenly appear and no one would know where he came from or his background. Well, that is what did happen. They didn't know He was from heaven. They didn't realize He is the Creator. But their interpretation was that he would come as an adult and lead them against their enemies, not a baby, and certainly not in a stinky feed trough. The zeal of the LORD was coming to the lowest of the low so that no one could say they were too low for Jesus. (Isaiah 49:7)

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 among those with whom he is pleased!" Now that angel is joined with the heavenly host. The incredible thing God was doing prompted them to praise God and give Him glory. Remember that means to declare His attributes. They were instructing them to glorify the Most High

Commented [Paul23]: Genesis 3:15 (NIV)

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Commented [Paul24]: John 1:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Commented [Paul25]: Hebrews 1:2-3 (NIV)

² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Commented [Paul26]: Isaiah 49:7 (ESV)

⁷ Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

God. The attributes we saw in Exodus are on display in a manger, mercy, grace, steadfast love, forgiveness and justice. (Exodus 34:7) They have been manifest in a little baby who will demonstrate those attributes with His entire life.

The coming of this baby means peace for all those with whom God is pleased. That is different from the KJV version but is a faithful translation of the best manuscripts. So with whom is God pleased? Who are the recipients of God's peace? He is pleased with His Son. (Matthew 3:17) **If you are in God's Son, and His Son is in you, then you have peace.** It's the only way to have true peace. Peace does not mean the absence of turmoil, but for the Hebrews, *shalom* means salvation. It is to possess every good thing. It means to be at peace with God, and others who are in Him.

He has come! He makes that peace possible. That is the reason this is good news and cause for great joy. And now that He has come, nothing can stop God from finishing what He has started. Jesus will be the Lamb without blemish, the Passover Lamb whose blood is on the doorposts of our hearts and saves us from the angel of death. He will end the curse that came with the fall of man. He will establish His Lordship over all! (Isaiah 9:7) He will finish the work He has begun in us. (Philippians 1:6)

Here is the reason that little baby was born. Revelation 21:3-7 (ESV)
³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son."

The baby came to take over, not with a sword, but with love. And He shall reign forever and ever! (Exodus 15:18) Hallelujah! That is good news of great joy for all people! Our hearts should never lose the wonder of what is coming because Jesus came into this world.

(Play the DVD of the Hallelujah Chorus in the mall in Canada
<http://www.youtube.com/user/AlphabetPhotography>)

Questions

- 1 Why should we never tire of the Christmas story?
- 2 Why did the angel appear to shepherds?

Commented [Paul27]: Exodus 34:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Commented [Paul28]: Exodus 34:6-7 (ESV)

⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Commented [Paul29]: Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Commented [Paul30]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Commented [Paul31]: Exodus 15:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ The LORD will reign forever and ever."

- 3 When does the world need good news of great joy?
- 4 Who is the good news for? How does that fulfill prophecy?
- 5 Why Bethlehem?
- 6 What are the hints of His deity?
- 7 What titles did the angel give him and how do they relate to Isaiah 9:6?
- 8 What was perhaps the most shocking statement of the angel and why?
- 9 Why is he pleased with man?
- 10 Why has the baby been born?