

The Pronouncement

Isaiah 9:6-7, 42:6-9; Luke 2:8-20

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When Stacy and I had been married for about five years, we were ready to begin having kids. The problem was we had not been doing anything to prevent having children. We went to the doctor and learned we had some fertility issues, and by the time Stacy was pregnant, we had been married for six years. Needless to say, it was a big deal when Stacy finally got pregnant.

We were very excited when the doctor officially confirmed that she was pregnant. Then, about twelve weeks later, the doctor wanted to perform an ultrasound. I thought it was normal, but it was not. Stacy knew that the first ultrasound usually occurs at 20 weeks, so she knew something was up. This was when we discovered she was pregnant with twins, and we were super excited.

I remember calling my mother to tell her that we were expecting twins. When I told her we were expecting twins, she said, "No, you're not! Stop messing with me." She wouldn't believe me and then she hung up. I called her back, and it took me a few minutes to convince her it was not a prank. Obviously, she was very excited for us. I remember telling our church, and they were super excited. Announcing we were having twins was like finding out we were pregnant all over again—there was double the joy.

I don't know what your birth announcement story is, but birth announcements are big deals. Speaking of birth announcements, our daughter, Sam is scheduled for a C-Section tomorrow morning at 10:15 at Mary Greely where she will have her first baby. Pray for Sam, Kyle, and baby Stueven. This is our second grandchild this year so we are super excited.

How would you announce the birth of a new baby? I have the privilege of announcing it at church from the pulpit, but there are many ways to announce the birth of a new baby, such as Instagram, Shutterfly, X, Facebook, or even snail mail.

These days, you can take hundreds of pictures, crop them, and send them worldwide. Sometimes, it becomes a competition to one-up others on birth announcements. It's kind of like what people do with gender reveal parties. It becomes a competition. Have you ever seen some of the outlandish things people do? It's crazy.

So, if you are expecting a baby next year, here's what you do. Forget emails, Shutterfly, Facebook, Instagram, and X. Forget birth announcements in the Ames Tribune or Des Moines Register. Here's what you do, have a choir of angels light up the sky and sing the glories of your little one to everyone in your neighborhood and town. They will love you for that, and they will never forget it.

You may have had amazing birth announcements and baby showers, and you may have thought the babies God gave you were little angels, but the angels did not show up to sing at your baby's birth.

You may have sent out a thousand text messages, but shepherds and wise men didn't show up to worship your child. The grandparents may have done that but not wise men from the east. They may have played music in the hospital but angels didn't sing at the birth of that little bundle of joy. No matter how we communicate birth announcements today, there has never been a birth announcement like that of the advent of Christ.

This morning, we are considering the pronouncement that Jesus is coming to earth to save His people. The pronouncement fulfills the promise we examined last Sunday.

We will walk through the birth of Jesus as it is recorded in Luke 2. There is much to love in this narrative. God wants us to behold the glory of the Messiah's birth because it is the glory of God that changes us. We will see many parts of this story that touch us right where we live. As we walk through this text, let the glory of Jesus' birth refresh your heart. I have two points about the pronouncements of Jesus' birth.

Pronouncement #1: The Glory of the Promised Child!

Last week, we looked at the promise God made to save His people through the seed of Eve. That promise was made in Genesis 3:14-15. We learned that the promise made there can be traced through the Old Testament.

In a unique way, the Old Testament is one long birth announcement that we are expecting a baby. Only this baby is the birth of a King who has come from Heaven. He is coming in His glory, so prepare your hearts for His arrival.

The prophet Isaiah gave us a couple of clear Messianic birth announcements. We can almost draw a straight line from Isaiah 9:6-7 birth announcement to Luke 2:8-20 and Jesus' birth. Listen to Isaiah 9:6-7 again:

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.

Last Sunday, we learned that Jesus is Immanuel—God with us. But here, Isaiah tells us even more about who Jesus is. He will be the *Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. He will eternally hold the throne of David, which means He is the promised King of Kings. He will rule with justice and righteousness for all eternity.* This can only be Jesus.

Luke 2:11 quotes Isaiah 9:6 when He says:

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The promised child from the Old Testament has finally arrived. He has come in His glory but not the glory the world expected. Not the glory the religious leaders expected. Not the glory the political establishment expected.

Friends, there is a stunningly mysterious glory surrounding the birth of Jesus. It is the glory of a birth like no other. It is a glory that is life changing when you treasure and ponder it.

Pronouncement #2: The Glory of Jesus' Birth is Good News for Us (Luke 2:8-20)

Let's walk through vv. 8-20 and examine the glory of the story of Jesus' birth. Look at vv. 8-9:

"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.

You've got to love this story. These shepherds were just going about their normal jobs tending sheep. It probably seemed like just any other night when God broke into their world.

The shepherds' story should give us hope for those we are praying will come to faith in Jesus. We pray for them and hope something dramatic or traumatic happens to get their attention, but most often, it is just them going through the normal routine of life when the glory of God breaks into their world as it did in the shepherds' lives.

There's something significant about the angels announcing the birth of Jesus to shepherds. Think about it, the angels did not go to the palace in Jerusalem but to a pasture outside of Bethlehem. They didn't show up at the temple and sing and make proclamation that the Son of God came as predicted. They didn't go to the high loft places of power and prestige like we think they ought to.

Instead the host of heaven went to a pasture in Bethlehem and here's the significance of that. Everyone in that day and time thought shepherds were outcasts and crooks. They were considered the lowest of the low. These men were not even able to testify in a courtroom. They could not worship in the temple because they were considered unclean. On the social ladder, they were just under the tax collectors and barely above disease-infested lepers who had to live in their colonies outside town. They quite literally were the dregs of society.

Shepherding in the Old Testament was a good profession. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his sons were shepherds. King David, the greatest king in Israel's history, began as a shepherd. However, somewhere along the way shepherding lost its appeal. Shepherds eventually developed bad reputations.

Listen, there is no romanticism in the angels' announcement to the shepherds. Luke is not trying to tell us some sappy, sentimental Hallmark Christmas movie story where we respond with an audible, "*Awe, isn't that nice.*"

On this particular night, these shepherds were just doing their normal thing when the glory of God shone all around them. These guys weren't used to a sudden flash of light that lit up the sky. Lightning from a thunder storm was their only experience for sudden bright light.

These guys weren't used to going into a room and flicking lights on. They were used to the sun rising slowly to where it becomes bright and then slowly setting, and then it is dark.

Think about it this way: We go to Jack Trice Stadium or any football stadium, and they can go from pitch black dark to brilliant light in a second. When I was growing up, it took stadium lights a good 15 minutes to warm up and become fully bright. Only in the last few years because of LED technology have we been able to go from dark to light in a stadium in a matter of seconds and that is still amazing to me.

The light the shepherds saw would have made a football stadium look like a shadow. They saw the light of heaven miles up in the sky opened up to them and the choirs of angels singing and proclaiming the birth of Christ.

Their response was quite natural: "*they were sore afraid,*" as the old King James reads. They were so afraid that it hurt.

Here's the point: The glory of God breaking into the shepherds' lives teaches us that God's grace is for everyone. The glorious grace of God is for all who will receive it as a gift. God's glorious grace doesn't play favorites. It comes to the lowest of the low. It comes to people who believe they don't deserve it.

When you think about it, the situation is upside down. However, this is how the stunning, mysterious glory of God is at work in our world. The glory of God meets us where we are. It penetrates into the darkness of our great need to reveal the glory of the Savior.

Friend, if you are here this morning and think you do not deserve God's grace, this message is for you. Jesus came for you. Trust Him with your life and with your future. Abandon all to Him, for He will not abandon you.

Likewise, if you are praying for someone who you believe may be too far gone to be saved, the shepherds should give you hope for their salvation. Even shepherds didn't believe God loved them, but He did. He had not forgotten them.

Look at what the angel said to them in vv. 10-11:

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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

"Fear not," the angel said. They had every reason to fear because the angels had just lit up the sky, and they had never seen anything like that. Yet, they told them not to fear.

You see, in the Bible, people always experienced fear, anxiety, and even terror when God came near them or when angels came near them. This fear of God goes all the way back to the problem Pastor Dean preached about in Genesis 3 in the first sermon in our series. After Adam and Eve sinned, they were in fear, and both hid from God. Our sin makes us want to avoid God. We fear Him and don't want to come near Him but there is something in us that causes us to desire Him too.

Friends, we were designed for a perfect relationship with God and live in peace and joy with Him. Yet, after Adam sinned, our relationship with God was broken, and fear entered our relationship with God and has been passed down into every human heart so that it creates fear of trusting God. But that fear of trusting God is a lie from the serpent.

So, the shepherds experienced the terror of being in the holy presence of the angels that night. Their normal fears were intensified because, like Isaiah, they knew they were in the holy presence of God, and they thought they were going to die.

Yet, the angels made an astonishing pronouncement: "*Fear not!*" Why should they not fear? Because it was a time of remarkable joy. It was the moment the world had been waiting for, and *the shepherds had been selected to be the first ones to experience the joy of heaven coming to earth.*

Jesus left heaven and veiled His glory in human flesh to come to earth to save sinners. He not only veiled His glory in human flesh, but He also came as a little helpless baby born in a manger in Bethlehem.

The angels said to the shepherds:

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

God had come in Christ to reconcile alienated sinners to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Then, the angels told the shepherds what to do. They were to go to Bethlehem and find the baby. To strengthen their faith in the message, they gave them a "*sign*" about where they would find the Messiah. Look at v. 12:

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

The angels wanted to give those poor, maligned shepherds confidence that when they saw the baby, they were looking at the gift of God to them.

Then the angel gave his final message as he was joined by millions more angels, and they blasted out the song of the ages:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

This song was not just a song but the message God wanted to give His people. It is a message of joy and peace, a proclamation that God's glory has come in Jesus Christ to reconcile sinners to Himself.

In our day, probably no song captures the message of v. 14 as well as the hymn, *Joy to the World*. This hymn was written by Isaac Watts in 1719. He had been studying Psalm 98, and after spending many hours meditating on the phrase, "*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise,*" he wrote the four-stanza poem.

He never intended the hymn to be a Christmas Carol. He wrote it to be sung in the normal course of church worship. However, it has become one of the most beloved Christmas hymns of all time. Listen to a couple of the stanzas:

*Joy to the earth,
the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields & floods, rocks, hills & plains
Repeat the sounding joy.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.*

It actually sounds like Watts was reading Luke 2 when he wrote this hymn. Luke chapter 2 pronounces good news of great joy.

But here's the problem: The proclamation of the good news of Christmas is only good news to those who know they need it. You see, the shepherds knew they needed God's grace—Do you? *Do you know that you need to be reconciled to God? Do you know that you need the peace of God?*

The reason the angels proclaimed,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

is because, since Genesis 3, there has been war between God and unredeemed mankind.

Remember Isaiah 9:6 called Jesus the Prince of Peace. The peace Jesus brings is not a general kind of peace where we have a peaceful life and experience prosperity. No. He is the Prince of Peace who brings God's peace to sinners because He made peace between God and man by His life, death, and resurrection from the dead. The Apostle Paul tells us that it is by the blood of Jesus that we have been brought near to God.

Jesus is the perfect Mediator between God and man. The God-man bridges the chasm by dying for our sins. He heals the breach and makes peace between us and God by His blood. It is by His blood that He brings us near to God. He restores the relationship He intended us to have in the Garden of Eden.

Remember, good news is only good news for those who know they need good news. *Do you need the good news of Jesus? Do you need the peace of Christ in your life?*

Saint Augustine famously said:

You created us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You.

Friends, Jesus has done everything necessary to reconcile you to God and quiet your restless heart and life. You simply need to recognize that you are in conflict with God and call out to Jesus to save you. Confess the conflict and sin in your life and place your faith in the Prince of Peace, who purchased peace for you through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

Next, let's consider what the shepherds did when they heard the pronouncement of peace to them:

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.¹⁷

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

These men heard the message and believed the message. We do not even know the names of these men, but that's okay because God's grace is for any poor sinner who will repent and place their hope in Jesus Christ.

Not only that, these guys didn't keep the good news of Jesus to themselves. Verse 18 tells us that they shared the good news with others as they went to see Jesus so that those who heard what they said even wondered what was going on with them.

These outcasts became the first evangelists to share the good news of Jesus' birth. These men who were rough around the edges were now preachers of the gospel. Now, that's good news for any of us who believe God can't use us in His ministry.

Listen, if you believe you can't share the good news of Jesus with someone because your life is not perfect or you still make mistakes—you're wrong. The gospel is for imperfect people and God uses imperfect people to share the good news of Jesus with others. You don't have to be perfect or know everything about the Bible to share the gospel with others.

One final observation before we wrap up Luke 2. Look at v. 19:

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

Verse 19 tells us that Mary did two things when she heard all that the shepherds told her. She pondered the message, and she treasured the message.

First, as unimpressive and suspect the messengers were, she didn't dismiss them. She listened to the message given to her by a group of men who were considered questionable at the time. She didn't consider the shepherds' flaws; instead, she listened to the message's content.

Friends, the lesson here is that the messenger is not the message. Friends, we should not ignore uncomfortable truths that come to us from unimpressive messengers.

Second, Mary did two things with the message: She *pondered* it and *treasured* it.

The Greek word *pondered* means to put information in context, study it, and connect truths. It is to think the truth out. When it comes to Scripture, "*to ponder it*" means to look at a Bible verse and ask: *What does this word mean? How does it fit in with other truths in the Bible? How does it fit in with what I know to be true? Pondering also means connecting the truth to what I believe and how I live.*

Next, Mary *treasured* what she heard. She not only engaged her mind with what she heard but she was emotionally invested as well. She engages her mind and also her emotions. She takes the word of God all the way in her heart. She relished it. We might say she does what the Psalmist said in Psalm 34:8,

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!

She let the message of the shepherds affect her deeply. In a sense, she turned it over and over in her mind. We might say she preached it to herself by reminding herself of the preciousness of the message and the importance of the truth. She saw the value of the truth of the message, and she took it to heart. It was the treasure of her heart.

Do you do this with Scripture? Do you ponder it and treasure it? Do you work to fit truths together, then take them deep in your heart and allow them to change how you live and relate to God and others?

Finally, v. 20 tells us the result of the shepherds' response to the good news they heard.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Remember how the shepherds began their night? It was just an ordinary day in the life of a shepherd when God broke into their world with the good news—Jesus loves sinners who will come to Him.

Now, they ended their shepherding shift worshipping God. The good news of Jesus produced worship in their lives. They were filled with joy and peace with God. They were changed because they beheld Jesus.

The pronouncement of Christmas is—Behold a child is given that is Christ the Lord! He came into our world to save us from the consequences of our sins by dying in our place on the cross. Won't you trust in Him who did all of this for you?

The angel is saying, "*You want relief from all your fear? Do you want peace with God and men? Then you need to behold the glory of the Savior who is given to you. Look at what He has done for you. Behold it! Ponder it! Treasure it! When you behold Him, there is no fear in the presence of God.*"