

The Reveal

It's a Boy, Part 2

Luke 2:8-20

In the early 1830s, two different groups of men, one in America and one in England, were independently racing to build an electric telegraph system.

The American group would win the day . . . with its unique use of magnetic pulses and a special code invented by the group's leader, Samuel Morse. Samuel was, by occupation, a skilled painter who specialized in portraits.

But by the late 1800's, his invention took the world by storm and electric telegraph companies were soon in operation.

If you can imagine it, less than 150 years ago, the fastest way to send a message from New York to California was to use the Pony Express, which took ten days. Imagine – less than 150 years ago, the fastest way for someone on the East coast to get a message to someone living on the West Coast, was to use a horse and a rider.

That would all change. With the invention of Samuel Morse and the creation of his Morse code, that distance could be spanned at nearly the speed of light.

The Wright Brothers would use it in 1903 to send a telegram to their father that December telling him about their first flight.

I was able see a picture of that telegram. In fact, I saw a picture of the very first telegram. It was dated May 24, 1844. On that historic day, Samuel Morse made the first public demonstration of his telegraph by sending a message from the Supreme Court Chamber in the U.S. Capitol to a station in Baltimore. His famous message was only four words, "What hath God wrought."

Samuel Morris gave his Creator God the credit. In other words, "Look what God has done!"

Nearly 2,000 years ago, God delivered a message to planet earth. And his deliver message wasn't a telegram or a letter.

He delivered it by means of angels . . . I guess you could call it – an angelgram.

God actually used angels – and still to this day they are at His beck and call.

Angels travel faster than we can imagine; their message is never lost in transmission . . . they never fail to deliver . . . everyone who receives an angelgram immediately gets the messages.

By the way, the number of angels is so vast that no one can comprehend their number.

If you literally multiply the prophet Daniel's accounting of angels around the throne of God you have his vision of 100 million angels worshipping God (*Daniel 7:10*).

The writer of Hebrews informs us that thousands upon thousands are in joyful assembly in the heavenly Jerusalem. (*Hebrews 12:22*)

Listen, if you were God and you wanted to deliver the birth announcement of God the son to the world . . . how would you deliver the message? How would you stage the big reveal? What better way, than angels.

I invite your attention back to the Gospel by Luke and chapter 2.

You may know enough of the narrative to know that Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem and, because of the imperial decree to pay taxes in your hometown, Bethlehem was overrun with people. They couldn't say no to Rome.

As we talked about it yesterday in our Christmas Eve services, Joseph and Mary are committed to obedience; they are making the best out of the worst of conditions.

They found shelter in a Bethlehem stable, more than likely a shallow cave which was commonly used in that region to provide shelter for the animals of travelers.

It is in that cave where Mary gives birth to Jesus – no doctors, no nurses, no midwife, no one to help this frightened teenage girl deliver her son into the calloused hands of her carpenter husband.

Back in their hometown of Nazareth, if everything had gone according to plan – which it obviously didn't, the birth of a son was cause for celebration.

The proud parents would call all their friends and relatives – in fact, the custom during this the turn of the century, was for the father to hire musicians to

come to the home and play music – celebrating the birth of their baby boy.

Instead, here they are in a cave or lean to; and they couldn't have felt more alone than now. They swaddled their baby with strips of cloth – and their cradle was Joseph's cloak, or perhaps some fresh straw arranged in the corner of the feeding trough, cut along the wall of the cave, which was typical in their day.

There are no friends to celebrate with them . . . congratulate them. And there certainly are no musicians in sight.

But then again . . . God the Father had arranged a reveal party – and the musicians are tuning up.

Let's slip into the scene at Luke chapter 2, at verse 8. In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11. for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

This is absolutely astounding. This angel has just announced that the Son of God had been born . . . and they are the first to find out.

First of all, what amazes me about this reveal is who God would disregard.

If you were assigned the public relations challenge of announcing the birth of God the Son – you would begin by making a list of everyone who ought to know – and then, making sure that they all somehow found out.

But here, God is disregarding everyone and anyone that ought to be on the list!

He bypassed announcing the news to the educated, the religious, the elite, the politically connected, the wealthy, the powerful. He didn't announce it to the Jewish Supreme Court – the Sanhedrin; He didn't announce it to the High Priest at the Temple in Jerusalem; He didn't have somebody send a memo to Caesar Augustus and the Roman senate.

The astounding thing is who God would disregard in this reveal; but it's even more astounding who God will dignify in the reveal.

Notice back in *verse 8* the most unlikely people to ever be given the news of Christ's birth – Luke writes, "*there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night.*"

You need to understand that in Jesus' day, the only people considered socially more distasteful than shepherds were lepers.

Because shepherds weren't able to keep all the regulations of the scribes and Pharisees – such as washing their hands at certain times and never touching blood or a dead animal, which were part of the job description of delivering lambs and fighting off wolves and eating out on the hillsides without a faucet and filtered water.

According to the Mishna which was the Jewish writings that codified scribal law, shepherds were under an ongoing ban. That is, they were considered perpetually unclean. They couldn't worship or enter the temple.

Besides, they worked on the Sabbath – the sheep didn't take Saturday off and so neither could the shepherds.

They were under the ban – disqualified from worship – they were, by occupation, religious outcasts.

And they are ones invited to the reveal . . . to hear the news that a baby boy was born nearby.

Look who God disregarded . . . look at who God dignified!

- Isn't it fascinating that Jesus willingly referred to Himself as our *Good Shepherd*. (*John 10:11*)
- The Apostle Peter called Jesus our *Chief Shepherd*. (*1 Peter 5:4*).
- In *Hebrews 13:20* Jesus is called the *Great Shepherd*.

In the Bible, the title "shepherd" happens to be the title that Jesus gave to elders who will serve His church and lead His church and feed His church.

Of all the titles He could have bestowed on this office of loving leadership and careful guarding and guiding – He chose to call them shepherds (Ephesians 4:11); translated pastors – or more literally feeders who pasture the flock.

It must have seemed odd in the first century for men who lead the church in worship, to be given the title of men who were never allowed to worship in the Temple.

Let me add to that the fact that shepherds were never allowed to be witnesses in any Jewish court of law. They were considered unreliable because they were not men of the temple. They were unclean – and thus, unworthy of bearing testimony before men.

Here's the irony . . . God chose them to be the first to testify of His Son's birth.

Listen, at the very outset of His Son's life – beginning with this public reveal – you cannot miss the grace of God.

Look who he disregarded! Look who he dignified!

The Apostle Paul wrote, 26. For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27. but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28. and the common things of the world and the despised God has chosen (I Corinthians 1:26-28)

One more thing about these shepherds before we move on – the text tells us that they were in the vicinity of Bethlehem (*vs. 8*) ***keeping watch over their flocks by night***. Bethlehem was only 6 miles south of Jerusalem – on the rural outskirts of the holy city.

Jerusalem of course, would swell with several million Jews during Passover as they came with their lambs to sacrifice in celebration of their former deliverance from Egypt.

If you're old enough in the faith, you may know the narrative from Exodus 12 where the death angel came sweeping into Egypt, killing the first born of every family, including Pharaoh's family. The only way to be rescued from the death angel was to put lamb's blood on the door of your homes, which the Israelites did that night. And those who had the blood of the lamb smeared on their door frame – thus behind the door, as it were, and behind the safety of atoning blood, they were then passed over by the plague of death. And that began the tradition of Passover – an annual celebration that would swell the population inside Jerusalem of more than 2 million people.

One first century Jewish historian named Josephus records for us that during the lifetime of Jesus, around 250,000 lambs would be killed and eaten in Jerusalem's annual Passover feast.

Where would they get all those sheep from? Well, many people raised their own – but the temple

also raised sheep and other animals which it sold to worshippers who came without an animal to sacrifice.

More than likely, these shepherds are on the temple payroll watching flocks of sheep.

One of the most confirming pieces of evidence is a rule recorded in the Mishna, the ancient Jewish code book. It stated in printed law that any animal found between Jerusalem and a small village nearby were to be available at any time for sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem. And the name of that little village nearby was . . . Bethlehem!

These shepherds were temple shepherds. Keeping watch over sheep that were destined to become one of the thousands upon thousands of lambs headed for the altar to atone for the sins of the people.

Can you imagine now the gospel and the grace in this significant announcement? God is announcing the birth of The final sacrificial lamb to men watching over sacrificial lambs.

God is announcing to men considered perpetually sinful that the Passover lamb has been born whose blood will cleanse their sins forever.

God is announcing to men out of fellowship with the worship system of Israel that the baby has been born who will bring them into fellowship. God is announcing the gospel to men who are outcasts that they can become members of God's family.

What a volume of truth and grace revealing the wonderful, deep, gospel and grace God! What a revel this was!

And that's just verse 8. Verse 9 is where it really starts to get interesting. ***9. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them*** – by the way, angels haven't been seen for more than 400 years. In fact, for nearly 500 years no angel has been seen by anybody on earth – and suddenly there are angels showing up everywhere.

- ***Gabriel came to Zacharias in Luke 1:19;***
- ***Gabriel came to Mary in Luke 1:26;***
- ***Gabriel seems to be one of God's chief messengers to humans; it was Gabriel who spoke to Daniel in Daniel 8:16 and again in Daniel 9:21.***
- ***I believe it was more than likely Gabriel who is now speaking with the shepherds – but notice further in Luke 2:9 and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10. But the***

angel said to them, “Do not be afraid (easy for you to say!) for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11. for today in the city of David there has been born for you (wait – did you catch that? He wasn’t just born – He was born, for you! Make that personal – write into the margin of your Bible here at verse 9 your own name; I’ve done the same thing so that my Bible reads), for today in the city of David there has been born for Stephen – a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

This reveal is quite a mouthful . . . in fact, the angel just delivers three titles for the baby boy.

The first title is the word, Savior – this was politically combustible information because this word – soter – was known all over the Roman Empire. It was the title taken by the Emperor Caesar Augustus; He claimed – and you can read inscriptions to this day about him – he claimed to the soter – the Savior of the World.

The Gentiles especially would perk up their ears at this title especially.

The next title the angel reveals is the title, Christ – a Savior who is Christ/Christos - this was a title that would have arrested the attention of the Jews.

Christos means anointed One – this was the title specifically designated for the Messianic office. Only the Messiah could claim the title Christ.

So the Gentiles and the Jews will be astonished as this message is first delivered by the Shepherds, and beyond.

But the last title summarizes it all in one breathtaking claim.

Today in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

The name, Lord, is from Kurios; it happens to be the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew term Yahweh. In fact, throughout the Greek translation of the Old Testament, more than 6,000 times, kurios is the translation of Yahweh.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Lord means God. This reveal included the astonishing truths that the Savior – who had come to save them; Christ who had come as the Messiah – was deity in the flesh.

So you could read this announcement this way: I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there

has been born for you a Savior, the anointed Messiah who is none other than God.

The true gospel demands all three titles.

A Jehovah’s Witness can’t agree to all of these; a Mormon can’t say this; a Muslim can’t say this. They can say that Jesus was anointed; they can say that Jesus was a Savior; but they cannot say that Jesus was eternally deity; God in the flesh. He is Lord!

The Apostle Paul declared in **Romans 10:9** that in order to be saved you must confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the visible expression of deity.

One day, as the song goes, when we look into the face of Jesus, we will indeed be looking into the face of God.

Let’s jump to verse 13 where the reveal goes into surround sound. ***And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying...***

Before we rush to verse 14, I thought the angels were singing. It says here that they were saying.

We’re going to destroy a dozen Christmas hymns; what fun is that?

Were the angels singing or not? Here in **verse 13** it says that the heavenly host was praising God and saying. Well the original word translated praising is the verb aineo (αἰνεῖω) – it’s rarely used in the Greek New Testament.

However, it’s often used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint for the verb hallel. That Hebrew verb means to praise – primarily through singing. The hallels were put to music throughout Israel’s history. Aineo is interchangeable with hallel. Both words typically refer to praising God through song.

You could paraphrase and amplify verse 13 correctly to read, “And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God with these lyrics – these words; and then in verse 14 we’re given, notice, in poetic form, the lyrics of their song. Here are the lyrics: 14. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.

What singing this must have been. The angels explode the heavens with their song of grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Job chapter 38 tells us that angels sang at the dawn of creation – as God the Son – the Logos – spoke the worlds into existence.

The Book of Revelation tells us that the believers in heaven will sing to the Lamb and the angels will join them.

So here, at this significant moment in world history, the angelic hosts burst forth with song.

Verse 15. When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” 16. So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph (the verb translated “found their way” means to discover after searching. And what was the sign that would tip them off? Verse 12 reads that the sign will be baby – but there would have been several born that night. Oh, but this baby is absolutely impoverished, belonging to parents without a roof over their head – in fact, the baby will be wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger – lying in a feed trough . . . that would have been unusual.

Notice verse 17. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

By the way, did you notice that now the shepherds are glorifying and praising God – that’s

what the angels were doing earlier. These shepherds were fast learners – the implication is that they are singing the song they’d just learned from the angels.

Has it ever occurred to you that angels haven’t sung about the gospel and the grace of God on earth since this time?

God could send more angels couldn’t He, every Christmas season? Why doesn’t He? Why doesn’t He write the message of His Son’s preexistent deity in the clouds? Why doesn’t he shake the earth with the chanting of millions of angels again?

I would. And He could!

But He is choosing from Luke chapter 2 to this very day – until the coming kingdom – He’s choosing to use ordinary, simple, sinful, faltering, forgiven, once outcast – now members of the family; God is choosing to use you and me, the redeemed, as His singers now.

We get to carry out the reveal – to the world, of who Jesus is.

The Savior – because we must be saved from sin and death.

The Christ – because we must have a Messiah to redeem us

The Lord – because we must have eternal God who alone can break the power of sin and death.

He has been born for you – and you – and you – and me; a Savior who is Christ, the Lord.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/25/16 by Stephen Davey.

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