

Heaven Resounds with Christmas Joy!

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Take your Bibles and let's go to Luke 2 as we continue this series of expositions on the narrative concerning our Lord's birth, our Lord's coming. We come to just two verses now in Luke 2, verses 13 and 14, and I have entitled this "Heaven Resounds with Christmas Joy!" You think there was joy in Zacharias' heart and Mary's heart and Elizabeth's heart and the shepherd's heart and in Joseph and Mary's hearts, certainly great great joy, but no joy like the joy of heaven. Heaven resounds with Christmas joy.

Let's look at it there together beginning in verse 13 of Luke 2.

13 And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased."

Let's notice first of all, I. Let's look at the heavenly singers themselves. The heavenly singers and note, A in our outline: their elation. The great deep joy or elation. Now verse 13 says suddenly this multitude of glorious holy angels appears. Now this is like the "suddenly" up in verse 9 when only one angel appeared. Here they are all coming together now, not just one but a multitude, to celebrate Christ's birth.

You know, our God is a God of celebration. He likes celebration. As a matter of fact, throughout Israel's history he mandated celebrations and these mandated celebrations were to recognize and glorify him for who he is and for what he had done for Israel. And celebrations not only are to glorify and remember all he is and all he had done for Israel but also to strengthen and encourage his children. Think about it, the Passover week, a commended and commanded celebration. Pentecost that was 50 days after Passover that celebrated God's faithfulness in the harvest. Then the feast of Tabernacles where they would come back together and remember how God took care of them when they had to live in little tents or tabernacles during the wilderness journeys. Then there was a new year celebration. There was the day of atonement and the days of atonement surrounding that they were to gather and celebrate. Then there was the weekly Sabbath. And then there was also a new moon that they would celebrate on a monthly basis. And the point is, Scripture required these things. I don't know about you, I like the fact that God required them to stop work, cease what you're doing, it's time to celebrate.

God likes celebration and often during these celebrations they would blow trumpets. Almost always there was feasting and almost always there were rituals to commemorate and cause them to remember who God is and all he had done for them, but now this celebration on this night, on a remote hillside outside of a little place called Bethlehem, is different. Here we have a host of holy angels shouting and singing and praising God's glory for what he's doing because this is greater than any and all the other celebrations God had given his people. You see, first of all, Christ is the fulfillment of what all those Old Testament celebrations pointed to. When he came, it's the fulfillment. He's the antetype of the type that all of them pointed to and here we're not celebrating God's faithfulness to his people, here we have God coming in human flesh born of the virgin Mary.

Now we saw up in verse 9 as the shepherds are all asleep pretty much on the hillside and there are one or two watchmen, they would take shifts watching the sheep through the night, and then one angel appeared and that was terrifying. That was just terrifying. If a holy angel ever burst before you in your presence, I think you're going to be terrified. That's the first thing you're going to feel. I remember one time one of these far-out false teachers that's on television that speaks a lot about visions and miracles, he said that Jesus comes in and talks to him every morning while he's shaving. And I like what one solid Bible preacher said, he said, "What I want to know is did you keep shaving?" If God shows up from heaven in the form of Jesus Christ or a holy angel, the Bible tells us or the Old Testament prophet said he fell down as dead when a holy angel appeared. So these shepherds are terrified when one angel showed up because, you see, it only takes one angel to announce the Savior's birth but it takes a multitude of holy angels to properly celebrate the Savior's birth. Oh, their great elation in shouting and singing and praising God.

Now notice secondly: their excellencies. As I've said here, the Bible says in verse 12 that this is a multitude of heavenly hosts. It isn't just any personalities here, this is a heavenly host. This is no ordinary choir. This is a term that would be used for a multitude of mighty soldiers in an army. This, indeed, is the most beautiful, powerful, glorious praise and singing ever to be experienced on earth. This is the heavenly choir. I'm convinced that when God created angels, he created some of the angels with the most perfect voices for singing his praise, and from creation's time they have been eagerly rehearsing and looking forward to this event, the most momentous and the grandest and the greatest event of all time or eternity. This is heaven's choir.

Well, the first holy angel appeared and announced Jesus was born, now this multitude of heavenly host has gathered and they are praising God and we would assume by now the shepherds have gained some courage. They have composed themselves. They have reassured themselves and now they are ready to witness the dazzling appearance of these holy angels and the finest sound which has ever been seen or heard on planet earth. Now Keith and Christian Getty are just wonderful in my opinion, most of all for their heart and their conviction about Christ and the truth, and then their music is professional and excellent. They were in Topeka, Kansas, Dallas, they are coming here and then who knows going where. I marvel and am thankful for the great popularity God has given

them, yet they have never compromised their message but their music is glorious. And by the way, the Grace Life Church choir and music program is glorious. It's a wonderful ministry and they do a wonderful job but that is nothing, nothing compared to what these simple lowly shepherds heard on this first Christmas eve. The elation and the excellency of what they must have heard.

Well, let's go to our second point. Not only the heavenly singers, we looked at their elation and their excellence, notice the heavenly song. The heavenly song that they sing. Notice the first subpoint, the theme of this song is the glory of God. That's the theme of their song. That's the first thing they say, "Glory to God in the highest." By the way, have you ever heard this before: it's all always about the glory of God? It's always about the glory of God. We have endeavored for many decades now to passionately and intentionally here at Grace Life be about not you, not me, not man's needs, man's wants, man's desires, but God and what God wants and what God chooses to be glorified by, to be God-centered, God-based, and these angels are certainly that way. It's always all about the glory of God.

Now these angels had been glorifying God for his infinite and wondrous glory for past time and eternity. Isaiah 6:1-3 we get a little glimpse of what happens around the throne of God. "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Above Him were seraphs," those are angels, "each with six wings in which two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.'" Can you just picture that scene? Look, angels are so mighty and so brilliant and so wondrous, can you just see them swirling back and forth, shouting out with thunderous voices, angelic voices, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty." That's what they've always done. That's what they are always about.

So these holy angels have been in the presence of God for thousands of years in untold eternity, yet this event, this event where their audience is just a simple shepherd band, this event is the highest of praises. Isn't that what they say, "Glory to God in the highest." In other words, the angels are saying, "You guys have no idea." The angels who have been in the presence, can you imagine being in the presence of God since he created beings, all that these angels have seen, but on this night they say, "Something has happened that is of higher praise and worthiness than anything we've ever seen before." "Glory to God in the highest." We're not sure what that means but I think it entails two things: this event deserves the highest of praise in the highest and holiest of places. This is a most wondrous event, the event of all events that could ever happen.

We know in creation the Bible says, for example...where did my verse go? Well, I've lost it. I won't use that verse. But anyway, "The heavens declare the glory of God and their expanse is declaring the work of his hands. Great and marvelous are thy works." Angels have always praised God for creation but this is the highest of praise, the birth of Christ. You see, these angels have watched the miseries of sin and transgression and reprobation

in the earth and now the door of mercy has opened. God's deep compassion for sinners has been revealed.

Now some say when you look at this verse, verse 14 where they are saying, "Glory to God in the highest," that that's actually a prayer. Let's glorify God in the highest. I don't think there's any way that's just a prayer. It's not a supplication, this is indeed a celebration. It's as if for just a moment God says, just for these shepherds, these shepherds got a special favor from God God didn't give to others, just for a moment God peeled back the layer between time and eternity and let these shepherds see what glories go on in heaven, and the glory of all glories is the coming of Christ.

Notice the flow of what the angels are saying. We'll elaborate on this in a moment. "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." So first the angels say, "We are here to glorify God. This is the most momentous thing and the aspects of it are that God has come to bring peace to men on earth with whom he is pleased." That's what they are glorifying God for.

You see this redemptive work, this saving men to bring men who are at enmity with God to a place of peace with God, this is God's greatest glory. 1 Peter 1:12 gives us an interesting insight, "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you," this is talking about angels, "when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things." These are things the Bible says to which angels long to look. In other words, these holy angels from time and eternity past were filled with this anticipation of, "What is this going to mean and how is this going to happen? How is all of this going to unfold?" Then all of a sudden it happens and they are blown away by the glory and the wonder of it all.

You see, in redemption his glory is most beautiful. In redemption, we see the multifaceted gem that sparkles with the countless hues of God's wisdom, God's power, God's beauty and God's love. In redemption, glory is seen in his sovereignty as he chooses the people he will redeem. In redemption, glory is seen in his wisdom because he designed so marvelous a plan to redeem them. In redemption, glory is seen in his power as his Son perfectly executes the plan of redemption. In redemption, glory is seen in his justice as the divine law is upheld and fulfilled in the life and the death of Jesus Christ for his children. In redemption, the glory of God is seen in his faithfulness in that he exactly fulfills his promises just as he promised.

His angels have been longing to see this unfold. They knew truths about it but now it is happening, but while his work, the Lord Jesus Christ's work, is of inestimable value for men, it is primarily about the glory of God. That's why the angels shouting and singing to begin with, "It's inestimable and wondrous beyond compare that he is coming to save you, but that's second, the first thing is glory to God in the highest. He thought this up. It came out of his wisdom. His power will perform it. His love will see it to the end. He is to be praised. He is to be glorified."

So the theme is the glory of God. Secondly, let's notice the message. Not only the theme, the glory of God, but notice the specifics of the message. The first part of the message there in verse 14 is, "And on earth peace." A peace on earth, the King James says it that way. Well, you and I live in a world that knows anything but peace. One researcher said that since the beginning of time, over 1 billion people have been killed in wars on planet earth, and he continued to say that if you estimate all the damage done by all the wars since time began, we have destroyed earth's surface 50 times over. Our world knows anything but peace.

One secular scholar wrote that peace is the tranquility of order and a lack of peace is order gone bad. Well, that's good in a sense but it leaves out the one who brings peace. You see, since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, there has not been peace on earth. Sin, you see, is the root of non-peace. When Eve sinned in the garden, she walked into non-peace. When she tempted her husband, Adam, he too participated in non-peace and their sin was against God and it broke the peace that was originally established between God and man.

We live in a world without peace and we live in a world full of men with hearts who know no peace. Man has no peace within himself. Galatians 5:17 talks about the fact that the Spirit within man is contrary to the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit, and there is a warring in the heart of man. Man is at war with himself, man is at war with his fellow man, and this results in nations warring against nations, but all because man is at enmity with God.

He has no peace with God but here these angels are singing before these shepherds on this hillside and they are glorifying God because in that kind of world God has acted to bring peace into that world, because through Jesus Christ men can have peace with God, men can be the friend of God, even God's beloved children. Romans 5:1 reminds us, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Conscience cleansed. Guilt removed. Fear vanquished. Only the power of Christ can impart inner quiet and peace to the soul of man. The Bible tells us, "Thou will keep in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee." Are you troubled? Get all your heart and mind on him. Get all your heart and mind on him and there you will find perfect peace.

Then the next phrase, not only peace on earth but verse 14 in the New American Standard words it this way, "with whom He is pleased." Now I do not have to tell all of you Bible scholars that there have been a lot of different translations of that second phrase. "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men" is the King James translation, and that's just not a good translation. That translation, "peace on earth, goodwill toward men," has a lot of sentimental value but it is theologically wrong. Jesus was not born just to give this broad, generic, hopeful, splashing of God's bringing goodwill toward men and peace on earth, there is more than that here and the Greek text makes it clear.

But let me say something, first of all let me say what this does not teach: this does not teach what classic liberalism and the purveyors of a so-called Christian social Gospel

give us. This is not teaching some sort of peace at all cost, this all-inclusive thing, this concept of multiculturalism that we hear today and somehow Christians ought to be all for multiculturalism. I'm here to tell you, we are not supposed to be for that. There is not a compatibility with Christianity and a Christian nation and so many of the doctrines and philosophies of people who come out of either Hinduism or Islam. I'd like to tell some of these Hollywood folks, "You want this multiculturalism? You think we all can just live together? Instead of assimilating into being Americans, we can just all become this new universal people of all these cultures? Well, I'll pay the first \$100 on your month's rent and we'll get you an apartment right in the middle of the most orthodox, conservative, Islamic community in America and let you live there for a year with your daughters and your wife. Then you get back to me on you telling me how all this multiculturalism works. It's fine to say that behind your guarded steel fence and your big walls." That's not what this is teaching. This is not teaching throw away all doctrine, throw away all convictions, it doesn't matter about doctrine, it doesn't matter which religion, we're just all going to be Christians and have peace on earth. That is not what the angel said.

It does not teach universalism. It does not teach that God came in the person of Jesus Christ to save absolutely every single person. That's called universalism. No need for repentance. No need for faith. No need for evangelism. No need for Christian doctrine. God is just through Jesus going to save everybody. That's error. That's heresy.

But here's what it does teach: it does teach that salvation and peace with God and the peace of God is brought to individuals who believe through the merit and the work of his Son, Jesus Christ. That's what it does teach. So the point is and these angels are singing gloriously on this hillside, "God has come now not in his wrath but in good will to bring favor to men through the works and the merit of his Son, Jesus Christ."

Now let me close by elaborating a little bit on that last phrase, "peace on earth toward men with whom He is pleased." That's the New American Standard but, you see, the point is that God's peace is brought to those on whom God chooses to favor and that, by the way, is a good translation of this verse. You could say peace on earth to whom God chooses to favor. It's like those he is well-pleased to bring salvation's peace through like on this Christmas eve night. There were possibly hundreds of bands of shepherds throughout Israel but God favored only one band of shepherds; they hear the announcement and they see the angelic choir. The announcement did not come to the high priest or the Sanhedrin or the dignitaries or the scribes and the law-keepers in Jerusalem or 1,001 other persons or groups. God's favor rested on one band of shepherds on one hillside. It's whom God chose to favor that night.

You say, "Pastor, why would God be like that?" Because he's God and he doesn't care what you think. He just don't care. You can have a church vote and vote God out, God doesn't care. He's still God and still sovereign. As a matter of fact, when you come to the Greek phrases in this verse, *eirene*, peace in, among, *anthropos*, men, *eudokia*, on whom his favor rests or of his good pleasure, that phrase, it has pleased him to bring favor to these. That's the same idea you get in Ephesians 1:5. It's the same Greek word, actually. This Greek word is used in Ephesians 1:5 where he says having "predestined us to

adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention," or the good pleasure, "of His will." Why did God predestine those who had believed in Ephesus to be his children? Because it pleased him to do it. They were the objects of his good pleasure. He was pleased to bask his special favor on them. Actually, and this will be the first time and possibly the last time I will ever make this statement: the New International Version of the Bible I think gets it right because I don't like the NIV. It's a little bit too much of a paraphrase but I think they get it right. You see it there on your screen, "peace on earth to men on whom his favor rests." That's what the angels were saying, to men on whom his favor rests. Remember what Peter said in his epistle that these things of redemption are things that the angels had longed to see and come to fruition. Holy angels from before time longed to see God's redemptive plan come to be played out on planet earth and here we have in Luke 2 this massive angelic choir appearing to these shepherds and they are praising God with such elation over the power and the wisdom and the beauty of God's sovereign plan of redemption for man, a redemption planned in eternity past, and now begun to be played out perfectly on the pages of time.

So of course, are you listening, church, this morning? Are you listening? These are angels. They are telling everything from God's perspective. Have I told you before the Bible forces us over and over and over again to repent of looking from man's understanding and turn around and get with God on how God views everything? They are holy angels. They are looking from God's perspective. You see, these singers, this holy angelic choir, they were there. They were there in the garden of Eden when God's favor rested on Abel and his offering but not on Cain and his offering. They were there when God's favor rested on Noah and preserved his family but not on the rest who perished in the flood. They were there when all the pagans on the earth, God chose a pagan man named Abram. He said, "Abram, get up. Leave your people. Go to another land. I have chosen to place favor on you and on your descendants and I will make a great nation for myself out of you." They were there when God placed his favor on Isaac but not on Ishmael, his brother, because through Isaac would come a nation and through Isaac would come the promised Savior. These angels were there when God placed his favor on Jacob and not his brother Esau, because Jacob would be the one through whom the nation would be built and would be the line through whom the Savior would come. These angels were there when God chose Joseph and not his brothers to be the special object of mission and blessing from the hand of God. How are you going to argue with the sovereignty of God? The angels were there when God chose Moses, Moses 40 years keeping the sheep, and God appeared and said, "I've chosen to favor you. You're going to be my deliverer and my law-giver and a foreshadowing type of my Savior, Jesus Christ." The angels were there when God chose David, lowly runt of the family David, keeping the sheep while the other boys did more noble tasks. The prophet comes to the household of Jesse, he picks no other man in Israel, none of David's brothers, but of the household of Jesse, he chose David. The angels saw that when God favored David. "You will be the great and mighty king of Israel. Not Saul, David, and you will be a type of my Son, Jesus Christ, and the line from which this Savior will come." The angels were there. Of course, an angel especially was there when the priest, Zacharias, went into the temple and was serving and the angel said, "Zacharias, your wife, Elizabeth, in her old age is going to bear a son and that boy, John, will be the forerunner of the Savior who will soon be

born." Why of all the men in Israel, God's favor came to Zacharias. The angels were there when God's angel appeared to Mary of all the virgin maidens in Israel. Mary. Do you remember what the angel said to Mary? "Greetings, favored one. Mary, you're getting a favor, a special God-pleasing favor on you. You didn't earn it, God is just doing it. You will bear a son conceived in your womb and this will be the Savior of the world."

So the angels are here on this night. Jesus has been born and they are overflowing with great joy with shouting and singing before these shepherds saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men on whom God's favor will rest." Are you listening to your pastor this morning? Every single person who has ever walked the earth to whom God's favor intended to rest on, it rested on and they will be saved. "Well, pastor, how do I know if I am one on whom God's favor has rested?" If you have come to repent of looking to anyone and anything other than Jesus Christ and have come to turn and place all your hope, all your faith or trust in Christ and Christ alone, then you are one on whom his favor rests.

Those angels had been waiting for this for eternity. They just can't hold it in. Glory to God in the highest. He's done it. He has pulled it off. And hey, when it all gets done, the last soul is turned to Christ, the eternal state is ushered in and the redeemed now purified and glorified church is assembled – listen to me – every single one on whom God set his favor to rest will be there. Glory to God in the highest. Glory to God in the highest.

Have you been a repentant? Is there anything you're looking to other than Jesus? Church membership? Cleaning up your life? Changing your ethics? Doing more good works? Being baptized? Taking the Lord's table? Walking down to the front? Repeating a prayer? Is there anything other than Jesus your hope is in today? You must repent of that and turn and say, "Christ, from this heart of faith to you, I don't deserve it but I need you as my Lord and Savior." And if you will turn to him, the Bible says all those who believe in him, he will in no wise cast out. I mean, it's a universal invitation to all. Would you come to him today and receive it?