

XIV. Gospel Worship in Biblical Perspective

Worship God!

“The Angels Worship the King”

Luke 2:1-14

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

December 15, 2013 – Morning Sermon

We are in our series of learning Gospel Worship and we will be looking at the passage from Luke 2. This is the Word of God. It's the truth. Luke 2:1-7 says *[1] In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. [2] This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. [3] And all went to be registered, each to his own town. [4] And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, [5] to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. [6] And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. [7] And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I have had the great privilege to walk these same paths we are studying it trips I have taken to Israel. I have purposely tried to walk through the paths of Mary and Joseph around Nazareth and found what I think is the old site of the synagogue, and the route by Jerusalem to Bethlehem 2100 years ago that they would have walked. They would have had two choices in that route and one would have been going down the Jordan valley and coming up by Jericho which means they would have come a little south of Jerusalem and then turned six miles to Bethlehem. The other route would have been through the hills of Samaria and they would have come very likely the route the wise men would come a few months later. They would have come on the northern side of Jerusalem passing by Zion Gate and the gates that would lead down to Bethlehem. In so doing they would have passed a no longer used limestone quarry, with the outcropping of a small hill that was called Calvary or Golgotha. They would have passed in the shadow of that hill on their way to Bethlehem. Of course, that hill would be a place of the One who would be born would come to 33 years later to save us from our sins.

What brings them there? The same sovereign God who will move an Assyrian Empire, a Babylonian Empire, a Medo-Persian Empire will bring Israel into captivity, will use Daniel to teach wise men and embed the Bible, then hundreds of years later the successors to Daniel who are wise men in those lands, in a few months from now will come. We studied in the last study how these representatives of royal nations would come and bow down fulfilling prophecy and bow down to Christ somewhere from two months to two years after His birth. The same sovereign God who moved empires to accomplish that to fulfill His Word to bring His Son is the same sovereign God who moves another emperor (of Rome), Caesar Augustus, and his mouth piece in that area, Quirinius, governor of Syria, to give a taxation and registration of everyone in order to tax them.

So Mary and Joseph have to leave the place where he was betrothed to her, Nazareth and traveled down by way of Jerusalem to Bethlehem. When they get to Bethlehem there is no place for them in the inn, more precisely guest room where more than likely they went around to various relatives and there was no place. So they end up in what likely was a cave underneath a house where they would house the animals, where the baby would be delivered and placed in a manger or likely a stone trough of the animals that would have been fed there. So that is how they arrived there. As they arrive in Bethlehem there will be another decree. Caesar Augustus had given a decree with an announcement. Now there is about to be another decree from a bigger king and a very unique birth announcement.

Before we get there I want to remind you a few things as we have been in this series of these birth narratives of Christ. I have tried to impress upon us that all of these narratives beginning with Christ Himself, the wise men, the angels and then in the next study the shepherds that in each of them there are three consistent features embedded in the narrative. The first thing embedded in the narrative is a proclamation that the One who is being born is King, more precisely Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. The second feature is that there is celebration where in each case worship takes place of this King. This is why we have called 'Worship the King' our theme of learning how to bring to the Lord Gospel worship in assembling together and with our lives. The third feature is anticipation of how this Christ is going to save His people at the cross. In each case at the manger there is the anticipation of the cross. In the last study we saw it with the wise men.

God moved by the Holy Spirit, upon the author of Matthew, whose burden is to convince the Jewish people that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah and the fulfillment of all prophecy, is the one who is chosen for the emphasis in the birth narrative upon pagan astrologers, philosophers, experts in the supernatural to come as royal representatives. That fulfills four prophecies that the kings of the nations will bow down to Him. Here is a down payment at His birth that the kings will bow down to Him. A fulfillment of another prophecy is that they will bring gold (affirming His royalty), frankincense (affirming His deity) and myrrh, not foretold in prophecy but looks to the future. As they come they say they are searching for the King, the Christ whom they proclaim as that. When they arrive they open their treasures and sacrificially worship Him. There is the anticipation of His atoning death at the cross when they bring the myrrh which 33 years later, myrrh will be placed on the body of Christ as He goes not from a stone trough but a stone tomb and will rise victorious.

So I have attempted to take these three features and put them together with two statements that are guiding us through our study. The first statement is the One (King) who always has been (Son of God) came down to save His people from their sins and became what He never was (Son of Man) yet now and forever will be (Fully God-fully Man), and one day we'll behold Him, not by faith but by sight. The second statement is Jesus Christ (the King) made His entrance into the world by way of a manger in humility to make His exodus by way of the cross in triumph to the praise of His Father, as He saves us from our sins. Now let's take a closer look at the angels with this unique birth announcement.

This birth announcement is unique for a number of reasons but first I'd like to set the context of this birth announcement that is being given to us. When does this birth

announcement take place? It takes place in the days of Caesar Augustus and the governor Quirinius. We have three key people we can date by – Caesar Augustus, Quirinius and Herod. Herod dies in 4 B.C. so that means this event takes place sometime between 6 to 4 B.C. Then we are told there is a decree from Rome that comes with an announcement of a taxation that was the first registration. In other words, governments not only tax but they learn to tax regularly. Since that was the first taxation for registration then that means there would be more registrations for taxations but this first one was being used by Divine appointment to fulfill the prophecy and calling of Christ that would fulfill all of these prophecies and bring the Old Testament to the focus of this manger.

Now we see Mary called the betrothed because she and Joseph are not fully married. To be fully married requires not only the covenant of commitment but also the consummation and Joseph had been commanded not to “take her” as his wife. In other words, he cannot consummate until after Mary has given birth. It also says in the text that she will give birth to “her” firstborn and it’s not Joseph’s firstborn for Joseph is the stepfather. He is the guardian doing the oversight in place of the Heavenly Father who sent His Son, eternally begotten into the world but in human terms is the firstborn of Mary. Mary and Joseph will have other children and Joseph’s firstborn is yet to come.

The place she will give birth is in the manger, probably the cave underneath the people who had no room, no place for them. The baby will then be wrapped in swaddling cloths. People generally read it as swaddling clothes and it is not clothes, it is cloths. The practice would have been linen strips of cloth used to wrap a newborn tightly in them. They did that for two reasons. One, is to continue the security that the baby had been feeling in the womb and as they would grow they would loosen them and they would fall away.

The other reason has to do right when a child is born. I can’t believe men have been talked into this thing. For my first child, this is the way it was done. You bring your wife to the hospital, kiss her, pray for her and say “I’ll see you later.” Then you go and act worried in the waiting room. I love the way Bill Cosby talks about how he got talked about being in the labor room. When the baby came out Bill said “Look, our baby is so, well it kind of looks like a lizard.” All of us were just ugly when we were born. When a baby is born they are all kind of curled up from the womb so they would start straightening the baby with the swaddling cloths as they wrapped the cloths around them. So Mary would have wrapped the baby Jesus in those swaddling cloths for those reasons and laid Him in that stone trough.

Then comes the announcement. Why is this announcement so unique? Number one is because of who delivered it. This announcement was given by angels. When angels appeared in the Bible, they appeared two ways. Sometimes they appear in human form, not as humans but in human form. Abraham met a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ and Christ had two angels with Him. Abraham thought they were two men. In others, when you came in today if God wanted to, these angels whom He designed as ministers and messengers, they could have been back there greeting you as you came in and you would have never known it. You might have thought “I’ve never seen that greeter before, who was that greeter?” “I don’t know.” The Bible says that some of us have entertained angels unaware.

Most of the time they don't show up that way but they really show up, reflecting the Shekinah glory which means when they show up this way, everyone starts eating dirt, they go face forward. So when they show up this way, what do they have to say next? They say "Fear not." Don't be afraid. That's what these angels say. They say "Fear not, we don't come in judgment. We have come with a great message for you."

By the way, I think the song writer for "Noel" is right. I think but purely speculation on my part, in this text where the angel comes down with the others behind him that reflected the Shekinah glory was actually the rising of the star of Jacob in Numbers 24:17 that the wise men would see hundreds of miles away that set them on their journey. So now the angels have come and the announcement has been made. So it's unique because of who is bringing the birth announcement.

Secondly, the announcement is unique because of what they say. The first thing the announcement says is that we bring you the Gospel. We bring Good News. The world lies in darkness and under the curse of sin and there is nobody in this world that can save you from your sins. You can't save yourself. Religion can't save you. We bring you Good News of great joy! Why is this great joy? Why is this Good News? It is because a Savior has been born. Right there in the city of David, in the land of Judea, the provincial capital of the tribe of Judah, the home and house where once David was born, and now the Son of David who was prophesied has now come, the One greater than David, the One who is the Great Shepherd, the Savior has been born.

The next thing the angels say is that this Savior is the Christ. He is the Messiah, the Anointed One. He is The Prophet. Everything in the Word of God, the 39 books of the Old Testament was pointing to Him. The Word has become flesh. Here is the final Word of God which has been spoken and announced by the angels. This is also the Christ who is The Priest. Now you have a Priest that doesn't need to be saved because He is perfect and this perfect Priest can be your Savior. This Priest is also the sacrifice as He gives Himself. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Here is The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The angel is not finished yet. There is Good News of great joy, a Savior is born who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:8-11 says [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 great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news (the Gospel) 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.*

This Savior that you're looking upon, in all the frailty of newborn humanity is God having come in the flesh. This is the Lord, Adonai. This is the Lord, Yahweh. This is God having come in the flesh, coming to save you. This is not a prophet that needs salvation. This is not a priest that needs salvation. This is The Prophet, The Priest and The King for this is the Lord who has now come wrapped in the infirmities of human flesh in a real body with a real mind and He has come to suffer for you, to save you from your sins. This is the Lord.

Thirdly, this Lord is for all the people. It's not just for you, shepherds, or you people of Bethlehem or you of the tribe of Judah or you Jewish but for all the people. Luke 2:10-11 says [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. This One who is born is bringing salvation to all the peoples of the earth.

Then comes perhaps the most unique part of this birth announcement. How many of you made a birth announcement when your child was born? What information comes on a birth announcement? Generally it would say something like this; “With great joy, Sam Harris, was born to Bob and Sally Harris...” What did this announcement say? This didn’t say “Good News, a Savior was born to Mary and Joseph.” The Savior came under the care of Joseph born through Mary but born to you. Let me be more precise with a southern American translation. He was born to all ya’ll. Mary and Joseph were chosen instruments but the Baby wasn’t born just to them or those who came to see Him. This Baby was born to all the people, born to all of you. What Baby is that? Go find Him.

Here’s the sign. Luke 2:12-14 says [12] *And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.* Wrapped in swaddling cloths is not unusual but what is unusual is that He is lying in a trough. Then the announcement gets very specific with a song. Luke 2:13-14 says [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 who are the “all ya’ll” who are going to get the blessing of joy from this Gospel? It is peace among those whom His favor (grace) rests upon. It isn’t saying those who are able to please Him but it is those whom He is pleased to save by His grace.

Let’s look at this phrase ‘peace on earth.’ He is giving you the scope of this Gospel message throughout the earth. He is not saying that the earth will have peace. He is saying Good News, there is peace because the King who could have come to bring judgment, came to bear judgment. He came to bear judgment so that a Gospel of great joy that there is peace, can be proclaimed throughout the earth. Who will have this peace? It is those who by grace, in faith, come to Him, those whom the grace of His pleasure has brought from death unto life. You know them by the fact that through faith and repentance they put their trust in Christ alone.

What does this peace look like in a broken world? Jesus also says that people will say peace but there really is no peace. This is a very specific kind of peace. What is the Gospel peace? After Jesus has given us a glorious sermon He says this in John 16:33 [33] *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.* Jesus says in Me you will have peace and in the world you will have tribulation. So you are in the world and by God’s grace you have come to Christ. So you are in the world but not of the world but believers still get sick, die and face all kinds of situations in this world. In fact the world will rise up to bring tribulation upon you but take courage for in Christ you have peace and Christ at the cross has overcome the world.

What does that peace in Christ look like? So this Gospel goes to all the earth and from all the tribes and nations its message by grace will bring people to Christ. When they believe in Christ they have peace in Christ. Romans 5:1 says [1] *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* So when you by grace through faith come to Christ, you are in Christ and Christ is in you, then you have peace with God. Up until then you were God’s enemies, have fallen short of the glory of God and are under the judgment of God but because Christ came not to

bring judgment but to bear judgment, when you come to Him who took your place on the cross to bear your judgment, now in Christ you have peace, specifically a legal, true, eternal peace with God. You are now in His family. You are not His enemy. You are now saved by grace and you belong to Him.

Philippians 4:4-7 says [4] *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* [5] *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;* [6] *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* [7] *And **the peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* I used to have this placemat that had a picture of a roaring waterfall and on the side of the waterfall was a rock and the water diverted around the rock. Underneath the rock came a little bush that had a nest in it and in the nest was a mother bird with some little birds and hundreds of gallons of water rushing by could sweep them to their destruction, yet they sat right in the midst of it in that nest with perfect peace.

You are in a world of tribulation. You don't look to religion to have peace with God. You look to Jesus. You don't look to your baptism to have peace with God but you look to Jesus. You don't look to your resolutions or your abilities but you look to Jesus who has come down from heaven for you, loves you and pays for your sins. So you have peace with God. Now He is with you. Even in the roaring tribulations of this world you can have the peace of God, navigating this life and all of its issues. I can have a peace beyond understanding, inexplicable by psychology or some notion if you trust Jesus you don't ever have any problems. No, I have an Overcomer and He is with me. He has overcome the world, the world of my sins so I have peace with God, the world of tribulation so I have the peace of God, who will make me more than a conqueror through Him who loves me and has loosed me from my sins.

Here is your takeaway. The manger is only explained by the cross and the cross is meaningless without the manger. The manger makes no sense, for why would God come to this world, except to go back up that six miles to Golgotha thirty three years later. Jesus will steadfastly put His face to that cross to pay for our sins. If this isn't God having come in the flesh then the Lord who is the Christ and our Savior, can't save us. Plenty of people have died on crosses and died for other people but they can't save them from their sins and give them peace with God and the peace of God. The only One who could do that is God having come in the flesh. The only One qualified to qualify us for eternity is the One in the manger. The cross is meaningless without the manger but the manger is explained only by the cross.

That is what we proclaim to the world in proclamation. That is what we proclaim in gathered worship that the name of the Lord is lifted high because this Savior went to that cross, died and was buried in a stone, cold tomb. It is embedded in this text. For it is this Savior who is born in a manger and He is wrapped in cloths as He lays in a stone, cold trough. Those linen cloths that wrap Him will be cast aside as He grows from that trough but one day He will go to a cross and He will be laid in a grave. Myrrh will be the spice that embalms Him and a linen cloth will wrap Him but that body will not stay in the grave. The One who left the stone, cold trough will leave the stone, cold tomb and those linen cloths will be cast away and we can proclaim Good News of great joy.

We have a Savior who is Christ the Lord and now there is peace with God and the peace of God for our Savior has overcome the world of sin and rebellion. We who fall

short of the glory of God have been saved by the grace of God to the glory of God. I'd like to borrow from a song we sing many times. From that manger He goes to a cross. From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the skies, Lord, I lift Your name on high. Glory to God in the highest who came to the lowest, to take us. When He came there was no place, no room and He went to the cross and took your place. Now He says "Fear not, for I have gone to prepare a place for you." No place, no room, took your place at the cross and now He prepares a place in His Father's house with many rooms. Lord, I lift Your praise on high. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. All of us reading this are in the world but I now pray and ask that those who know You have the peace of God and are in God and that their lives would declare praise to the Lord on high. O Lord, what a night when the announcement came, a unique announcement, another decree from a greater King, "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, Bethlehem, a Savior, He is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest!" The Gospel of peace has come to men and those saved by grace respond to the heavens, "Lord, I lift Your name on high!" In Jesus' Name, Amen.