

What is Christmas All About?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 December 2011

Preacher: Dennis Beery

[0:00] Well, with the arrival of December, we are officially in the Christmas season.! Maybe it starts sooner or later at your house, but in our house it's always been the tradition! to start thinking Christmas, to get into Christmas mode, as it were, when December rolls around.

So, on what appears to be the first message of the Christmas season, I like to use as my text for today, a few lines from my favorite Christmas TV special, Charlie Brown Christmas.

This is Linus speaking, and he says, And there were, in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall see the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men. Yes, that was the Bible being quoted in a Christmas TV special.

Now, I don't watch that much TV anymore, but I would hazard a guess that you don't see the Bible quoted in modern Christmas TV specials that are aimed at a general audience. And that is if the producers can even bring themselves to call it a Christmas special instead of the much safer holiday special. But this was 1965 when a Charlie Brown Christmas first appeared on TV, and political correctness was still pretty much in its infancy. The passage that Linus quoted from Luke 2 was prompted by a question from Charlie Brown. Most of you have probably seen this program and know that throughout the show, Charlie Brown is disturbed by the over-commercialization of Christmas.

And he finally cries out in despair, Can anybody tell me what Christmas is all about? And that's when Linus says, Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about.

[2:34] And then he quotes the passage from Luke 2. Well, Linus, in spite of his thumb sucking and security blanket, got it right. This passage truly does tell us what Christmas is all about. And not only that, it tells us what we should do about it, what our reaction should be to the Christmas story. So let's have a closer look at this passage. And I'm hoping that when you're done, just like Charlie Brown, you'll have a better handle on what Christmas is all about as we head full steam into this season. So we'll go back to the NIV since I doubt that most of you have Linus's preferred version, which is the King James with you today. We'll start in verse 8 of Luke 2. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Now we heard a little bit last week about what conditions were like.

We heard this in our Sunday school class about what conditions were like for shepherds in that part of the world at night. It could be pretty cold and there was no dozing off. I mean, there were sheep that had to be watched after all. So in verse 9, it says, And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. Well, that seems to be the response, always to be the response, when an angel appears in that way. Terror, absolute terror. When an angel appears in glory, there's no, oh, hi, Gabe, how's it going? Or, hey, Mike, what's up? No, it's pretty much shock in awe, dread, and terror. Notice, though, that it's not the angel's glory. It says the glory of the Lord shone around them. Whatever glory that angels display or whatever glory accompanies angels when they appear, it's not their own. It's the Lord's glory. The angels are like us in that regard.

They have nothing of themselves. Anything they have, including displays of glory when they make an appearance, comes from the Lord. It's not their own. That's why holy angels always give glory to God, as we'll see shortly. Verse 10, But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good

news of great joy that will be for all people. So after calming the shepherds, the angel announced that he had some news, good news, and not just any kind of news. It was the kind of, it was good news, and it was the kind of good news that would bring great joy. And it would be good news of great joy, not just for a few people, but for all people. And so what was this good news of great joy for all people? Verse 11, Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. So the good news of great joy for all people was that a Savior was born that day. Now, if you were a Jew living in Palestine during those days, that was indeed very good news, because the Jews were looking for a Savior, the Messiah, the Christ. And what would that Christ do? Well, the first thing is, he would be a great political ruler who would liberate the Jews from the dominance of the Roman Empire. He would kick the

Romans out of Palestine and set up his own throne and return Israel to the glory days of old. And not only that, he would give them relief from sickness and physical hardship and all the things that had made life so difficult for the Jews over the centuries. From a totally physical perspective, that would have been a great Savior to have. One who would give relief from physical hardships and bring liberty from oppressive rule. Who wouldn't want that kind of a Messiah? But there was a slight problem with this particular expectation that the Jews had, and that was that they didn't understand everything that this Messiah would accomplish once he finally arrived. And though these particular verses here in Luke 2 don't tell us exactly what kind of Savior was born on that night, there's another passage that makes it quite clear. And that's Matthew 1, verse 21. You can turn over there if you like. Matthew 1, 21.

When Mary first became pregnant, an angel appeared to Joseph and told him what kind of Savior this child would be. And this is what the angel said to Mary in Matthew 1, 21. She said rather to Joseph about Mary. She, Mary, will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. That's the kind of Savior he was. One who would deliver his people from sin.

[7 : 59] And that's also why it was good news of great joy for all people. If Jesus had come merely to kick the Romans out of Palestine, well, that would have been good news for the Jews. People in other parts of the world probably wouldn't have cared much. But since he came to save his people from their sins, and that's good news for all people, to Jews certainly, but also to Russians and Venezuelans and Romanians and Ethiopians and New Zealanders and Cambodians and all people everywhere.

Did you know that when the angel told the shepherds that he had good news of great joy for all people that he used, that the word he used for good news is actually the same word that's translated gospel elsewhere in the New Testament? So you could actually read Luke 2, 10 this way, I bring you the gospel of great joy that will be for all people.

I hope that the gospel continues to be a message of great joy for you. Certainly there is an initial excitement and joy when we first come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. But much like a honeymoon, that first wave of excitement and joy usually doesn't last. But as you settle into the Christian life, and over the years the Lord tries your faith and delivers you out of various trials and circumstances, and then you grow in his grace and knowledge, then your joy in Christ will continue to grow as well.

I think I can safely say that that's the experience of many seasoned veteran Christians in this room, that their joy in Christ and his gospel continues to grow year after year.

If you're a believer, I hope that that's your experience too. I think it's what Peter was talking about when he said in 1 Peter 1, verses 8 and 9, though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[10 : 23] We can't see Jesus with our eyes. We can see him with the eyes of faith. And as that faith grows year after year, we're filled with an ever-increasing, inexpressible, and glorious joy. And that's because the goal of that faith is the salvation of our souls. That's why it's a gospel of great joy.

Well, anyway, let's head back to Luke 2 and see what happens next. We'll pick it up in verse 12.

This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Suddenly, a great company of heavenly hosts appeared with the angels, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men on whom his favor rests. When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found

Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. So the shepherds were able to corroborate with their own eyes what the angels had told them. As we'll see in a moment, it's plain that the shepherds not only saw the Christ child, but they also believed in all that the angels said about him, that this was the Savior, the Christ, the Lord. I hope that no one sitting here will let another Christmas go by without seeing exactly what these shepherds saw, that Jesus is Savior, Christ, and Lord. I want it to be good news of great joy for everyone sitting here. You see, these shepherds knew that if what these angels said was true, then it was the best possible news away for them to be delivered from their sins had finally arrived here on earth. This was not the kind of news to sit and discuss around the campfire at night or to casually talk about around breakfast the next morning.

That's why they said, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger.

There was no waiting around. If there was a Savior, they had to see him right away. If anyone here doesn't yet know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, I hope that you will run to him, even as these shepherds did when they heard the good news. Don't let another Christmas pass by without you turning from your sin and running to this Savior. Well, we left the shepherds at the manger. Let's pick it up in verse 17. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told about the child. And verse 18, and all who heard were amazed, were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. When they arrived there, they saw that everything the angel said was true. [13:50] There was the newborn Christ, the one who would save all his people from their sins. So what did they do next? Well, they could have just sat there gazing at Jesus, I suppose. I'm sure that it was an amazing and fascinating thing to be sitting there gazing at the face of the promised Messiah. Or they could have eventually gone back to their flocks and had a nice invigorating discussion among themselves about seeing the baby Jesus. But I want you to notice what they actually ended up doing after leaving the manger. These shepherds did two things that are very important for those of us who know Jesus to take note of. What did they do first? Did you catch that in verse 17? When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. They went and told the good news of Jesus to other people. Unless I'm mistaken, I think this is the first account of people spreading the good news about Jesus to other people that you can find in the

New Testament. And I'm glad it's here because it teaches us something about who's qualified to spread the gospel to others. And that would be everybody who professes Jesus as Savior. Whether we are factory workers or mechanics or school teachers or shepherds or housewives, whatever, we all need to be looking for opportunities to tell others about the Lord. Let me show you another example from the book of Acts about your average, everyday believer, telling other people about the Lord. It's found in Acts chapter 8 and verse 1.

Acts 8 and verse 1. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. And then down to verse 4. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. So you see that the apostles stayed behind in Jerusalem while everybody else scattered out and preached the good news everywhere.

We will be very soon scattering from this building, from Grace Fellowship, back to our homes and towns.

And I hope that you and I will be looking for opportunities to tell other people about Christ. Pray for the Lord to help you to see those opportunities and then to ask him to give you the words to speak when the time comes. If we do this, we may see the very same thing on the faces of these people that the shepherds saw. Amazement in the eyes of those who have heard about Christ and a desire in their own lives to seek him out. Well, we're still not done with these shepherds yet. Let's move back to Luke, the second chapter. After telling others about Christ, they did something else that's very important for us as Christians to take note of. That's found in verse 20. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. So after the shepherds heard what the angels said, they hurried off and saw Jesus with their own eyes. Then they went and told other people the good news about the birth of Jesus. And what was the result in their own lives after they experienced all of these things that night? Well, this verse shows us they praised and glorified God. Brothers and sisters, I hope that as

you think back on all that the Lord has done in bringing you to himself, even as he brought these shepherds to see Jesus and believe everything that the angels said about him, that it will cause you to worship, to glorify and praise the God who has saved you.

[18:08] We heard in Sunday school, not that many months ago, that missions exists because worship does not. Worship is the ultimate end of all evangelism. If you have been on the receiving end of evangelism, and Jesus is your savior, then worship is what should naturally follow.

For those of us who are saved, that should be the focus of each and every one of us. If Dennis Beery, if any believer, is not giving daily glory, praise, and honor to the God that has saved us, then we need to do some serious soul searching about our commitment to that Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us, so whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of Jesus.

That is our purpose, to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And that's what we hope to accomplish when we evangelize. So just as it was for these shepherds, the glory and praise of God should be something we think about throughout every day. Did you notice that the angels set the example for us in these two things? First, they came and told the shepherds the good news of great joy that will be for all people. After that, we see them praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to man on whom his favor rests. The angels told others the good news about Jesus, and then praised and glorified God.

Then the shepherds did the same thing. They told others about Christ, about the Christ child, and then they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they heard and saw. This Christmas story is all for our example, that we will have that same desire to tell others about Christ, and then praise, worship, and glorify God for sending him, his son, to earth 2,000 years ago to save us from our sins.

[20:28] If there are any here who do not know Christ as Savior, I hope that you will take this season to seriously reflect on Charlie Brown's question. Can anybody tell me what Christmas is all about?

If you are not in Christ, then can you really say that you know the answer to that question? Because Christmas is all about good news. It's about good news of great joy. Good news of great joy for all people. It's not about getting a holiday off from school or work. It's not about family gatherings or decorating or putting presents under the tree. It's about good news. It's about good news of great joy, for all people. And it's the good news that a Savior is born. The shepherds heard this news and they knew what to do. They ran to him. You can run to him right there in your seat. Cry out to him in your heart to have him forgive your sins, and he will be quick to forgive. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you so much for this time of year, for the gospel that arrived when Jesus was born in that manger 2,000 years ago. It was indeed the best news of great joy for all people that you had sent a Savior, someone who could rescue us from our sins. We had no hope without him, Lord. And we pray that you will, on the one hand, cause those who do not know you to do as those shepherds did and run to you, to that Savior, that they might have those sins removed and that they would glorify you.

And help us as your children, as brothers and sisters in Christ, to praise and glorify your holy name every day as these shepherds did once they saw Christ as their Savior.

[22:49] Father, we thank you for this time. Help us throughout all the activities and all that we will do this time of year to focus on our Lord and Savior. We thank you for him, and we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.