

**A Field of Glory – Luke 2:8-20**  
Sermon by Pastor Joe Davis  
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**I. INTRODUCTION**

Merry Christmas! Thanks for taking a break from your regular Christmas activities to honor our Savior and fellowship with your church family. I've promised to keep it brief today so you can get back to your regular Christmas traditions and do whatever cooking or other activities you have planned for rest of the day. We've still got some gift opening to come at our house this afternoon, so I know my kids are hoping I'll keep it really brief!

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Luke chapter 2, where we'll be focusing on verses 8 to 20...a passage that many of you may have already read together as a family as part of your Christmas Eve or Christmas morning traditions. In fact, you'll probably need to slap your face or pinch your cheek a couple times just to wake up and actually hear what it says since you've read or heard it so many times in your life. We're going to work through it one or two verses at a time, just to make sure you don't check out!

For those of you that were here last night, you'll remember that the first 7 verses of Luke chapter 2 gave us a factual, historical account intertwined with well-known historical figures and real countries at a very specific time period when the Roman emperor had ordered a census to be taken of the whole empire. We saw how God used this ordinary event and a decree given by Caesar himself to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy that said the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

Everything we saw last night leading up to the birth of Jesus seemed ordinary to all appearances, though it was far from it: a 70-mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem in obedience to a decree by the Roman emperor and the birth of Mary's child in Bethlehem in a very unimpressive place...a shelter for animals. Perhaps the most unordinary thing about it was a woman having a baby in a dirty stable and having to lay her baby in a feeding trough. It was different, all right, but probably not thought of by Mary and Joseph as extraordinary in a good

way...more like extraordinarily humbling, uncomfortable and humiliating. Nonetheless, Mary had a healthy baby boy, their basic needs were provided for, and Mary and Joseph knew that this baby was special and set apart for God's purposes.

## **II. THE ORDINARY: SHEPHERDS IN THE FIELDS AROUND BETHLEHEM (Luke 2:8)**

Well, as Mary was delivering a baby and as she and Joseph were spending the night in a stable with their new Son, God was doing something visibly extraordinary in a field nearby Bethlehem where some shepherds were watching over their flocks through the night. These ordinary shepherds had no idea that the Good Shepherd had just arrived and that they were going to find out about it in a big way.

Let's read verse 8 of Luke chapter 2:

***8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.***

It was just another night in the life of a shepherd. Perhaps a few were snoozing, some were enjoying the starlit sky, and another was tending a fire.

## **III. THE EXTRAORDINARY: SUDDENLY AN ANGEL (Luke 2:9)**

But suddenly everyone was awake and alert and terribly frightened as the darkness of the night was lit up with an other-worldly light and the appearance of someone very impressive and intimidating. Let's continue on in verse 9:

***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.***

Don't you wonder what the glory, the splendor, the brightness of the Lord looked like as it shone all around them? It doesn't sound like the glory of the Lord was only around the angel either, but it seemed to be shining all around the shepherds as well. All we know is that it was an impressive and intimidating sight

and that each shepherd knew they were in the presence of great glory and it caused them to be terribly afraid.

Do you think they were thinking: “Ok. I’ve finally done it. I’ve crossed the last line with God and he’s here to finish me off right here and now?” Who knows what was going through their minds, but whatever it was they felt their humanness, as do all people who encounter an angel of the Lord, and if there was going to be a battle they knew they didn’t stand a chance.

#### **IV. THE ANGEL’S MESSAGE (Luke 2:10-12)**

But fortunately for the shepherds, the angel had not arrived to carry out justice and judgment. He had arrived with a much different plan and message. Let’s hear what he has to say in verses 10 through 12:

***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. 12 "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."***

As we’ve seen recently in both Joseph and Mary’s encounters with angels, those who meet them in the glory of the Lord always need to be told a simple statement: “Do not be afraid.” These are almost always the first words of an angel when they come face to face with human beings. When we see angels as they are, fear is the natural response. They’re so impressive and powerful that those who see them are often tempted to fall down and worship them, which of course should never be done.

So this angel told the shepherds not to be afraid and he gave them a reason. They didn’t need to be afraid because he was bringing good news of great joy for all people. The angel had a message for the whole human race, a message of good news bringing great joy. And isn’t it wonderful that this good news wasn’t just for the Israelites...it was for all people. Everyone had reason to rejoice and be glad because of what the angel was about to tell the shepherds.

And the good of great joy was this: a Savior had been born. And not only that, he had just been born TODAY and in, of all places, the little town of Bethlehem...just over the hill from where these ordinary shepherds were going about their nightly business. And wonder of wonders, do you know who this Savior is? He is Christ the Lord.

The Greek word for Christ is *Christos*, meaning anointed, the Greek designation for Messiah. If you remember at a later date, when Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, she said to him, ***“I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.”*** And of course Jesus replied: ***“I who speak to you am He.”*** Even the Samaritan woman knew that the name, Christ, referred to the long-awaited Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures.

So the angel was making clear to the shepherds that a Savior had been born and that this Savior was none other than the long-awaited Messiah. And in order to provide evidence that this good news of great joy was true, the angel offered a sign to the shepherds. This sign would have 4 parts: the shepherds would find a baby; the baby would be wrapped tightly in cloths; the baby would be lying down; and most unusually, and what makes this a unique sign, the baby would be lying down in an animal feeding trough.

Have you ever known any mothers who had a baby in a stable and then used an animal feeding trough as its crib? I certainly haven't! It would definitely be easy for the shepherds to be sure they had the right baby. Check all the barns and find the one with the baby lying in a feeding trough. And don't you think they wondered why the Messiah had been born in a barn of all places? Have your parents ever said to you, “What, were you born in a barn?” Well, now you can remind them: “Well, Jesus was!”

#### **V. SUDDENLY A MULTITUDE OF ANGELS PRAISING GOD AND SPEAKING (Luke 2:13-14)**

But back to our shepherds. As they were trying to deal with their fear and mentally process this incredible announcement from the angel, things got even more interesting. Let's pick up in verses 13 and 14:

***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."***

If the shepherds were afraid and overwhelmed before, you can imagine how they must have felt when suddenly a huge number of other angels appeared and started praising God and making another pronouncement: ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."***

Now whether or not the angels were singing or speaking praises is unclear. I'm sure we all have in our mind a heavenly choir concert and certainly that could have been the case. You're probably hearing Handel's Messiah in your head right now. But however the angels were proclaiming the praises of God, they were doing it together as a multitude and I'm sure it must have been extraordinarily special to see and hear.

And the message they proclaimed was full of hope for the human race and glory to God who had brought about the amazing miracle that would make permanent peace with God possible through the One called Jesus, who would save people from their sins. God was offering great blessing and favor and grace to people who deserved no such thing. While we were still sinners and in full rebellion against God, God was making a way to rescue us! This good news the angel was bringing to the shepherds was so full of great joy that the hosts of heaven couldn't help but appear out of the heavens and burst out in spontaneous praises.

Scripture tells us that not even angels understood the full scope of God's plan to save human beings from their sins, but now they were starting to get an idea. Prophets had foretold it, but that doesn't mean even they understood how it was actually going to come about and the full significance of who this Savior was actually going to be. And even now, the angels probably didn't understand the road the Son of God would soon have to walk and how it would lead him to the unthinkable for them: his death on a cross for the sins of the world. The One who deserved highest praises would be brutally crucified at the hands of sinful men.

I'm reminded of the words of Peter in 1 Peter 1:10-12:

***10 As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, 11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look.***

Even angels longed to look into and understand what God's plan for the human race was all about. And now they were watching it unfold and couldn't help but break out in praise as the eternal Son of God was being born as a human baby. Glory to God in the highest was the only appropriate response! ***"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"*** (Romans 11:33). Amen?!

## **VI. SHEPHERDS RESPOND TO WHAT THEY'VE HEARD AND SEEN (Luke 2:15-16)**

Now how long this heavenly praising of God by the angels went on, we don't know, but at some point the angels departed back into the heavens. Let's continue on in verse 15:

***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, and the baby as He lay in the manger.***

Do you wonder who spoke the first word after the angels left or if they all just stood there with their eyes wide and mouths hanging open? "Did that really just happen?" and they all shouted, "Yes! Absolutely no doubt...We all saw and heard it!" At some point the words definitely started flowing and a plan was quickly formulated. And there seems to be no questioning whether what they had heard and seen had really happened. Not just one shepherd had seen it...they all knew something very real and profound and life-changing had just happened in front of

their very eyes and they didn't waste any time responding to it. "Let's go straight to Bethlehem then and see for ourselves what the Lord has just shared with us."

They ALL knew God himself had just given them a message through the angels...no doubters remained...and they also knew just what they needed to do. It was time to search out the sign the angel had promised them...time to start searching the stables for a baby lying in feeding trough! Forget the flocks for a minute. Let's go! And they went in a hurry and soon found Joseph and Mary and the baby in a feeding trough, just as the angel had said...all 4 elements of the sign promised by the angel were there.

## **VII. SHEPHERDS SHARE WHAT THEY'VE BEEN TOLD ABOUT THE CHILD (Luke 2:17-19)**

Do you think Mary and Joseph might have been a little surprised when a rough and dirty group of shepherds suddenly burst in on them and stood in awe around Jesus in the manger. God works in surprising ways that we usually don't expect, doesn't he? Well, they were even more surprised and amazed when the shepherds started talking. Let's read verses 17 through 19:

***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.***

I get the idea from these verses that there were more people in the stable than just Mary and Joseph. Notice that statement, "all who heard it wondered." That word translated, "wondered," means they marveled at or admired the amazing things the shepherds shared with them about this child. All who were there with Joseph and Mary, were blown away by this amazing report from the shepherds saying that angels had just appeared and told them that this helpless baby lying in a feeding trough was a Savior, the long-awaited Messiah in fact! And don't you think they wondered, "Why is this happening in a barn? And why would God share this message with shepherds of all people, the lowest members of society, and not proclaim it in the synagogue to the chief priests and religious leaders." What was God up to?

But Mary, already knowing that this was a special child conceived by the Holy Spirit apart from any man, treasured what the shepherds said as additional evidence that God was on the move and that she had the privilege of holding in her arms and caring for the very Son of the Most High God. She pondered and thought deeply on the significance of what God was doing in this humble stable of Bethlehem through the most ordinary of ordinary people. Mary held these things in her heart so that she would never forget the amazing things God was accomplishing.

#### **VIII. SHEPHERDS RETURN TO THEIR FIELDS, GLORIFYING AND PRAISING GOD (Luke 2:20)**

And having shared their amazing message, what they had seen and heard with their own eyes and ears, the shepherds went back to their daily lives. Let's finish out our passage with verse 20:

***20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.***

The response of the shepherds was simple: they glorified and praised God! Amazed and awed and humbled by what had been shared with them by God through the angels and how he had confirmed it with an unmistakable sign, there was only one thing to do: give honor and glory to the only One who deserves it and who was making salvation and peace available to all people through this little baby boy born in a humble stable in Bethlehem. Many more amazing things were to come, but the sunrise was unmistakably beginning to crest the mountains! The glory of God was bursting forth into the everyday lives of ordinary people who needed salvation from their sins and to be restored to a right relationship with the One who had created them.

#### **IX. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

There are so many things we can take away from this familiar account of the shepherds, the angels and Jesus' birth. I'll just highlight a few as we close today. First of all, Jesus is the epicenter of God's plan to redeem and save people from their sins. The birth of Jesus was and is still good news of great joy that is for all people! There's no salvation, there's no new life, there's no forgiveness, there's



no freedom from the wrath of God, there's no victory over sin, there's simply no hope without the eternal Son of God who took on flesh a little over 2000 years ago and then was born in a humble stable in the historic town of Bethlehem. If you don't know him yet...if you haven't admitted your need for him, believed in his death and resurrection on the cross, and invited him to be your Savior and Lord, you're missing out on this good news of great joy! In fact, Scripture says you're still dead in your sins and under the full wrath of God...not a place any of us want to be.

Most of us are here today because Jesus is our life and hope and the One who has saved us forever and restored us to a right relationship with our Creator. But there could be some here this morning who still just Jesus was just a good man, or who think the Christmas story is just a good children's tale, or who maybe believe that Jesus is the one way of salvation, but have never personally invited him to be Lord and Savior.

If that's you, I invite you to have that simple conversation with God right now...a conversation where you do 3 simple things: Admit your sin to God; Tell him that you believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead; and personally invite Jesus to be your Savior and Lord. It's that simple and if you mean it in your heart, you will be saved in a moment and become a forever child of God. He'll give you a new heart that longs to follow him, his Holy Spirit will take up residence within you, and you'll start a journey of walking through life and eternity with your Creator. You'll finally have hope!

You'll begin to understand what peace on earth really looks like, because it's only available through Jesus...a peace that passes understanding. As we're saved through him we finally have a permanent peace with God and move forever out from under his wrath. And then as we walk with him through life, he gives us peace in the middle of even the most difficult of circumstances we'll ever have to face. Remember, this peace proclaimed to the shepherds by the angels is available on earth and it only comes through Christ.

And for those of us that are already in relationship with Jesus and already at peace with God, I'd close with three final points of application from what we've studied today. First, as we've noticed repeatedly in our recent messages, the kingdom of the heavens, the unseen spiritual realm is alive and active all around

us. Though we don't often see a heavenly choir of angels appearing to us, angelic and demonic activity is just as much of a reality today as it was back in the time of Joseph and Mary. Don't fall into the great deception of our modern age that says the only reality is what we experience with our 5 senses. Watch for God's activity, keep your spiritual eyes open for him, and expect to see him at work. And always be on guard against the activity of the evil one.

Secondly, God delights in working through ordinary people in ordinary circumstances to accomplish extraordinary things. He loves to work powerfully within humble people who have no illusions that they've got it all together and don't need him. Do you feel inadequate? That's a great place to start and remain because it will keep you looking to God alone for power and strength and wisdom and keep you giving him all the glory and praise for whatever he accomplishes through you.

And finally, don't put God in a box and ever imagine you know exactly how he works or that you've figured him out. Scripture says that God works in mysterious ways for a good reason. He's always surprising us with his plans and rarely does things the same way twice. Keep your eyes and ears open and be ready when he turns your world and plans upside down in order to accomplish something much greater than you had ever imagined. And when he does, give him all the glory and praise just as the angels and the shepherds did on that amazing night of our Savior's birth.