

A Heavenly Serenade

Introduction

The Text

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 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. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ **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 among those with whom he is pleased!”** (Luke 2:8–13).

Questioning the Text

- A. We followed the narrative through v. 12 last time and we now pick it back up in v. 13. Up to this point, a single angel of the Lord, presumably Gabriel, has been speaking with the shepherds. And this follows the pattern of the previous angelic announcements we’ve seen in Luke’s infancy narrative (Zechariah [1:11] and Mary [1:28]).
 - 1. But then something unprecedented occurs. With the angel’s announcement that this child—Savior, Christ, Lord—is finally here, it’s as if heaven itself could no longer restrain its joy. For, again, we read: “...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 among those with whom he is pleased!”
- B. Now I just have a couple of questions for us this morning that are going to guide my observations as we make our way through this.

(1) When Does the Angelic Choir Appear?

Don’t Miss This!

- A. I do think that the sequence of events is most critical to properly understanding them. The angelic choir did not show up too early, nor too late, but at just the right moment.
 - 1. And what moment was that? If we return to the narrative we see that it was not immediately following the announcement proper (vv. 10-11), but after the disclosure of a sign whereby the shepherds would know they’ve found the right baby (v. 13): “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

- B. It's after this statement that "suddenly" the curtain is dropped and the angelic choir revealed. But why?
1. Well, consider the sign, consider where this heavenly child, this Savior, Christ, and Lord would be found? In a stable (probably), in an animal's feeding trough.
 - a. It is presumably not what anyone would expect. "Why such humble beginnings for such a lofty figure? Is God really in this?"
- C. If the shepherds have any doubt that there is something of cosmic significance occurring with the birth of this little child in an animal's feeding trough, in the little Judean town of Bethlehem, God now calls heaven to come in full force and testify to it!
1. You have to appreciate the juxtaposition, the polarity of such a scene. It doesn't get any lower than shepherds and sheep, little babies, mangers, Bethlehem, and yet it doesn't get any higher than a multitude of angels filling the night sky with bright glory and loud praise. But in this moment, the two are one.
- D. And the point, it seems to me, is this: God is jealous for His people not to miss what He's doing in the incarnation! "If you look at this baby in an animal's feeding trough and you don't see the glory of my grace, perhaps this will help you get it!"
1. In the angelic choir He provides something for the visual learners and the auditory learners among us.
 - a. For the visual learners, this scene simply illustrates on another level what is happening at the incarnation: heaven is beginning to merge with earth— God is becoming man.
 - i. Therefore, when the God-man, Jesus Christ, is born on earth as a little baby, heaven opens up to celebrate.
 - b. But, for the auditory learners, these angels do more than illustrate the merging of heaven and earth that is happening at the incarnation, they're singing about it.
 - i. Notice the lyrics and the poetic parallelism. For it is: "glory to God in the highest [heaven], and on earth peace among men [in Gk.]"— glory, God, up high...peace, men, down low. Heaven and earth, God and man, coming together, for His glory and our peace!
- (1) And all of this is happening because of that child! Don't miss it!

Do We Miss It?

- A. We see the wonderful lengths to which God goes to assure us that we are on the right track in following this Jesus. But receiving Him here is really only just the beginning right?

1. A certain principle is put in place at the incarnation that we dare not miss, though we are so prone to: namely, heaven breaks into earth in the humblest of forms, God is at work in the smallest of things.
- B. This is why Jesus would tell His disciples this parable: “³¹The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matt 13:31–32).
1. It starts out so small, but it grows to be so big. Indeed, in not so long, “the kingdom of the world [shall] become the kingdom of our Lord” (Rev 11:15).
- C. This little baby in a manger in Bethlehem has initiated a cosmic revolution. And He calls us into it. But in so doing He recalibrates our values. It’s not the big, flashy, powerful, wealthy, externally righteous that God cares about. It’s humble, broken, lowly faith in Him and love for others.
1. It’s not the religious leaders who are so busy with all their work in the temple that fulfill God’s commandments, but the despised Samaritan who pauses his plans to care for a neighbor in need (Luk 10:29-37).
 - a. I fall into this all the time. “I’m too busy serving God to have time for you.” Meanwhile, God is saying: “Do you really want to serve Me? Put the commentary down and go put your arm around your wife.” Heaven’s breaking in!
 2. It’s not the praying, fasting, tithing Pharisee who is justified in God’s sight, but the downtrodden tax collector in the back beating His breast because He’s so broken up over His sin (Luk 18:9-14).
 - a. Maybe some of you have been walking in sinful and dark places as of late. You feel so convicted by it that even my mentioning it here is making you all but tremble. Do you know that you could right now send heaven soaring into song?
 - i. “How?! By paying God back? By cleaning up my act?” No! By lowering your head, holding out your empty hand, and gathering up just enough strength to say: “I’m sorry Lord, forgive me.”
 - (1) I’m telling you, though no one in this room may even notice, heaven just broke in. It’s not the externally righteous over whom the angels are thrown into vibrant celebration, but “there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luk 15:10).
 3. It’s not the rich that come into the temple with pomp and pride to deliver their magnificent donations that add anything to the treasury of heaven, but the poor

widow who drops in her only two pennies (Luk 21:1-4)! Those two pennies given in humble faith and love, are enough to break the scales of heaven!

- a. Maybe when the offering bags come around you are struck with shame. I'm in this room with all these important people working for Apple, Google, or whatever. I can't even afford my 1 bedroom apartment. So you hang your head and when the offering bags get to you, you kind of fold up the bills in your hand so no one can see how few of them there actually are.
 - i. You don't realize that your little offering in faith to God is worth more to Him than if Tim Cook himself were to walk in here and write a check for a billion dollars. You're doing kingdom work, with your 2 pennies!
- D. But we continually need to hear the angelic choir on this don't we?! Aren't our recalibrated kingdom values always migrating back to the default mode of our flesh and this world? I'm always trying to do something "big" for God, and I forget that oftentimes the biggest things to Him look like the smallest things to everyone else.
- 1. We need to hear heaven singing over us in the seemingly little, mundane moments of our lives. It might feel small to you, changing a diaper, confessing your sin, giving a couple of pennies—but I assure you, if you are doing it with a humble heart of faith toward God and love toward others, heaven is singing!

(2) What Does the Angelic Choir Sing?

- A. We've already looked at the basic structure of their song and how it puts in lyrical form what God is doing in the incarnation. But now I want to look at the content a little more closely.
 - 1. Particularly, I want to ask the question: If God is to be glorified in His dwelling place in heaven for what He is doing with us on earth down here, what exactly is He doing down here?

On Earth Peace

- A. The first thing we see is that this child has come to bring peace: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace..."
- B. We do well to recognize that the peace referenced here is so much more than what we typically make of it in our common idiom.
 - 1. Most people like to speak of peace in terms of an inner experience, a feeling, a psychological state, often related in some way to our external circumstances.
 - a. Hence we speak of feeling at peace while we're sitting next to the ocean, holding the hand of our loved one, lying in our warm bed, cashing a big check, etc.

- C. But this does not adequately account the fullness of peace referred to by the angels here. Certainly Christ came that we might have peace inside and out, but He wants it for us in an enduring, even eternal, way. He's aiming bigger!
1. The peace we naturally pursue is always leaking out. It never stays. It drip-drip-drips leaving a low-grade panic in it's void. Another vacation by the beach, another relationship, another check. But it's as if the faster we put it in, the faster it leaks out—and the more and more we panic.
- D. The Prince of Peace comes for a panicked people—a people that have seen their peace leaking but have not been quite sure how to fix it.
1. The song of this angelic choir is an invitation for those kinds of people to follow this child. He is the One who knows how to fix the leak at its source.
 - a. And so we do. We follow Him, from Bethlehem, to Galilee, to Jerusalem. And as He's entering Jerusalem, we marvel at the words He speaks over the city in between sobs: *“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes”* (Luke 19:42).
 - i. What does He mean by this? We're not sure. But, with the angel's song still echoing in our ears, we keep pace behind Him. Bethlehem, Galilee, into Jerusalem, to Calvary!
- E. And there, as we watch the Son of God, the Savior, the Christ, the Lord, the Prince of Peace, put to death on that cross, it all becomes clear.
1. Our leaking peace, our panic, it's not because we don't have enough comfort, money, or things of this world. It's because we're not right with God, to whom we and this world belong.
 - a. But If you have peace with God in heaven, you have peace in all and every circumstance on earth.
- F. Paul, in Col 1:19-20 sets this peace as the goal of Christ's entire life: *“¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell [incarnation],²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross [crucifixion].”*
1. In the place of our panic, it's to the blood of His cross that we run. Jesus' blood doesn't just answer to our panic at the beginning of our Christian lives, it is the sufficient answer all the way through. For if God is now fully and forever for me, who or what could ever be against me?!

Among Those with Whom He Is Pleased

- A. But if we read carefully now, we notice this peace is not indiscriminately applied to all men. For the angels sing: “on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased [objects of His favor and good pleasure]” (v. 14b).
- B. The question that should start to trouble us is: How do I become one of these with whom God is pleased and among whom there is therefore peace?
1. Certainly we’ve already established that a person must come to Jesus if he wants this peace, but now we are stepping a bit even behind that and asking, how does one get into Jesus in the first place?
 - a. And the answer these angels give us is staggering. For they don’t point us to man’s wisdom, strength, initiative, or even his faith. They point us to God’s sovereign grace.
- C. Now, I am not pulling this out of thin air because it matches my larger system of doctrine. Let me show why I think we’re talking about election here—sovereign mercy that awakens a dead sinner to the beauty and benefits of Christ.
1. For one thing, it is most certainly implied in the narrative of our text itself. For God could have had the angels make such an appearance and announcement to anyone, or everyone. But he chose these shepherds, and these shepherds alone.
 - a. As such, these shepherds come to represent for us the kind of people upon whom God takes pleasure and among whom there will be His peace: lowly, humble.
- D. Furthermore, when we do a simple word study in Luke of the Greek word translated “pleased” in our text, it almost always places us in the context of sovereign grace.
1. “²¹In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will [good pleasure]. ²²All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Luke 10:21–22).
 - a. Here Jesus is rejoicing in the sovereign grace of God whereby the revelation of who He and the Father are is being made not to the wise and the significant, but to the “little children”—the nobodies, the lowlifes. People like the shepherds.
 2. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

- a. Here again, it is God giving His kingdom to whosoever He pleases. And He always seems to take pleasure in giving it to the lowly: “little flock.”

- E. There is a text from Paul where this word shows up again twice and it brings together powerfully all that we’ve been saying this morning: “³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will [good pleasure],⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose [good pleasure], which he set forth in Christ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:3–10).
 - 1. Do you see how this text basically walks us back up my sermon this morning?!
 - a. We begin with this idea of being “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world...predestined for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to...His good pleasure” (vv. 3-5). Though there is nothing in myself to commend me to Him, I am an object of His favor by His sovereign grace, and I’ve been brought into union with His Son.
 - b. Because of this union, I receive all the benefits of His accomplishments, which we described as peace, peace with God by the blood of His cross. Here we see it described as “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (v. 7). We are made right with God because of Him.
 - c. And all of this has as its final goal what we spoke of at the beginning: namely, heaven merging with earth. God has “a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (v. 10).

- F. Jesus says this in Joh 6:44: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” So I close: If the Father is drawing, come to Jesus, and therein find your peace with God, and your heaven on earth. Now and forever.