

December 23, 2018
#54
Christmas According Angels
Welcome

Luke 2:8-20

⁸Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. ⁹The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

¹⁰The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. ¹¹Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. ¹²This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." ¹³Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, ¹⁴"Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

¹⁵When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." ¹⁶They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. ¹⁸Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. ²⁰The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.

My mother wrote more than 20 cards to send to Lithuania. They were to her friends who are lonely, home bound or just need a little note to uplift their spirit during Christmas. It is very expensive to send international mail. Even more when you put chocolate and a little decoration in the envelope. So we made a few trips to the post office. On the last trip we went to Shelbyville post office. It took me a long time to fill out the customs forms and be ready to mail all of it. My mom had a \$100 bill in her hand hoping it would be enough. We had a little chat with people standing in the line because they were interested to know what language we speak. So when it was time to pay I said: "I Hope it is not more than \$100." The post office worker said: "It is \$100". My mom and I rejoiced that she had just as much as was needed. She also grabbed a few more envelopes because she remembered a couple more ladies to whom she wanted to send a card. On the way out, we were not sure if we paid for the envelopes. I asked my mom to show me the receipt. I was shocked because this what I saw. It cost us \$105. But she asked us only for \$100. I went back to her and said we did not pay you enough. She said: "I could not ask you for more. I notice your mom was holding \$100 and I could not ask for more. I paid the \$5.

That was the loudest Christmas message and it truly blessed for us. We were strangers – immigrants – whom she had never met before. How can you stay open for opportunities to always do good? I bet she had done this job for decades. I bet she has heard all kinds of complaints and about how expensive it is to send. Yet she managed

to do a random act of kindness. How does one always stay alert for opportunities to do all the good you can? She did it without even saying anything or making it known

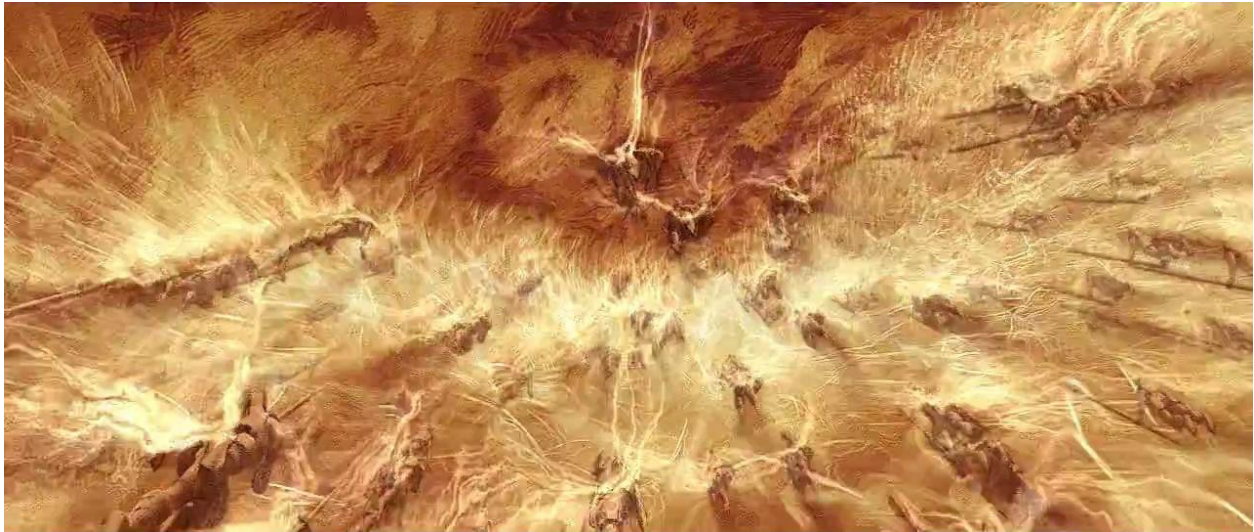
I was encouraged. I was touched. I was moved. God is still making his way into the hearts of those who welcome Him and welcome others into their lives. God is still at work in those who are willing to give by blessing others and at the same time God blesses the giver.

God thought about us. Not only did he think, he showed that he loves us. We have been hearing from angels during Advent. Today we meet an angel with an army of the heavenly host. The Lord's angel stood before them. The Lord's glory shone around them and they were terrified.



Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. Angels were praising God. They recognized what God did and what it means to God's creation. Heavenly forces started to praise God. Why? Because God gave His Son to change the destiny of all humanity. No longer would there will be separation from God. No longer would sin have power. The whole household of God was praising Him.

Christmas is simply the *undeserved kindness of God*. From start to finish, the whole Gospel narrative is about God's grace. We must always look through this lens when reading the Scriptures.



This Christmas as I was studying these most beautiful verses, my thoughts and my eyes stopped at the words:

Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, ¹⁴“Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.” Wait a minute. Peace among those whom he favors? I looked up other translations: “peace to those on whom his favor rests.” “to those with whom God is pleased.”, “and on earth peace, good will toward men”. Most translations make it very clear, that Peace is to those whom God is pleased. Looking even deeper and questioning even more, I found that the phrase "people of approval or favor" is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, defining the pious person who possesses God's approval and lives in obedience to God's ways. So does it mean the peace is not to all people? God's peace is granted to "people who possess God's approval". In other words, the wholeness God gives to people through His Messiah only applies to those who have God's approval.

Peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased. How can you please God? Without faith it is impossible to please God ([Hebrews 11:6](#)). So Christmas does not bring peace to all but to those who have faith. Christmas brings peace to those who believe and have faith in God and in Jesus Christ. This faith is to be lived out in every area of our lives: Faith that makes time to praise God, faith that is alive in everyday life, faith that gives not what we do not need but gives what is precious to me. Faith is

putting all trust in God. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

John Wesley wrote in his journal "It struck into my mind, "Leave off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?" I asked Bohler whether he thought I should leave it off or not. He answered, "By no means." I asked, "But what can I preach?" He said, "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith."

The shepherds got the message. They were terrified. Of course they were. Even when we are scared of what God is saying and any challenges God places before us. We want to understand how God works instead of simply trusting. They said to each other: "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened"



What happened? "Your savior is born. He is Christ the Lord. "My savior is born". Who is your Savior? Is he born in or you are still waiting for something to happen? Do you need somebody else? You believe but not all? You trust but not enough to change your life? Peace to those who believe. Peace to those who please God. It does not

sound very appealing to our ears, but we need to have a living faith. You have to be able to say: "My Savior". You have to be able to live a life that witnesses who is your King.

There is another important way to look at this song of the angel choir. The Bible says faith is a gift of God. So then how do you have faith which pleases God? You receive it.

As I said earlier, we must look through the lens of God's grace. God's favor is totally unearned. You do not jump through hoops to get faith. You receive it. The postal clerk gave a gift and my mother did not even know it. God's gives us God's favor and, many times, we do not know it.

No wonder the skies were filled with the heavenly host. We were all dead in our sins and trespasses. God extended and continues to extend His favor – His grace -- to all. "For God so loved the world....."

Jesus is now our righteousness in the eyes of God.

It is our responsibility to nurture faith at every opportunity, but ultimately it is a gift to receive.

Jesus is the Savior. Jesus is still at work in those who answer His call – those who receive this gift of God called faith. Christmas is still a time of remembering, renewing, welcoming and putting all of our faith in Him and growing our faith.

Today we celebrate that Ravin said "yes" to Jesus. Ravin decided and is very excited to be baptized in the name of God the Father, His Son Jesus and Holy Spirit. Today we see that God is alive, He is still alive even in Fairland. God's Spirit is still at work and looking for those who will say yes. New life at New Life is still happening. Jesus was born 2000 years ago. In 2018 Ravin will be born again because of what God did through Jesus. Ravin is putting her faith and her life in Jesus: the same Jesus who was born to Mary and Joseph, the same Jesus who lived, taught, healed and showed love the same Jesus who died on the cross, rose from death and will come again.

I invite you not to be only an observer but also participant. Would you remind yourself that you are baptized? Would you remind yourself that you are a child of God? Would you again give your heart and your life into God's hands? Would you say yes, to Jesus and choose to praise God in your daily life? Christmas is a time to receive peace through the faith in Christ Jesus.

Welcome Jesus and welcome Ravin who became a child of God and a member of our family.