

Angels' Song, Luke 2:13-14
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Introduction

Alright church, we are currently in the midst of a sermon series titled, “The Songs of Advent”—which I heard is the exact series you walked through last Christmas at New Breed. I like it—we’re just following your lead! Today we are turning to what is the shortest (and maybe the sweetest) song of Advent: the song of angels.

So I invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to Luke 2:13-14. You can find that on page 857 if you’re using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The title of today’s sermon is “Angels’ Song,” and the main idea is this: When God’s glory comes down, God’s peace breaks out. Here is what’s about to happen: anyone ever heard of tag team preaching? Well, today me and Pastor Michael are going to tag team preach this passage. I will cover the first line of the song, and then Michael will cover the second.

- 1) God’s glory comes down - Luke 2:14a
- 2) God’s peace breaks out - Luke 2:14b

Here’s one of the things I love about preaching this way. One scholar actually describes the songs recorded in Luke’s Christmas story as like a duet. First we hear Mary’s voice, and then we hear Zechariah’s, and then both go quiet as the song enters into a chorus led by angels.¹ In the same way, I hope today that the focus won’t remain on my voice or Michael’s voice, but will ultimately lift up into a chorus of highest glory to God, as we stand in awe of the peace that Christ brings.

Our tradition here at Antioch is to stand for the reading of God’s word, so if you are able, I invite you to do so now. Again, today’s passage is Luke 2:13-14, but for context I’m going to read vv. 8-20. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

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

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, Luke, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), 54

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,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Luke 2:8-20

The Lord has spoken to us. [Congregation:] Thanks be to God!

Exposition

We have started each sermon in the series so far with a popular Christmas song that contrasts with songs of Advent. So today I want to share not only the best-selling Christmas song of all time, but the best-selling song *of all songs*. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, 50 million copies have been sold worldwide. Any guess what it is? “White Christmas” sung by the “angelic” voice of Bing Crosby. It goes like this:

*I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten and children listen
To hear sleigh bells in the snow*

*I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write
May your days be merry and bright
And may all your Christmases be white²*

² Irving Berlin, “White Christmas,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9QLn7gM-hY>

Part of what made it so popular was that it came out at Christmas 1941, just as the United States was pulled into the second World War. And as soldiers in the Pacific and Europe spent what was for many of them their last Christmas alive, they listened to this song and longed for home. And in their lowly state, much as it does today when sorrow invades our holidays, this song offered a false sense of peace. If I could just be with my loved ones, gathered around a Christmas tree, with snow falling outside, then all would be well. They longed for an earthly event that felt heavenly.

In a similar way, today's song from the Gospel of Luke comes to those of lowly state, and it too offers a glorious sense of peace. But here's the main difference: this glory and this peace—it's for real. Not just because it was sung by true angel voices, but because it was an earthly event that was heavenly. Not just an event that could change a person's circumstances, but could change a person—forever.

You see, thus far the songs of Advent have been hymns that rose up from earth to heaven. Not so with today's song—it's an anthem that comes down from heaven to earth.³ To put this in perspective, the birth of John of Baptist was announced with the song of one old prophet; the birth of Jesus Christ...it arrives with the song of *a billion angels*. Something unlike anything in all of history is happening here, as John describes in his Gospel:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

1) God's Glory Comes Down - Luke 2:14a

What's happening here brings us to our first point this morning, that God's glory comes down. This comes from the very first line of the angels' song in v. 14:

"Glory to God in the highest, Luke 2:14a

Glory—not a reference to God's majesty, but glory in the way of praise.⁴ Something that might help us understand this is the climactic moment at a sporting event or concert. It doesn't matter if you're not a fan of the team or the band, when someone hits a last second shot, or hits the highest note in the most popular song, you'll come out of your

³ Ryken, 82

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), Loc 4997-4999

seat with your hands up and your mouth screaming. You may not like to describe it this way, but you're giving glory, in the way of praise.

So, glory (or praise) to God *in the highest*—which we should take to mean the highest place or highest heaven; a billion times higher than praise we would give to any event or person.⁵ If you put all this together, the angels are expressing something that's out of the ordinary for even them—they who for eternity past have been giving glory to God in heaven. What's different here is a higher glory, a praise song unlike any they have ever sung before. Why? In the words of one pastor: “Now is come the highest degree of glory to God, by the appearing of His Son Jesus Christ in the world. He by His life and death on the cross will glorify God's attributes—justice, holiness, mercy, and wisdom—as they were never glorified before.”⁶

But wait a minute, this is all about God's glory going up. Didn't we say this point was about God's glory coming down? Yes! If we are to wrap our heads around Christmas in such a way that our hearts go up in the highest praise, we've got to see that Jesus is bringing together two things that couldn't be more different, couldn't be more separate: heaven and earth. In order to unpack that, let's back up in the story. Read with me in v. 8:

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. Luke 2:8-9

Just when you think the circumstances couldn't get any more lowly for the arrival of God's Son, a group of shepherds enters the scene. I know we don't have much familiarity with shepherds in our society, but let me tell you, it is a dirty business. There's a reason why if you try to give me goat cheese I'll smack it out of your hand. The smell alone brings back memories of being around them when I lived overseas. And I made friends with former shepherds who spent their entire childhood alone with a flock and little hope of ever doing anything else for the rest of their lives. In Jesus' day shepherding was lowly and despised and even villainized.⁷ We kind of miss this, but when we read that the angelic announcement of Jesus' birth was given to a bunch of shepherds, it's meant to be totally absurd. It would be like if Jesus came in our age and

⁵ Bock, Loc 5000-5003

⁶ J.C. Ryle via Ryken, 82

⁷ Bock, Loc 4861-4869; Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1974), 101

instead of the angels appearing to us good religious folk, they went to a group of panhandlers sitting around a fire counting their money.

Why in the world did it happen this way? Well, for one, when God's glory comes down in the Person of Jesus Christ, it's good news for everyone. Look at v. 10 with me:

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. Luke 2:10-11

The angel doesn't just say that Jesus is good news for all people. Actions speak louder than words, right? So the angel *demonstrates it* by appearing to shepherds—the lowest of society.⁸ The people who could be left out and no one would even notice—that's who God goes to *first*. You could be anyone, from anywhere, in any state of life, and claim this gift. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."⁹

And the way this gift is described uses a combination of terms unlike any other place in the Bible. The child born unto them is (1) Savior, (2) Christ, and (3) Lord.¹⁰

- Savior—the One who could free them from sin and death
- Christ—the One who had been promised as Messiah
- Lord—the One in the highest place: God himself

Put all three together and what you get is the highest, most glorious way you could possibly describe this child.¹¹ All this, wrapped up in one present, and it's handed to these shepherds with a tag on it that says, "From: God, To: You".¹²

Once again, why? Why would God do it this way? Because when God's glory comes down in the Person of Jesus Christ, even though it's good news for everyone, it's only received as good news by the lowly. Read with me in v. 12:

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:12

⁸ Christianity Bible Studies, *The Songs of Advent*, Christianity Today, <http://cloud2.snappages.com/49ada79ad9a748389e048a61641b9f4bb1b5c5a7/The%20Songs%20of%20Advent.pdf>, 12

⁹ Romans 10:13

¹⁰ Bock, Loc 4926-4930

¹¹ Morris, 102

¹² Ryken, 79

Here's the heavenly sign of Savior, Christ, and Lord; here's how you'll know him when you see him—not a royal onesie and a golden crib. No, no, when you see rags and a feeding trough, that's when you know you've found your king. *So lowly*. And for that to mean any kind of good news for you, you gotta be lowly too.

This is the image that comes to mind here:



This past week Antioch lost a pillar in Mrs. Louise Jenkins. As I mentioned at her funeral yesterday, she had come to see herself in a lowly way as the worst of sinners, and also had come to see God's provision of a lowly Savior for her. And the longer that reality settled in her heart, the more it led her to glory in the highest. Because she was forgiven much, she loved much. And so, often while the rest of us sang with hands in our pockets and distractions on our minds, Mrs. Louise lifted a feeble-yet-strong arm high in praise. She was an example to us.

Therefore Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians,

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:5-7

The only thing more lowly than a child wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger is a man wrapped in a linen shroud and laid in a tomb.¹³ Are you willing to be in need of such a Savior? It seems here that the shepherds were. Not necessarily by what they say, but what they don't say. For the first time in Luke an angel appears announcing good news, and the hearers give no objection or request for a sign.¹⁴ Why? *Because they knew how much they needed it.* Do you?

And so no wonder we read in v. 13,

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, Luke 2:13-14a

It was only fitting. This is what happens when God's glory comes down. For what takes place after that, it's time for Michael's voice to carry the song...

2) God's Peace Breaks Out - Luke 2:14b

[Michael Matala]

¹³ Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Adoration: The Effect of Christmas, Luke 2:14," <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=83121131310&logos=1>

¹⁴ Robert A. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1992)

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Irving Berlin, "White Christmas," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9QLn7gM-hY>