

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: The Incarnation

Pt. 2 The Shepherds

Luke 2:8-20

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 12.19-20.09

Thank you Milo. Good morning. Let's take out bibles and turn together to the passage that we've been studying, Luke chapter 2. If you do not have a bible, that's alright. We have one for you in the chair back. The passage we're studying is found on page 857 – will get you right to the text. While you're turning there think with me. What has been your favorite Christmas gift over the years? Can you think of that? Can you remember that? I was thinking about that myself. I've got to be careful because I don't want to offend my wife or anyone else who has given me great gifts but I was thinking about the one gift that stands out in my mind and that was a gift my mother gave me. From about the age of ten forward I've always wanted to have a big moose. You know, a moose head that you can hang on your wall. I don't know why. I've just always wanted a big moose head. I remember when I was very young my mother would say, where are you going to put it? We don't have high ceilings. Where are you going to put it? I always asked. I was relentless year after year until I think I was about eight, nine or maybe even ten years I had been asking for this one gift. Finally my mother, who must have just gotten tired of me in my persistence found a stuffed animal of a moose, decapitated it, put it on a plaque, gave it to me and I have it to this day. That's probably my favorite gift that I've ever received from somebody. Now, I'm enjoying receiving gifts, of course but I'm also enjoying giving gifts. As you move from childhood to adulthood, especially to parenthood now you get to take on the role of the gift giver. And, we've had a tradition that was started, when I was very young in my family of creating a list. A list for the parents that they might be able to look at what you want. A list for Santa Clause. That's now come over into my children's lives. They're creating lists. I think they must have gotten some of their lists creating ability from me. I took it to an art form. My sister, she would scratch out a few things she wanted on an envelope of something laying around. I actually created a book with a table of contents, a ranking system, pictures when that was applicable. Now my children are kind of getting into the spirit. I have twin girls. Twin A, very pragmatic, very practical. Her gifts are very clear cut. She also stars and checks. She has a rating system. Twin B, she's a little bit more gregarious. She wants, for example this year she said she wanted a moped. Now, we live out in the country. There's no place to ride a moped. And I was asking her where in the world are you going to ride, why do you want a moped? I don't know dad, I just want a moped. So, that's what she wants. Jack, he's five. Jack's trying to end his life early. He'd like to have a dirt bike. Went to the mall; did the perfunctory Santa Claus visit; we sat there on Santa's lap – I didn't, Jack did and Santa asked Jack, well what do you want for Christmas this year? I want a dirt bike. Well then, Santa looks at him, looks at me, looks at him – well, we'll see what we can do for you. I'm thinking no tip for you this year Santa. It's true. I enjoy that role of a parent of giving gifts to my kids.

You know, something else I've experienced as I've grown older and I've been practicing the traditions of Christmas. I also have an internal desire, about this time of year for the truth of Christmas; for the essence of Christmas. What is the essence of our celebration? That's what we've been talking about. If you're just joining us we're studying a very familiar passage – Luke chapter 2 which is the quintessential Christmas story. We looked at

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the first seven verses last week which was basically the birth narrative; the birth circumstances and we're seeking to find out what is the essence of Christmas. We said last week in the study of those seven verses that a single word might encapsulate the true essence of Christmas. That's the incarnation. Now, the incarnation is a word that we probably don't use on a regular basis. It's a theological word. You might remember from our study last week it is the word that describes the second person of eternity, second person of the God-head, stepping out of eternity into time and space, becoming a man. It literally means, incarnation literally means to become flesh, to take on flesh. We said that's the essence of Christmas – to understand that involvement of God in our personal lives.

The second half of this passage, I think reveals the heart of the incarnation because it reveals the heart of God. That's what we're going to study this morning verses 8 through 20. We're not going to read it number one because it was just read for us but number two – because you know it so well. But I still want you to have the text open on your lap because we're going to be referring to it.

The first thing I want you to notice when you look at this passage is who this birth announcement is given to. Who was that? The first people to know about the birth of the Messiah besides Mary and Joseph were whom? They were the shepherds. Do you find that at all interesting? Maybe you don't. Maybe you need a little bit of background of what sheperdology is all about. The shepherds were not highly thought of during this particular time in history. In fact, you might say they were about the lowest, maybe the bottom of the social ladder in society at that particular time. They were uneducated. They were unskilled. They were unreliable. Now, in the past a shepherd was a job of respect. David was a shepherd. Moses was a shepherd but at this time in the history of being a shepherd that was not often the case they were often looked down upon. Actually, they were not even allowed to give testimony in a court of law because they were thought as a lot to be untrustworthy. Not only that but because of the Mosaic Law, because they were around animals all of the time they were not allowed to worship in the temple. They were thought to be ceremonially unclean. That means they were outcasts from society. They weren't even allowed to be with people. They're not the ones you would expect to receive the greatest news of history. You would think this news would come to people of greater importance. Maybe, Caesar himself or at least a Jewish king or maybe the Pharisees. You would , not expect that this news of great importance to come to people at the bottom of the social ladder. Why is that? In the very beginning of this study we see an opening of the heart of God. We see what the ministry of Jesus Christ was really going to be like.

There was a prophet. A prophet who's name is Isaiah that predicted the birth of Jesus but no on prophesied about His birth but also about the types of ministry the Messiah would have and in Isaiah 61:1, you don't need to turn there. I just want you to listen to it. Isaiah is speaking on behalf of the Messiah and he says the spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind

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up the broken hearted and to proclaim liberty to the captives. Thousands of years before Jesus ever walked this earth there was a prediction about the type of ministry that He would have.

Now, take your bibles and turn just a page or so over to Luke chapter 4. This is now Jesus as an adult. He is beginning His ministry on earth and what do we read in chapter 4, verse 16? And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up and as was his custom he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and he stood up to read; and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him and he unrolled the scroll and he found the place where it was written; verse 18 – the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. What is this? This is Isaiah 61:1. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him and he began to say to them, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Now, just to continue what was going on in that moment there was a great outcry from the Jewish leaders at that point because here the hometown boy, Jesus of Nazareth was proclaiming that he was the Messiah and there was a great uproar because of that. But with that just as an aside I want you to see what He was saying. He was saying, look at who I am coming to minister to. Look. I am not coming to the self-righteous. I am not coming to the self-sufficient. I'm coming to just common people who need grace in their life. That was going to be the ministry of the Messiah and it started in His infancy. It started with the proclamation from this angelic being that here, the Messiah is born to you today and He's going to be about good news. He's going to be about grace. We see the heart of God in the very beginning of Jesus life.

Now, in this passage I want to reveal, show you, teach you six statements that the angel made that I think bring us to the center of Christmas; bring us back to the purpose of Christmas. Six statements that reveal to us the essence of why we worship Jesus Christ. Dan made a great point. Christmas isn't just about this time of year for believers, Christ followers. Christmas is something that happens every day of our lives. I want you to see that in the text.

It starts in chapter 2, in verses 9 and 10 with the angel of the Lord appearing to them. And the glory of the Lord shown around and they were filled with what? Fear. So would you. So would I. Put yourself in this place for just a moment. Can you imagine this? Can you imagine just going about your daily business? Out in the open air you're taking care of sheep. It's night. Suddenly a bright light shines. Put yourself in that adrenaline moment. Have you ever had an almost accident? You know, a near miss that is so close that you literally have to pull over to the side of the road because your heart is beating so fast you have to catch your breath? Have you ever had an experience where maybe a loud noise or

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something has happened unexpected and it so startles you that it just rivets you to the moment? Have you ever had one of those moments? That's what you need to get yourself into to kind of put yourself in the shepherd's point of view. They're minding their own business and suddenly something other than human appears to them, this angel and it causes great fear. Of course it causes great fear but actually there's a sequence of events that takes place that is often characteristic of angelic appearances to men. It's the same sequence of events that happened with Gabriel when he came to Mary; when the angel went to Joseph and so on. The sequence of events is there is an appearance. There's immediate fear. There's words of comfort followed by a message that's personal and then a sign. A promised sign. That's what we see here. We see first – words of comfort. What does the angel say? Fear not. That's the first statement I want us to look at.

The angel said in a command – fear not. I don't want you to be afraid. Now, in one sense we should be fearful of that which is outside of human existence; that which is of the divine. We're called in Proverbs 9:10, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But you know, that's kind of the fear of reverence. It's the fear of respect. Do we need to be afraid of God? Interestingly, I have a number of conversations with people recently that just say that they have this innate fear of God. Of one day meeting God or a fear that God is going to do something to them because of some way they've acted. Maybe that comes out of the history of what you've grown up thinking about God. Maybe that's a bit of your background. I don't know what that is but there's something inside many of us that fear God. One of the promises of the coming Messiah is that fear is now something that can be dissolved away in to a relationship. Let me read to you Romans 8, verse 15. Paul's writing. He says, for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Why? You have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry Abba Father. We are adopted sons and daughters. Why is it we no longer need to be fearful of fear? Because of the Messiah. He started it. Neither do the shepherds. The shepherds do not need to be afraid. Why is that? Well, continue reading. Look at verse 10. Fear not for behold, I bring you good news of great joy. That's the second statement that I want you to zero in on.

What is the announcement? The announcement is of good news. It's a Greek word that's pronounced goo – on – galitzo which means to proclaim good news. I bring that up simply to let you know that this is Luke's favorite word. He uses it all throughout the Gospel of Luke. He also uses it all throughout his writing in Acts. He uses it more than any other New Testament writer. Why? Well, this was for one thing the most anticipated event in human history and what Luke is trying to communicate is that it is here – the birth of the Messiah, the birth of the Savior is here. Man has been in bondage to sin and now he is released. He's released from fear. He's now open to receive this adoption. The sons and daughters. Salvation has come. What happened when the angel finished proclaiming the good news? Well, look at verse 13 and 14. Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts. What's a multitude? A multitude in scripture is somewhere around the number of ten-thousand. If you literally look at this in the Greek rendering it's multitude

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upon multitude. In other words, it's beyond numbering. There's an unprecedented amount of angelic activity on earth and what are they doing? They're saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom He is pleased. They are celebrating what? They are celebrating the way of salvation that has come to humanity.

You ought to think about this. Think about this in the scheme of what you know about the scriptures, about the Word of God. Here's these angelic hosts covering the heavens, peering in as if to see the birth of the Messiah – the second person of the trinity, a person that they would have known to be God becomes flesh, why? For the redemption of men; for the redemption of women. This was going to be a paramount time in history. It didn't happen in angelic history by the way. When the angels sin and they fell and were put into immediate punishment. When we fell into sin how did God respond? He sent the way. He sent the way of salvation. Why am I laboring this point? Because what kind of news is this? This news of great joy? You see, you want to bring back the true spirit of Christmas? Then you really have to ponder what exactly God has done for us. We have to realize the extent of the separation that sin has caused between us and God. Now that separation had been bridged and that it has been bridged with a living God who has come so that we might know him, we don't need to be afraid. This is good news of great joy and who's it for? All people.

That's the third thing I want us to look at. The third pronouncement, statement. For unto you is born this day a Savior who is Christ the Lord for whom? All people, verse 10. This is an inclusive statement. It includes everybody but, verse 11, it's personal. It's born unto you. Born to you. Have you ever thought about that? This is not just a story. This is God demonstrating His love to you personally. You notice that the angel did not announce the child's name? If you look back in Matthew's Gospel for example the angel told Mary the child's name. If you look into the situation with Joseph. The angel tells Joseph the child's name. Here we don't see the name. We see titles. Did you see that? He is Savior. He is Christ. He is the Lord. Those are the last three statements, by the way that we're going to look at. Let's look at the fourth statement – Savior.

He calls Him Savior. Why is that? Why did he choose to use a title? Luke, by the way uses a number of different titles for Jesus: Prophet, Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Servant, King of the Jews, Righteous One. But the primary description that Luke uses for Jesus is Savior. Why is that? Because that is what He has come to do. Matthew 1:21. The angel invades Joseph and says to him, she will bear a son. You shall call His name Jesus for He will what? Say it with me. Save His people from their sins. He is going to be the Savior. Too many times Jesus is portrayed, especially in modern day Christianity, too many times Jesus is portrayed as the one who will rescue us from unfulfillment of life. Will rescue us from an unfulfilled marriage or from unfulfilled jobs or from finances or from habits and part of that is true. Jesus is a rescuer but those are all symptoms a greater problem that he's rescued us from sin. You see, the biblical understanding of a savior is someone who

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rescues one who can not rescue himself. Think about this in terms of the Old Testament. God is the Savior the Jewish people. He saves them because they can not save themselves and He demonstrates that over and over again. They were in bondage to Egypt so he is their Savior by releasing them. They are in bondage or in fear to the wars that are now coming upon them. Some of these battles are going to be against nations that are two, three, four times their size. And He saves them from these battles over and over again. Many times we see that God saves the Jewish people from themselves. God is a Savior. In fact, in Isaiah, Isaiah 43:11, He says, I am the Lord and beside me there is no savior. He tells the people. I'm it. But do you recall what the Psalmist said is Israel's greatest sin against God? Psalm 106:21 they forgot God their savior who had done great things in Egypt. They forgot God. They forgot that He was their Savior. I think we are dangerously close to that when we zip through the holidays, filled with its tradition; filled with its joy; filled with all that's a part of it – family celebrations, gift giving. But, when we rush through the season and forget this is a celebration about our Savior. We miss it. When we rush through the holiday season and forget that this is a message of grace that's pertinent to us all throughout the year we miss it.

Now, I don't mean to be offensive but it the sound of the Savior, grace, forgiveness of sin has become a type of yawn in your life because you're just so use to hearing about it I want to warn you that the outcome is greater distance from your God. You know one thing that the scriptures tell us to do over and over and over? To remember. We're called to remember, to confess, to repent, bring us back to the center of who God is; what He's done for us. You know, Christmas is a great time of the year to do just that. To remember, to bring us back to really what this is all about. To say again what is the essence of the season? It's the proclamation of our God; a proclamation of grace that He is a Savior.

But He's not only the Savior. He's the Christ. That's a title, by the way. It's equivalent to Messiah or Anointed One in the Old Testament; refers to as Messianic position. It's a description of who He is. That He is the Christ. He's the King of Kings. Now, put this in historical context. The King of Kings of that particular day, when this first occurred was Caesar Augustus. Remember we talked a little bit about Caesar Augustus. Gaius Octavius. He was the first Caesar of the newly formed empire of Rome and what did Caesar do? He put in the Pax Romana, the Peace of Rome which meant that is you were a Roman citizen, because of Caesar Augustus you would be able to walk all the way across the empire in complete safety – something that never occurred before. It was often called Pax Augustus because it was Augustan's Peace and he made sure it happened and the people loved him because of this. There was an altar of Augustus that stood in the center of Rome. In fact, the people rearranged the calendar to begin the year on his birthday they so revered him. He was considered a savior. He ended war. He brought peace. Caesar worship was the primary religion of the day. Some theologians, historians look into this text and wonder if Luke isn't taking this announcement from the angels and playing on what is going on in history as if to say for unto you is born this day, verse 11, in the city of David a Savior who

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is Christ, not Caesar but who is Christ the Lord s if to remind people Caesar might be the king of kings of the day but he's not THE King of Kings of eternity. That He is Christ the Lord. As if he's saying don't forget who is the one who has the preeminence in our life. That might not really mean that much to us today because we all live under a Caesar. We don't live or function in a society that is governed by one who has ultimate control where we worship the leader. This is far removed from our understanding but we can understand this – that there's always something or someone in our Christian life that vies for the preeminence that belongs to Christ alone. There's always someone or something. Could be someone in your life that has just taken over all aspects of your life. Now your life is really about their life. They have come the preeminence. Or maybe it's something. Maybe it's a career or a possession or it's money or it's something that you spend most of your time, that's the preeminence of your life. That's the defining moment of who you are. Well, what do we do at this time of year? We remind ourselves from an angelic announcement that the preeminent one of our life is the Savior who is the Christ. It draws us back to what is the center of who we are. We're called Christ followers. This is what we're about. Do you realize that unlike Caesar, He won't force that upon you. He's not going to force His rule upon you.

A moment ago we were talking about fear of God. Do you really think God has a desire to cause fear in you? He could have thought of a much greater way to cause fear than sending an infant. Infants don't cause fear unless you're a new parent of an infant then you have all kinds of fear but most of us aren't afraid of infants. Just because they can not do anything to us, we actually have to do everything for them. Yet, how does God demonstrate His love for us, that He wants to be the preeminent one in our lives; the Christ in our lives? He sends an infant. And, Ephesians 2:8 and 9 talk about it as a gift. For by grace you have sinned and saved and it is a gift. You know, a gift is not something forced upon you unless you have to take it an re-gift it to someone you really don't like but most gifts are something that are offered to you, right? This is a gift. He is the Savior, Christ, the Lord.

What's the term Lord? What's that mean? It means supreme power. Ultimate authority. Owner, ruler. You know, that's what Jesus really wants to be in our lives. Not by force, unlike Caesar but by grace, like the Christ. He wants to come and be your Lord. Is He? How do you worship Christ this season? Well, look at what the angels did. Look at verse 15. When the angel 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. They were amazed. Have you lost the amazement of your God? Verse 16. Then they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. They were anxious to know Him. Are you anxious, to know Him? And when they saw it they made known the same that had been told them concerning the child and all who heard wondered about what the shepherds told them but Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. They spoke about Him. He was the center of their world. And the shepherds returned glorifying, praising God for all that they had heard and seen and had

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been told. They worshipped. They were never the same. And that's true. All these years later. When you encounter the Savior, Christ, the Lord who was born for you, you will never be the same. It brings meaning to life. Not just Christmas. It brings meaning to our very lives.

I want to lead you in a time of prayer. We just thank God for the Savior. I want to invite you just to bow your heads and spend just a few moments thanking Him. Have you done that? How long has it been since you've gotten alone in a place of privacy, gotten down on your knees and you've went before the Lord. You didn't have anything to ask Him for. You just went before Him and you said thank you. Thank you that you came as a child, out of your rich, kingly heritage into a life of poverty so that I might experience you as the Savior, Christ, the Lord of my life.