

The Joy of Christmas

I still remember as a little child going out with mittens on my hands, putting my hands in the snow and taking a bunch of snow in my hands, squashing it together to make a snowball, rolling it in the snow until that ball got bigger and bigger and finally, really big! Then I would put it aside and start all over again. Take a bunch of snow, squash it up into a little ball and roll it and roll it until I got another big snowball. I would make three of these. The first one was the largest and the third one was the smallest. Then I would stack them and put the smallest one on top.

I would then start looking for two rocks and a stick. I would take the stick and put it right where the nose should be, and two black rocks would be placed right in where the eyes should be. I called that creation my snowman. Then I had to find something for the mouth. I had fun making snowmen as a child. That was absolutely a thrill.

A second memory that I have as a child was Christmas Eve. My mother would put together what we referred to as a smorgasbord of holiday food. On Christmas Eve after our service at church, we would get together and eat from Mom's spread of food. It was really great food. I have fond memories of those days. It was something which I looked forward to.

A third thing that I looked forward to was always Christ-

mas Day, Christmas morning. I would wake up sometimes before my parents, and stay in bed until they got up. I remember on occasions that I just could not wait for mom and dad to get up so that I could start opening the presents, to see the toys, to see what I got. For me, that was what Christmas was really all about. One of my favorite presents was a picture that I could paint by number. I remember doing that as a child. That was fun. I can remember receiving plastic models of ships. I liked putting ships together. I remember sports equip-

ment. But my all-time favorite gift that I had at Christmas time was a crystal radio set. I was able to put the radio together. It operated on a crystal. I could hear people and music on my new crystal radio. That was one of my best gifts as a child. Christmas was a great time of the year. It was a time of anticipa-

tion. I looked forward to Christmas. I looked forward to opening the gifts, and my heart would leap with joy with the things that I was given.

CHRISTMAS WAS A TIME OF ANTICIPATION. Is that what Christmas feels like to you? Do you look forward to Christmas? Is Christmas a time of anticipation? I do not know if that is true of you, but I know that it was true of many at the time Jesus arrived. We are told that the Jews were waiting for their Messiah. There was great anticipation



that He would soon come. We know that when John the Baptist arrived, he was asked, "Are you the Christ?" That is, are you the Messiah? And he answered, "No, I am not." Although we are only told of two times in the gospel of John, I suspect that John was asked those questions many more times. When Jesus arrived, He went through the same questioning. People were wondering whether or not He was the Messiah.

In John 1 we are told that two men became Christ's disciples: John and Andrew. They found Jesus one afternoon and spent time with Him. Their conclusion at the end of the day was that the man they spent the afternoon with was the Christ. We are told in John 1:41 that Andrew ran off to tell Peter,

[We have found the Christ! John 1:41 \(NASB\)](#)

Andrew's excitement just exudes off the pages of scripture. His excitement over Jesus reveals his emotion when he ran off to find Peter. It just tells us what he thought of Jesus. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah and he was emotional.

In John 4:25, when Jesus was walking from Judea up through Samaria, he encountered a Samaritan woman at a well. When the woman arrived at the well, He entered into a conversation with her. In that conversation, she informed Jesus that the Messiah was coming. Here is a Samaritan woman and she knew that the Messiah was coming. She was looking forward to the Messiah. After their conversation was finished, we are told that she ran off to the city and told the people that she had found the Messiah. The way she put it was, "Is this not the Christ?" It is obvious that she thought Jesus was the Christ. It is obvious that she wanted to tell the people in the city that she had found the Christ. She was so excited about the fact that Jesus is the Christ.

In John 7 we read on multiple occasions people were asking about whether or not Jesus was the Christ. They asked again and again and again, "Is He the Christ? Is this the Christ?" Didn't the religious leaders know that He was the Christ? They were looking for the Christ. They were wondering who was the Christ.

In John 10:24 we are told that the religious leaders asked

Jesus, "Are you the Christ?" The nation was abuzz. The people were wondering. The people were wanting to know Jesus was the Christ; was He the Messiah? We are told that Peter confessed on one occasion that Jesus was the Christ. We are told in John 11:27 that Martha declared that Jesus was the Christ. When we arrive at John 12:34, we find that people were knowledgeable about the Christ. They knew what the coming Christ was supposed to be like—well, at least they thought they did. That tells us that there was great interest in the Messiah, the Christ. They were wanting to know. They were looking. They were waiting. There was great anticipation. It reminds me of my waiting, my anticipation for Christmas morning. I wonder if that is the kind of anticipation, the kind of passion, the waiting, the emotion that they had. I cannot help but think it was probably close.

JESUS FULFILLED ANCIENT PROPHECY. In John 20:31 the apostle John writes,

[. . . these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ . . . John 20:31 \(NASB\)](#)

The gospel of John was written that we might know that He is the Messiah. Now why did John write the gospel of John and say that the primary reason it was written was so that you might know that Jesus is the Messiah? Why would you do that if you were not excited that Jesus was the Messiah? The point is simple. They were interested in the Messiah. They were looking for the Messiah, and we should not be too surprised because the prophets of old had predicted the Messiah was coming.

In fact, in Romans 1:2-4, we are told that the prophets predicted that Jesus the Messiah would be born and be a descendant of David. So when Mary was visited by Gabriel the Archangel in Luke 1, and Gabriel announced to Mary that she was going to be with child, he told her that the baby would be the Christ. Can you imagine what must have happened in Mary's heart? Can you imagine her mixed emotions when the angel told her that she was going to be pregnant? This is something that she has been looking forward to, that is, the coming of the Christ, the Messiah. Can you imagine the emotion in her heart?

How about Elizabeth, who after Mary tells her what has happened, responds with great joy? Then Elizabeth tells Mary that she is blessed among women. Now, the only reason she would say that is because she really believed Mary's pregnancy was truly a great thing. Elizabeth and Mary must have been two very excited women as they contemplated what was going to happen.

Then nine months went by—nine months. I can imagine Mary thinking about what was going to happen. Surely she went through all the thoughts about pregnancy and all the ins and outs of what that involves. Can you imagine her anticipation? What Mary and Joseph did not know was that years later after Jesus was born, people would call the day of their baby's birth Christmas. It would be a day to be celebrated.

CHRIST IS BORN IN JERUSALEM. Our study is in Luke 2 and let's start at verse 1 as the great anticipation is in play. Little did the people of Jerusalem know that their Messiah was about to be born.

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. Luke 2:1-5 (NASB)

These verses tell us very quickly that Mary and Joseph had to make a trip from Nazareth up to Bethlehem. They had to make a trip because there was a decree, an order that they go to Bethlehem so that a census could be taken. Some people have said, "Was this really a census, or was this a taxation?" I think it was both. Our evidence indicates it was probably more than likely both a registration as well as a taxation, and so they had to leave Nazareth and make a trip up to Bethlehem.

Now it is important to understand that Mary and Joseph were poor. We get that picture later on when Mary and

Joseph take Jesus to Bethlehem to be dedicated where they offered two birds. According to the Mosaic Law, they were allowed to offer two birds if they were poor. If they were wealthier, they were to sacrifice an animal. Therefore, we get the picture that Mary and Joseph are poor. They are going through some difficult times emotionally, I am sure, because of her pregnancy. We can imagine that she probably heard some criticism because she was pregnant out of wedlock. It was not exactly a great time to make this trip either because she is in the final days of her pregnancy. This was just not a good time to make the trip.

In verse 6 we find,

While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:6-7 (NASB)

There are three Greek words that are translated as "inn." The one that is used here has the idea of "guest room." It does not mean an inn, a motel or a hotel such as we think of today. In this particular scenario based upon more recent archaeological discoveries, we now know that the owner of the place would have lived on the top floor of two floors in this building. On the lower floor there would have been an area for guests and also for animals. So when we are told that there was no room for them in the inn—substitute the word "guest room"—that would mean that there was no more room for guests. On this lower floor there would have also been a place where the owner's animals could spend the night. Therefore, Mary and Joseph had to be with the cattle. That is where Jesus was born. When Christ was born, He was put into a manger, or into a feeding trough. This was not a wonderful place for our Messiah, our Christ, to be born.

THE SHEPHERDS IN JERUSALEM. Now verse 8,

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. Luke 2:8 (NASB)

This verse tells us that it was nighttime. We do not know

whether Jesus was born in the late afternoon, or whether this was early night, or maybe midnight—we do not really know—but whatever time of day it was, it was dark.

We are told,

And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. Luke 2:9 (NASB)

We often get a distorted view of how the angel appeared to the shepherds. Verse 9 says, "The angel stood before them." The angel stood. The angel was not in the sky. The angel was standing before them on the ground. The angel stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terribly frightened.

Now just imagine these shepherds. It's dark. They are tending sheep. We believe they were tending sheep that were headed for sacrifice at the temple, and all of a sudden an angel stands before them. I think I would have been afraid.

THE ANGELS ARRIVE. Verse 10 introduces the angels.

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 . . ." Luke 2:10 (NASB)

Notice that the angel says, "Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good news of great joy." He did not say, "I bring you good news." He said, "I bring you good news of great joy." Now why would he add "great joy"? Obviously he must have believed that his news was great and would bring joy. Obviously Heaven must have believed that it was good news because at the angels announcement, there was reason for great joy.

. . . for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11 (NASB)

That was and is the good news of great joy. The one who was born is the Messiah. He was the one they had been waiting for, the one they had been looking for, the one they had been anticipating. They had been waiting and waiting and

waiting and anticipating, and now He was born!

ANGEL GIVES THE SHEPHERDS A SIGN. In verse 12,

This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Luke 2:12 (NASB)

Have you ever wondered why the angel said it is a sign? Just imagine a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. I do not know about you, but for years I would read that and ask, "What is the big deal? Just sounds like a Christmas story." Since when are babies wrapped in diapers and lying in a manger a sign? The answer is that back in those days most poor parents could not afford cloths or diapers for their infants. In Christ's time, cloths were expensive. Only the wealthy people could afford what we call diapers. Obviously there are consequences to that, but that was the way it was.

Now think about the manger. Perhaps the reason that Jesus was wrapped in cloths or diapers was that there were some guests who heard that a baby was born. There may have been some wealthy travelers who had some cloths. Maybe they had babies as well. They may have shared some cloths with Mary for Jesus. Remember Mary and Joseph were poor. Now think about a baby wrapped in cloths that are normally used by a wealthy family. He is lying in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. That is incredibly inconsistent. It did not make sense. Therefore, it was a sign.

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.

Luke 2:13-14 (NASB)

SHEPHERDS SEARCH FOR CHRIST. At this time of the night the city must have been quiet. No excitement . . . but that was about to change, because in verse 15 we are told,

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." So they came in a hurry and found

their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. Luke 2:15-16 (NASB)

Now just think about the angel's message for a second. The shepherds were out in the field. There were probably 100-300 homes in the area of Bethlehem. How are they going to find this baby? They probably went from one house to another house to another house getting the people in the community very excited. Each time they went to a house, they asked about this baby. I can just imagine the shepherds going up to one house and saying, "Hey, do you know where this baby is that is wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger? Do you know where He is?" I can imagine the questions. I can imagine the interest that occurred in that community. Finally they found Him.

Verse 17,

When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. Luke 2:17-18 (NASB)

The people were abuzz. The city was abuzz. The whole region was alive with interest about the birth of the Christ. Verse 19 tells us that Mary was also.

But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. Luke 2:19 (NASB)

ANGELS WERE FILLED WITH GREAT JOY. Just imagine the emotion in the community. But not just the community, not just Mary and not just Joseph were excited about the birth of Christ—there was someone else whom we often overlook. No, I should not say "someone." I should say a group of angels. The angels had been waiting and anticipating the birth of Christ. You say, "Wait a minute, how do you know that?" The answer is found in 1 Peter 1:10-11,

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, 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. 1 Peter 1:10-11 (NASB)

These two verses are very simple. It says the prophets had prophesied. The prophets were seeking to know about the time Christ would come. Verse 12 adds,

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 . . . 1 Peter 1:12 (NASB)

Do you know what the prophets were told? God let the prophets know that they were not writing for themselves, but for us. The prophets were writing for the people in the future and not for themselves. Now notice the last part of verse 12,

. . . things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:12 (NASB)

Do you see what it says?

. . . things into which angels long to look

The Greek word for "long" is *epithymeo*. It has the idea of great emotion or great desire. It is sometimes translated as "lust" to give you a flavor of the emotion involved, or to care for or covet. This is a strong word involving emotion. So we are told that the angels longed to look.

The word that is translated as "to look" is the Greek word *parakupto*. It has the idea of one stooping and stretching the neck in order to gaze at some wonderful sight. I have a picture of angels in heaven looking over, stooping down, looking down to earth to see. The word has the idea of stooping to look. It has the idea of tremendous interest. We have two very powerful words put together, strong emotion with a tremendous desire to understand. That describes the attitude of the angels.

There are two very important points to take away from this verse. The first is that the prophets wanted to know, and the angels also. Not just the prophets, but the angels wanted

to know. Think back to Daniel 9:20-27. Earlier in Daniel 9, the prophet Daniel had been asking God for an understanding of a passage of scripture. Consequently, Gabriel the archangel was sent to Daniel to give him the answer. When Gabriel arrived, he give Daniel the answer which is recorded in verses 20-27. In that passage there is a prophecy about the time Jesus would come, when the Messiah would arrive. Do you know what that tells me? It tells me that the angels understood at that point in time when the Messiah would arrive.

The second takeaway is that the angels have emotion. Think about this, angels long ... to look. The angels long to look. Think about angels having emotion. Angels are not some sterile group or like Spock on "Star Trek." Luke 15:10 tells us that the angels rejoice when sinners repent. This means that angels have emotion. The angels are excited when people come a to saving knowledge of Christ.

Therefore, we know that these angels who knew when Christ would arrive were excited about what was happening. They were emotional about His birth. Just think for a moment with me, Gabriel probably—we don't know for sure—but I tend to believe that Gabriel was thrilled about the announcement he gave to Mary. He had the opportunity to share the name by which this baby would be called—Jesus, the Christ! Think about Gabriel's emotions.

How about the joy of the multitude of angels who announced there would be peace among men, with whom God is pleased. I believe they enjoyed giving the announcement to the shepherds. The angels longed to look. The angels wanted to know. The angels participated from the very beginning of Christmas on earth to the very end. The angels were involved in the announcement of Jesus's birth. The angels were involved in ministering to Jesus at His temptation. The angels were at the grave when Jesus was resurrected. They greeted the women. The angels were at His ascension in Acts 1:10. The angels watch us (1 Corinthians 4:9). Hebrews 1:14 tells us that they minister to us. The angels have been involved in the plan of salvation from the beginning to the end.

In Ephesians 3:10 we are told that God revealed His grace of salvation to the angels through the Church. The angels

were looking. They are still looking and they are wanting to know more. John MacArthur writes the following with regards to the passage in 1 Peter 1:12,

Though the angels will never experience redemption, the book of Revelation contains a fascinating portrayal of their interest in it.

And He, Christ the Lamb, came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. When He had taken the book, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." Then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory, and blessing." (Rev. 5:7-12)

The holy angels will join the song of redemption even though they have not experienced salvation. They have been witnesses to the greatness of God's salvation and they long to look.¹

They desire to know.

CONCLUSION. When Jesus was born, it was an awesome event here on earth. It was great news, and the great news was what? First, that the Messiah was born. Second, the great news is that peace is available to men, with whom He is pleased. It always fascinates me every time I look at a Christmas card in the store. It has peace and good will among men on the front or inside of the card. That is not exactly what

1. John MacArthur. 1 Peter. The MacArthur New Testament. Moody Press. 2004., p. 58.

the Biblical text says. The verse says, “peace among men with whom He is well pleased.”

Think about Zacharias. In Luke 1:79 at the very end of the verse, we are told that the Messiah will guide our path into the way of peace. Jesus tells us that He came to bring peace, not as the world gives. He does not offer peace carte blanche. His peace is not escape from suffering, anxiety, war, struggles and trials in this life. That is not the kind of peace Jesus came to give. Jesus said the kind of peace He gives is not the kind of peace in which the world is interested.

In Acts 10:36 we are told that peace is through Jesus. In Isaiah 9:6 we are told that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. In Romans 5:1 we are told that we can have peace, the kind of peace that the angels were talking about, the kind of peace that Jesus is talking about and it is peace with God.

[Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . Romans 5:1 \(NASB\)](#)

And the verse goes on to tell us that peace is acquired through faith. Did you know that peace is acquired through faith? Peace with God is acquired by faith. It is not by something you do. It is not by your work. It is not by your activity. It is by faith. It is by believing that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is the fulfillment of the prophesies, and He is the one who came and died for our sins. The angels were interested in the plan of salvation. They were interested in what it was all

about. They were interested in His birth as well as His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. They were interested in all of it. They wanted to know, and they still want to know. They are still interested, they are still learning. There is a song whose lyrics are:

He is our peace
who has broken down every wall
He is our peace, He is our peace
He is our peace
who has broken down every wall
He is our peace, He is our peace.

Get the point? He is our peace. “He is our peace, who has broken down every wall.” He is the Prince of Peace. Jesus came to offer peace. Jesus came to give us peace, “not as the world gives, give I unto you.” He gives us spiritual peace by forgiving our sins when we believe in Him. It requires that we believe that we are a sinner. It requires that we put our faith in Jesus Christ as the only one who can forgive us of all our sins. It requires that we are repentant of our sin. These are the ones who find peace with God. These are the ones who find real peace. Ultimately, we will have peace in heaven. We will be free from sin, free from war, free from suffering and free from anxiety. It will be peace in the broadest and best sense of the word. Jesus brought joy on Christmas.