

# Glory to God in the highest

Luke 2:8-20

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It is surprising that the story should tell that the first announcement of God came to some shepherds. Shepherds were despised by the religious people of the day. They were quite unable to keep the details of the ceremonial law; they could not observe all the meticulous religious hand-washings and rules and regulations. Their flocks made far too constant demands on them; and so the religious people looked down on the shepherds as sinful people. It was to these simple men of the fields that God's message first came.

How long had heaven known? How long had they be kept quiet? Since the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden, heaven had been waiting for this moment, when the Son of God would take on the form of a man, descend to earth, to save man from their sins.

It is interesting how God proclaimed His son's birth to those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. Mary, the young god-fearing mother of Jesus. Joseph, the honorable simple carpenter. The peaceful simple shepherds, sitting quietly in the countryside. The Wise Men, who were actively seeking a king.

Can you imagine all the other people in Bethlehem that night, who were engrossed in their busy-ness and who completely missed the Savior of the world, who had just been born in their midst?

But if we are not careful are we not the same? Hurried? Busied? Worried? Pressured? Stressed? Distracted? Not even aware of the presence of this Savior who has come near.

While Christmas should be a source of celebration, we must never forget the larger picture of why Christ came. We can never separate the manger from the cross.

While we don't have a clear picture of what the nativity scene looked like, scripture does give us a clear picture of who this baby would be. Isaiah 9:6 talks about Christ in these words:

***“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”***

The list of names for Christ continues throughout scripture. **Alpha and Omega** (Rev. 1:8; 22:13); **Author and Perfecter of our Faith** (Heb. 12:2); **Deliverer** (Rom. 11:26); **Good Shepherd** (John 10:11,14); **Great High Priest** (Heb. 4:14); **Hope of Glory** (Col. 1:27); **Image of God** (2 Cor. 4:4); **King Eternal** (1 Tim. 1:17); **King of the Ages** (Rev. 15:3); **Lamb of God** (John 1:29); **Light of the World** (John 8:12); **Lord of All** (Acts 10:36); **Morning Star** (Rev. 22:16); **Wisdom of God** (1 Cor. 1:24); **Our Holiness** (1 Cor. 1:30); **Our Protection** (2 Thess. 3:3); **Our Redemption** (1 Cor. 1:30); **Our Righteousness** (1 Cor. 1:30); **Son of the Most High God** (Lk. 1:32); **The Way, the Truth and the Life** (John 14:6); **Holy One** (Acts 3:14); **King of kings** (1 Tim 6:15, Rev. 19:16); **Lord of lords** (Rev. 19:16); **The Christ; The Promised Messiah; Our Redeemer.**

He is the Great physician. He is the Provider. He is the one who lifts up the lowly. He is the one who loves the unlovable; the one who humbles the proud. He comforts those who mourn. He forgives the repentant. He rejoices over those who are His. His name is truly wonderful. All of those titles are descriptions that communicate who Christ is and who He can be to us. God could have chosen any of these names to be Jesus actual earthly name, but in Matthew 1:21 we get an additional picture of who the Son of God was to be. Matt. 1:21 says:

***“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”***

One's name is important. In the Old Testament, "name" was not just what someone was called, it was also a statement of who they were as a person. It was a description of their character. Jesus does many things for our benefit. Makes our load lighter, gives abundant life, grants peace, and much more, but out of all the names the Father could have chosen for His son to have He chose the name "Jesus". Jesus was the Greek form of the Old Testament name Joshua. And **"Jesus"** meant **"The Lord Saves"**. This is His name because He came to save us from our greatest problem, our sin.

We find this same truth throughout scripture: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29). *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). The baby, Son of God, is our Savior. At this time of year we must not separate the manger from the cross.

Our biggest problem is not our lack of finances, our difficult bosses, our disobedient children or unknown futures. Our biggest problem is not our troubled marriages, poor grades, a terminal illness or a natural disaster. I am not seeking to belittle the difficulties in our world, but there is a problem that we

all have that is much greater than these. We find the answer in this verse, *"You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* Our biggest problem, that affects our present and our eternity, is our sin.

The Bible tells us that every person has rebelled against God and against other people. At one time or another, each of us has selfishly put ourselves first and neglected the needs of others. We have tried to be the "god" over our own situations and selfishly tried to be the masters of our own lives. We've been abusive, proud, hateful and unforgiving. We have lied, lusted, gossiped, disobeyed our parents, dishonored our spouse, broken the law, and selfishly refused to help others in need. Because of our rebellion, we have separated ourselves from God.

In the Bible another word for our rebellion against God is "sin." The Bible tells us the penalty for our sin is death: not just physical death, but spiritual death (an eternity in Hell with suffering and without God). Thankfully God didn't leave us without hope.

Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, came to earth as a man and lived a sinless life. He willingly allowed himself to be killed to die in our place. He paid the death penalty for our sin so we would not have to. Three days later He was raised back to life. Because of this, the way has been opened for us to be forgiven and to be reunited with God. But this is not just for the present, it is for eternity in Heaven.

If we truly repent and believe in Jesus Christ, then his death washes away our sin. If we choose to reject Jesus Christ, then His death means nothing to us and when we die we will have to pay for our own sin and be separated from God forever.

We can either humble our hearts before God, turn from our sin and believe in Jesus Christ, or we can harden our hearts against God and continue in our rebellion. One will lead to forgiveness and salvation, the other will lead to guilt and condemnation. Our greatest problem is our sin, so God sent Jesus to meet our greatest need, to save us from our sins. Jesus is the "Lord who Saves."

We are used to celebrating the baby Jesus in the manger. Mary and Joseph, the angels, the *shepherds*, the Wise Men and the manger. It is a remarkable gift indeed, but we can only appreciate our salvation when we understand how desperately in need we *are*. It is not that different than one who appreciates health once they have been healed from a life-threatening illness. Or one who more fully appreciates God's provision only after they have known *poverty*. Or one who appreciates companionship more deeply only after they have experienced loneliness. We will only appreciate the importance of this Savior, born in the manger, as we *understand the gravity of our sin*.

So what do we do? We allow God to draw us near to Himself. Rest in Him. Submit to Him. Trust Him. Wait on Him. In His presence we will be convicted of sin and fully embraced by His grace. Only then will we be freed from the Spirit-numbing familiarity of the Christmas story, and be in awe once again that God the Father would send the Christ child to save us from our sins.

The manger is just the beginning. Celebrate Christmas from the manger . . . to the cross . . . to the empty tomb . . . to eternal life. This is the reason for the season and the source of the Merriest of Christmases.