Glory to God, Peace on Earth

Luke 2:1-20

Key Verse: 2:14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Last week we studied Christmas message to Mary. Angel Gabriel visited Mary and delivered God’s message about the birth of Jesus Christ. Mary accepted God’s message saying, “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” (Lk 1:38) Today we’ll study Christmas message to the shepherds who were feeding their sheep in the field at night. Let’s see what Christmas message to them was and how they responded to this message. We’ll study the heavenly response to the birth of Christ, too.

First, Caesar’s decree (1-4) Verses 1-3 explains the historical background when Jesus was born. Look at verses 1-3. “***In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.***” At that time the Roman Empire ruled the world. Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census to levy more taxes from his colonial countries under the slogan of Pax Romana, which means “Peace from Rome.” Without exemption all people in the entire Roman world must go to their own town to register. Joseph was not an exemption. Look at verses 4-5. “***So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David***. ***He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child***.” Joseph went up to Bethlehem with Mary because he and Mary were descendants of David, who had been born in Bethlehem.

Here we learn a very important lesson from Caesar’s decree and Joseph and Mary’s trip to Bethlehem. Caesar issued a decree to collect more tax, but God used the decree to fulfill the prophecy that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem. God used Caesar Augustus to let Jesus be born in Bethlehem as God had promised to his people long ago. No matter how this world goes around, all things are in God’s control. Our Sovereign God works for his good purpose in all human history. In 1990 the Berlin Wall collapsed, and USSR fell apart into many countries. Mikhail Gorbachev, the Russian president, removed the Curtain of Iron and declared the end of Cold War against the West. This must be one of the most important events in the 20th century which changed world history. However, when we see this event from God’s perspective, God used Gorbachev to open the door of Russia for our missionaries. The door of Russia had been firmly closed with the Iron Curtain. There was no way for our missionaries to enter Russia even though we had prayed for five years since Dr. Samuel Lee had suggested to send missionaries to Russia. God answered our prayer that Mr. Gorbachev issued a decree to open the door for missionaries. Amen! We suffered much because of the pandemic. But do you know that the season of Christ came back after the pandemic. The movement of spiritual revival are occurring everywhere in Canada, Korea, USA, and even in St. Louis. All things are in God’s control. In all things God works for good for those who love him. In the decree of Augustus, in the proclamation of Gorbachev, and in the turmoil of the pandemic, God is working faithfully for his purpose and for his glory through his chosen people. Remember that we are the main characters in human history. Those who participate in world mission are main actors in human history like Joseph and Mary. Amen!

Second, no room for Jesus (6-7) Look at verses 6-7. “***While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them***.” When you stop by Schnucks, the grocery store, you cannot park on the spot for a pregnant woman driver. When you board on a plane or in a train, a pregnant woman and a mother with children are prioritized. But there was no room for the pregnant Mary, who was going to deliver the baby at any moment. This shows us a similar situation in people’s hearts today. There is no room for Jesus in their hearts even though they celebrate Christmas. Their rooms are filled with other things such as shopping, Christmas party, traveling, and so on, not with Jesus. There is no space for Jesus. They even push out Jesus outside. How about you! Do you have a room for Jesus today? Where is your Jesus now?

The Magi, the three wise men, who traveled a long distance by following the star, entered King Herod’s palace, because they thought that the king of the Jews must be born in the king’s palace. But the king of Jews was born in a manger because there was no room for him. Jesus once said, “*Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head*.” (Mt 8:20) Jesus had no place to lay his head even at his birth. He was laid down in a manger, where animals mingled, where smell and coldness filled. In this way God appeared as a man in such humble way. In this way Jesus was born poor in order to make us rich. Remember that in order to make us rich Jesus became poor. In order to save us he died on the cross! Praise Jesus!

Third, good news of great joy for all the people (8-12) Today people of the world celebrate Christmas. Yesterday my aunt in Korea who is a follower of Buddha sent a Christmas card by phone. All people realize the birth of the Christ. However, when Jesus was born, only a few groups of people knew his birth. The shepherds in the field were one of them. Look at verse 8. “***And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night***.” Why did God choose the shepherds? I believe that God needed eyewitness and messengers who could deliver the news of the birth of Christ. (15) What happened to them when they were feeding their flocks at night? Look at verse 9. “***An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified***.” The shepherds never expected the sudden appearance of the angel. They were more frightened when the glory of the Lord shone around them. What was the angel’s message to them? Look at verses 10-12. “***But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you; You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.***” The angel’s message was the birth of a Savior, who is the Messiah, and that God’s sign is a baby lying in a manger. No matter how good news may be, if it is not related to me directly, it may not be good news for me. But the angel proclaimed to the shepherds that a Savior has been born to YOU. Jesus is a Savior not only for the shepherds, but also for you and me. Jesus is the savior of the world for all generation. You think that a savior is the one who helps you when you are in need or when you are in trouble. It is partially right. In Jesus’ day the Jews were waiting for the savior like Moses who could deliver their people from the Roman Empire. But Jesus came to save us from our sins. He came to save us from the hand of our enemy, which is Satan. The Bible says that we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Ro 3:23) The price of sin is death. We had to pay the price of our sin, which is death. But Jesus died in our place. He shed his blood on the cross to pay the price of our sins. He also opened the way for us to come to God through his resurrection. We all follow him to heaven for our eternal life. Is this not good news for you and me and for all the people? Graduation from school, promotion from your work, restoration from your health, reunion with your family, are all good news for you. But what is better news than you are saved?

You may ask how you can be sure of God’s salvation. Jesus is the sign for you. In Jesus’ day the Jews continued to seek for signs. Jesus answered them that there is no sign for them but the sign of Jonah. The sign of Jonan is the message for repentance and the faith in Jesus. The angel told the shepherds that the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger is the sign of God’s salvation. The baby is the sign of God’s love for sinners and of faithfulness to his promise. When you have Jesus in your heart, you carry the sign of God. When you don’t have Jesus in your heart, you continue to seek for signs like the Jews.

Fourth, glory to God and peace on earth While the angel delivered the message to the shepherds, suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ***“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests***.” (13-14) When we are invited to a birthday party, we sing ‘Happy Birthday to you!”. But there was no group of people who sang for the newborn baby Jesus. So, God sent the heavenly hosts to sing “Glory to God and Peace on Earth!” Why is the birth of Jesus a glory to God? The birth of Jesus reveals the Father's glory. John said in John 1:14, “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*.” He continues, “*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known*.” (Jn 1:18) When we know Jesus, we come to know who God is. Hebrews 1:3 says that the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.

In Exodus Moses really wanted to see God’s glory. So, he asked God to show his glory. (Ex 33:18) But God showed Moses only part of his back. (Ex 33:23) But we are blessed because we see God’s glory, full range of his glory, through his Son Jesus Christ.

The birth of Christ reveals God’s glory through his obedience on the cross. When Adam sinned in the beginning, God’s glory fell through Adam’s disobedience. When Jesus obeyed the Father and took the cross, God’s glory was restored through his obedience. The birth of Jesus proved God’s faithfulness. God promised to send a Messiah, a Savior, from an offspring of a woman in Genesis 3:15. God repeated his promise through many prophets such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so on. God kept his promise and showed his faithfulness by sending Jesus as a baby in a manger.

The birth of Christ is the prelude of his glorious resurrection and second coming. When he came to this world for the first time, he came as a Savior, and only a few people knew about his coming. But when he comes again, he is coming as a judge and that all people on this earth will see his second coming. His coming to this world reveals God’s glory and reaffirms our final victory. Amen!

Then why did the birth of Jesus become peace to men? Sin blocks the way between God and men. Sin separates men from God. In the book of Romans Paul said that the whole world was under God’s wrath because of their sin. Men became objects of God’s wrath and punishment because of their sins. But Christ Jesus died for our sins. He paid the price of our sins on the cross and opened the way for us to be reconciled to God. Paul said in Romans 5:1 “*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Jesus himself became our peace who destroyed the wall of hostility between God and men. Ephesians 2:14-16 says, “*For he (Jesus) himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility*.”

Do you remember the true Christmas story, called “Christmas Truce” between the German soldiers and British soldiers during World War One in 1914 in the West Front? It was cold and wet Christmas Eve. Both hostile groups stopped firing because it was Christmas Eve. Silence and coldness overwhelmed the trench. Suddenly a Christmas carol, “Silent Night, Holy Night” broke silence and heard from the German camp. The British soldiers wondered, but soon they began to join singing. The German soldiers waved their hands and asked the British to meet at no-man-land. They met there, sharing cigars, coffee, and wine and celebrated Christmas Eve together. There was a saying that they exchanged haircuts for coffee and played a friendly soccer on the icy pitch. In this way Jesus became a peace between the two hostile soldiers. Do you have anyone who needs to be reconciled to you? I pray that Jesus may become a peace-maker between you and your enemy today. Amen!

Fifth, Go, tell it on the mountain! (15-20) When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “***Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about***.” (15) The shepherds were obedient to the angel’s message. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (16) When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about the child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (17-18) God used the shepherds as the messenger of the birth of Christ to all people around them. Look at verse 20. “***The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told***.” Luke did not mention here about the joy which the shepherds had experienced, but they must have been overjoyed as the Magi were when they saw the star and Jesus. In this way those who knew and carried Christmas message are full of joy and thanks.

Look at verse 19. “***But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart***.” Mary knew that all these things came from God. Her virginal conception, delivery, the appearance of the angels, the visit of the Magi, the shepherds’ testimony, were treasures in her heart. She prayed that God’s will might be done through her life and through the baby Jesus.

In conclusion, let us celebrate the birth of Christ. Prepare a room for Jesus and receive him to your heart so that you may see his glory and enjoy true peace and joy! Amen.