

Praise the Lord for Christmas Luke 2:13-14

Well here we are celebrating Christmas on a Sunday. I was curious about how many times this has occurred so I searched for the information from the internet. In the 20th Century there were 14 times when Christmas and Sunday were the same day. The last time was 2005. If you're planning ahead, the next time it will occur is in 2016.

I am troubled at the growing trend of churches, even fundamental churches that cancel their services for the day. Here are some of the reasons, I mean excuses given.

People are so busy and Christmas is supposed to be a family day, so the decision was made as a family friendly gesture. The church should promote family

The church is supposed to be reaching out to the unbeliever, and if they won't come on a regular Sunday, they are less likely to come on Christmas.

Last time Christmas fell on a Sunday, people didn't come.

Getting help on that day will be hard, and won't be worth the effort, as we expect a low turnout.

I think it's wonderful that we can celebrate Christmas together when it falls on a Sunday. The reason we celebrate is because of the promise God gave through the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Micah. The Redeemer has come. God has done His part in providing a way to be restored in relationship with Him. He took the initiative because He knew that we would not. He took the initiative to show us that we cannot in ourselves achieve reconciliation or salvation. He took the initiative to show us that we have nothing to brag about when it comes to our salvation. God did it all

I'm glad you're here today to celebrate Christmas. Turn in your Bibles to the familiar story of Jesus' birth in Luke's gospel, chapter 2.

We'll just be looking at two verses this morning, verses 13-14. **Luke 2:13-14**

You have heard or read this story perhaps hundreds of times. We have heard many sermons centered on the Christmas story.

It has been formed into Christmas pageants put on by Sunday school classes when little Sally plays with the ruffles on her new dress, while little Billy picks his nose, and little Johnny cries for Mommy.

The message of Christmas has been sung by Church choirs all over the country from the masterful works of Handel's *Messiah* to any other number of musical compositions such as the one the choir sang a couple weeks ago. **One night during our rehearsal Matthew Bauerle asked me if all cantatas were the same. I admitted that they were. I told him that there is little change with cantatas.** They all have songs by Joseph and Mary. There is usually a song about the angels and their heavenly voices ringing. Many underscore the humble setting where Jesus was born. The men always sing some song about the wisemen and their travels. It's basically the same message from cantata to cantata. The music will change and the words will be shuffled around, it's just been repackaged. Yet, it's a timeless message, wouldn't you agree?

So how do we take what is as familiar as the back of our hand? What can we discuss that will make this not just another sermon but something that brings new life and joy to an old familiar story? This morning even though this is perhaps the hundredth time I would like us just to focus on two points from this passage.

The Angelic Appearance
The Angelic Adoration

I. THE ANGELIC APPEARANCE – v. 13

Let me ask you a question? **Do you believe in angels?** Maybe you have an angel collection.

When I resigned from Hospice I received a couple of going away gifts from some co-workers. They are small figurines. One is of an angel kneeling in prayer. A teddy bear is on the floor next to where the angel is kneeling. A halo circles about the head. The other figurine is something that can be attached to a wall or a door or your mirror. On the front is an angel in flight blowing a trumpet. Below the angel are the words "God bless." There is an open slot at the top where four pieces of paper are rolled up. They contain either a familiar song or Scripture passage. They remind of God's presence or protection or provision.

That angels exist can be seen from many passages in both the Old and New Testaments.

The first encounter in Scripture we see of angels is when God banished Adam and Eve from the garden. To keep them from re-entering He set cherubim with a flaming sword at the eastern side of the garden.

You may recall that along with an appearance of the Lord, a couple of angels met with Abraham to discuss the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Later they were sent to Lot to escort he and his family out of the city before its destruction.

An angel was sent to block the way of Balaam. His donkey could see the angel and attempted to change directions, but Balaam beat him with the stick to go forward.

An angel met with Gideon to call him to lead Israel from bondage to the Midianites.

When David sinned by taking a census of the Israelite nation an angel was sent to destroy part of the population.

An angel was sent to Elijah.

An angel appeared before Daniel with visions of the future as well as when he was thrown in the lion's den.

An angel came to Zechariah to inform him about the coming of a son.

An angel appeared separately to Mary and Joseph that she would bear the Christ child. Later the angel appeared to Joseph to get him to move to Egypt. In our text, an angelic host met the shepherds to bring news of the birth of Jesus.

An angel met with John on the Island of Patmos.

Hebrews 13:2 reminds us that we are to entertain strangers because it might just be an angel.

Because the Word of God is true we can believe what it says about the existence of angels. They are real and maybe we have seen them without realizing it. To the shepherds who were out in the fields surrounding Bethlehem it was a normal night. I picture them sitting on a little knoll overlooking that little town. Flickering lights could be seen in the windows from a distance. The only thing unusual were the travelers they could see walking the road into town. A census was taking place under the authority of Caesar Augustus. Everyone was to go to their ancestral home to register and pay taxes. Joseph and Mary were headed to Bethlehem, home town of distant relative David.

Maybe to pass the time away, the shepherds tending their sheep played a game trying to guess where travelers were from. That person's attire looks like they're from the southern part of Palestine, Beersheba. That group looks like they're from Jerusalem. They look like they're from Nazareth.

Those of you who remember George Kell, baseball player and TV announcer for the Detroit Tigers will remember that if someone hit a foul ball into the stands he would say they were from some city in Michigan. If, for example, Al Kaline was batting and he hit a foul ball, George Kell would say something like a fan from Hartland grabbed that ball. Or a fan from Brighton snagged that ball. There's a souvenir ball for a fan from Fenton.

People were coming from all over to register. It was busy in town with lots of people streaming in. The shepherds didn't know that all the inns were full or that a weary couple having traveled some 80 miles had arrived as night was falling but couldn't find a place to stay. The only commotion they heard came from the sheep they were tending. It was just another night out in the fields.

Their quiet, normal night was soon shattered when an angel appeared out of nowhere startling them. This angel had just come from the presence of God to bring them news. **How do we know he had been with God?** The previous verse notes that God's glory was around the angel. It would have been similar to the appearance of Moses when he came down from Mt. Sinai having been in God's presence for 40 days. His face shown.

The angel gave news about the birth of the one who was the Savior, the Messiah. You'll find him in a manger. I suppose that description narrowed the search a bit. They wouldn't need to look in homes or motels. They would find him in some corral where there was a manger, a simple feeding trough for animals.

The appearance of the angel would be startling in and of itself. That's just not something you see every day. And why come to the shepherds? After all, shepherds were a despised group. They were considered the lowest class of society. They could not testify in court as a witness and because of their occupation were considered unclean and therefore unworthy and unable to go to the temple.

So why then was the angel sent to these shepherds? Since they couldn't testify in court who would believe them when they testified about what they saw and heard? I'd have to admit that it would be difficult for me to believe. But maybe the message wasn't so much for others as it was for them. Maybe God wanted to show them, reveal to them, that while man rejected them according to the social

structure of the day, God was saying that this baby who has born in Bethlehem, who is the Savior, can be your Savior as well, that salvation is available to everyone, including social outcasts.

The Salvation God offers as a gift through His Son, Jesus Christ is for everyone regardless of race or gender or status. When it comes to salvation, we're all on equal ground. God accepts everyone who comes by faith.

Maybe the shepherds were also startled by the news. Generation after generation had been waiting for the Messiah to come and now the news that He was here would be startling.

Our text says that **"suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God."** Seeing a whole host of angels would be startling as well.

We aren't told how many there were other than it was a great multitude. Maybe heaven was vacated by all angelic beings who were given the task of proclaiming praise to God. All we know is that there were a lot of them. If one angel revealed the glory of God, imagine what a multitude of angels would look like who shown with the glory of God and who find pleasure in praising God. That infinite God became human must have been one more unique character of God that left the angels in wonder of God. This was for them one more evidence of His greatness and one more opportunity to give glory.

Revelation 5:6-14; 7:11-12

In fact everything in creation has been made to glorify God. The Westminster Catechism begins with asking this question: why do we exist, what is our chief end. The response is that we are created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. On that hillside that night the angels were doing what came naturally to them. They were praising God. They appeared suddenly. The word is intended to convey

the idea that there was surprise upon surprise. Imagine what they must have sounded like. We have a good choir, but I'm willing to go out on a limb and say they sounded much better than we do. I'd say they were far better than the Brooklyn Tabernacle choir, a choir who has won awards.

Having stepped from the presence of God into our world, our time, they proclaimed the praise God deserves. This would truly be a night to remember, a night when lowly shepherds received the message from God, a night when salvation came in the form and person of that little child born in Bethlehem to a poor carpenter and his wife.

There was an angelic appearance.
Then there was an angelic adoration.

II. THE ANGELIC ADORATION – v. 14

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”

Notice that God is the focus of their praise. All praise is to be directed to Him. The word used in the Greek is always about God.

Scripture reminds us of several reasons why God deserves our praise, whether from angels or people.

1. We praise God because He is worthy.

Revelation 4:11

Psalm 96:4

Psalm 145:3

II Samuel 22:4

2. Praising God reminds us of His greatness, His blessings, His provisions, His power.

When the blind man received his sight **Luke 18:43** says that he immediately praised God.

When children in the temple were singing Hosanna to Jesus because he was healing people there, the

Pharisees confronted Him. Jesus then quoted from **Psalm 8:2 “from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise.”**

3. We praise God because praise transforms our spiritual environment.

II Chronicles 5:13-14

Isaiah 6:1-8

4. God inhabits our praise.

Psalm 22:3 “But Thou art holy, O Thou who inhabits (enthroned) the praise of Israel.”

We are to praise God joyfully for His wonderful works. **Luke 19:37** notes that when Jesus came near, the people began to give God praise for all the miracles they had seen Him perform.

Psalm 9:1 reminds us that our praise to God should come from our whole heart.

I'm afraid that when I get to heaven and stand in God's presence that I'll be ashamed that my praise was shallow or at other times it was insincere or that I failed to give Him praise at times when He deserved it or times when I took the praise that should have gone to Him.

But I do know this, that when I stand in His presence I will be just like everyone else and all the angels: my praise will never end. I will gladly and fully praise Him because only then will I see who He is and what He has done so that I can stand in His presence.

We received a letter with Christmas greetings from Jim and Liz Neigh. At the top of the letter is beginning of a popular Christmas carol “Tis the season to be...” They didn't finish the carol. We would sing “Tis the season to be jolly, fa la la la la la la la.” The Neigh's put a different and spiritual twist to the song.

“Tis the season to be speechless – we stand in awe at the love of God who sent His only Son that

whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.”

“Tis the season to be grateful – We can never thank the Lord enough; but He still wants to hear our thanks, again and again and again, throughout each year.”

“Tis the season to be filled with praise – The shepherds were filled with praise and went about telling everyone what they had seen. Am I, are you, filled with so much praise that we’re telling the Good News everywhere we go?”

“Tis the season to be – letting the children of the world know what the Christ of Christmas has done for them and of the eternal life they can have through faith in Jesus Christ.”

The angels give Him praise in heaven.

The angels gave Him praise on earth.

We are to give God praise on earth and we will give Him praise in heaven.

Notice what the message is for which they praise God. They give Him praise and they claim that peace will come to earth. **Were the angels wrong that night when they announced peace has come?**

When we look around all we see is unrest. Wars and rumors of wars are all over the globe. Civil unrest exists in the banners that are carried by protesters demanding rights. Neighbors are at odds. Crime is rampant. Peace has not yet come to earth. Peace is nowhere to be seen. Later even Jesus announced that there would be wars and rumors of wars even up to when He returns. **So did the angels lose something in their translation of the message they were given by God to give to man?**

We all long for peace in some fashion or another. The peace of God is given to those who have given their lives to Him, those who have surrendered their will to Him. Where peace treaties have been made, they have been broken. This world has known constant conflict since its fall in the garden. God is offering eternal peace. His is a peace treaty that will never be broken. When Christ comes to earth

to rule during the millennial reign, there will be peace throughout the world then, but not until then. There will be global peace. But God has also given us the capacity to know peace in our heart right now.

Romans 5:1 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” – We were enemies with God. Sin brought enmity between us and God. But through Christ’s death and resurrection He has made it possible for us to be at peace with God. It comes through faith.

There was a man in the hospital who was close to death. A minister came to see him and asked the man if he had ever made peace with God. The replied that he didn’t know they had ever quarreled.

Isn’t that the problem today in our country? People believe they’re okay with God. People believe that God basically doesn’t have a problem with us and that eventually we’ll all get inside the pearly gates. Such a mindset ignores the holiness of God and that He demands holiness of us and that we fall far short of that requirement. **So how do we come to be at peace with God?** As **Romans 5:1** points out it is only through faith in Jesus Christ. If Jesus hadn’t come to be born and live among us and then die for us there would be no peace. Peace is possible.

When have come to the place where we have peace with God, then we can experience peace from God. **Romans 1:7 “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

This peace resonates from God; it is a part of the fruit of the Spirit that is developed in us as we yield to Him. Peace with God also gives us the peace of God. **Philippians 4:6-7** reveals to us that the peace of God comes through prayer as we offer our requests to Him with thanksgiving.

This peace settles our anxious heart as we give to God our cares, our worries, our frustrations. His calmness comes on us and gives us a certain amount of contentment in those difficult situations that occur. We search for peace in so many different ways. But there is only one peace that lasts, only one peace that gives hope, only one peace that is certain and that is the peace of God. It's a peace the angels said would come to earth because the Savior had been born. People languish over whether or not they'll get to heaven, but they don't have to because of the peace afforded to those who believe in this child whose birth we celebrate at Christmas and then who died in our place. Jesus offered His disciples a peace that the world can't give and doesn't understand. Only a follower of Jesus can understand the peace that comes from following Him. He is the God of peace who gives us peace to know we have eternal life and peace to know that all our cares are in His hands when we give them to Him. Because the God of peace is with us there is nothing to fear. **Romans 15:33 "The God of peace be with you all."**

II Corinthians 13:11 "Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."

Philippians 4:9 "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the god of peace will be with you."

II Thessalonians 3:16 "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you."

Numbers 6:24-26 "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace."

Our trusting God and loving His Word is the condition by which we receive His peace. Implied in **Proverbs 3:5-6** is the understanding of peace for those who trust that God will direct their steps.

Psalms 119:165 "Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble."

Edmund Sears wrote:

All ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! For glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing:
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

The angels are voicing praise to God because peace is now possible between God and mankind. Their anthem still echoes through time to today. **"Glory to God in the highest and earth peace to men on whom His favor rest."**

The favor of God rests on you today if you have turned to Him for salvation in the one born 2,000 years ago in that humble manger. Our hope of eternal life is pinned on Him. When we have peace with God, we can know the peace of God as we yield to Him. Yield to Him first for salvation and then yield to His leading each day after that until His Son returns. At that time we will know peace on earth. Christ came to establish peace between God and us. It will only happen when we trust in Him for salvation.

"Peace is the tranquil state of the soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is."

Joseph Bayly has written:

“Praise God for Christmas.

Praise Him for the Incarnation, for the Word made
Flesh.

I will not sing of shepherds watching flocks on
frosty night, or angel choristers

I will not sing of a stable bare in Bethlehem, or
lowing oxen, wise men trailing star with God,
frankincense and myrrh.

Tonight I will sing praise to the Father who stood
on heaven’s threshold and said farewell to His Son
as He stepped across the stars to Bethlehem and
Jerusalem.

And I will sing praise to the infinite, eternal Son,
who became most finite, a baby who would one day
be executed for my crime.

Praise Him in the heavens, praise Him in the stable,
praise Him in my heart.”

May it be our desire, our heartfelt joy, our bold
determination to give God praise for the eternal gift
of His Son, who came to live among us so that He
could die for us. If He didn’t come to earth, if He
had changed His mind, we would still be lost in our
sin, still enemies with God, filled with fear and
anxiety, without hope and without peace, but praise
God, the God of peace, gave us His peace found
only through faith in His Son born of a virgin, born
in Bethlehem. It is good news of great joy for
everyone, because the Savior has been born.

**II Thessalonians 3:16 “Now may the Lord of
peace Himself give you peace at all times and in
every way. The Lord be with all of you.”**