

The Praise About Christ
Luke 2:13, 20, 25-35

Psalm 22 is what we call a Messianic psalm. It looks forward to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as the Savior who would lay down His life as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. The psalm begins with the Messiah agonizing over the rejection and abandonment of God. But He immediately responds with a declaration of trust in God that He is holy and inhabits the praises of His people.

When we consider what the Savior would physically experience in untold pain and suffering throughout the crucifixion ordeal as the bearer of sin, it seems that the most significant toll on the Savior came from the silence of the Father, when Jesus poignantly asked why He had forsaken Him. That was perhaps the worst moment for Christ. Maybe in that moment on the cross, Jesus reflected back to the nighttime prayer vigil in which He submitted to the Father's will declaring that He would go through the awful ordeal because that is what God had decreed should happen for the benefit of mankind with the willing obedience of the Son.

Speaking for the coming Messiah in the prophetic text, the psalmist reminds us that the Messiah would embrace complete trust in God who inhabits the praises of His people. We read in **verse 3** **"But You are holy, You who inhabits the praises of Israel."**

The word inhabit or enthroned in some translations, describes the circumstance of sitting, remaining, or dwelling somewhere. When the Messiah declared in **Psalm 22:3** that God inhabits the praises of His people, He was conveying His absolute trust in God. Even at the moment of abandonment, the moment of His greatest need, the Messiah trusted God was completing His sovereign plan as the Messiah continues in **verses 4 and 5** to trust that God would deliver Him.

That God is enthroned on high is evident throughout Scripture.

Psalm 9:11 **"Sing praises to the Lord, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples His deeds."**

Psalm 113:5 **"Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high!"**

Isaiah 6:1 **"In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple."**

GotQuestions adds this insightful explanation: **"Heaven is the place where God is surrounded by praise, and it is described in the Bible as God's temple."**

Psalm 11:4 **"The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord is on His heavenly throne."**

Habakkuk 2:20 **"The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him."**

The ultimate dwelling place for God is with His people: **"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:3, 22).**

In **I Corinthians 3:16-17**, God's presence now inhabits His body – the church through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

"Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?...God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."

The writer of **Hebrews (13:15)** reminds us that **"through Jesus, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess His name."**

Consider, then, what one author notes by stating that **"praise causes the presence of the Lord to come into our midst. Even though God is omniscient, He manifests His authority and rule in our environment when we praise Him. When we praise, God comes in and leads us forth...When we praise, our faith and trust increase."**

Christmas offers us a tremendous opportunity to give praise to God for His indescribable gift (**II Corinthians 9:15**). From Luke's account of the birth of Christ we want to consider three different settings where praising God occurred. Let me share a story and from it see why God is to be praised.

In 1910 D.R. Van Sickle wrote a Christmas poem entitled “All Hail to Thee, Immanuel!” Later that year it was put to music by Charles Gabriel.

All hail to Thee, Immanuel,
We cast our crowns before Thee;
Let every heart obey Thy will,
And every voice adore Thee.
In praise to Thee, our Savior King,
The vibrant chords of Heaven ring:
All hail! All hail!
All hail! All hail! Immanuel!

All hail to Thee, Immanuel,
The ransomed hosts surround Thee;
And earthly monarchs clamor forth
Their Sovereign King to crown Thee.
While those redeemed in ages gone,
Assembled ‘round the great white throne,
Break forth into immortal song:
All hail! All hail!
All hail! All hail! Immanuel!

All to Thee, Immanuel,
Our risen King and Savior!
Thy foes are vanquished, and Thou art
Omnipotent forever.
Death, sin, and hell no longer reign,
And Satan’s power is burst in twain;
Eternal glory to Thy name:
All hail! All hail!
All hail! All hail! Immanuel!

Churches began singing the hymn in their services, never realizing that its author, Van Sickle, was not a believer in Christ. He had written the poem out of sentiment. But years later while sitting in a service, the choir sang this hymn, he was convicted of sin, and gave his life to Christ after hearing his own carol about Immanuel – God with us!

For God’s indescribable gift, we offer Him praise. Praise is an expression of gratitude stemming from absolute trust in the giver of the gift. When we see the Messiah/Savior wrapped in swaddling strips of cloth lying in a manger we must declare with the psalmist our desire to put absolute trust in God for this unprecedented and undeserving gift, a gift which God so freely gave, a gift that is our Savior.

God knew what He was doing when He sent Jesus to be born of a virgin, born in the most vulnerable manner imaginable.

Consider first the praise of the angels.

I. THE PRAISE OF THE ANGELS – vv. 8-14

Of course, we would expect praise to come from the angels. They have a number of responsibilities, tasks for which they were created.

They serve as our guides.

They protect us.

They even encourage us.

They are God’s servants, and they are sent from Him to carry out His will.

All these are done without our awareness.

But among those duties, their primary role is to surround the throne and fill heaven with praise. We can learn from them what delights God when it comes to praise. As one author noted “**they call on us to love God as they do**”, which includes our praise to God.

The first thing from **Luke 2** about the praise of the angels is that their praise was relevant.

A. Their Praise Was Relevant – vv. 8-12

According to **verse 8** it’s night. Unknown and unnamed shepherds were watching their flocks. There’s lots of speculation about this particular group of shepherds and the flocks they tended. Some think they were just boys. I’m not convinced that’s the case. Even though David was a shepherd boy or more likely a teen, nighttime was when wild animals or bandits seized the opportunity to nab their prey. I suspect they were men of various ages.

Something else that people like to speculate is that the sheep were destined for the temple to be sacrifices. It’s possible and maybe they make that assumption by connecting John the Baptist’s later declaration that Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the people then concluding that since Jesus would be a sacrifice, these sheep would be an apt picture of the sacrifice Jesus would in time make on the cross.

Whatever the case, shepherd and sheep are outside the town of Bethlehem doing their thing when the night sky was illuminated with the brilliance of an angel, who we assume came directly from the presence of God, where he had just been engaged in praise, when he was tasked with traveling to earth with the news of the birth of Jesus.

The angel who had just stepped into time and space shown with the glory of the Lord, with appearance that terrified the shepherds.

The angel came with a message. Actually, he came with two messages, both entwined together. The first was a message of comfort – **“Don’t be afraid”**. The second was a message of hope – **“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”**

Embedded in the message of comfort was a word to bring them ease by the angel’s appearance. They had nothing to fear by his presence. At times in the Old Testament we see the presence and message of an angel delivering bad news, news of judgment as when the Lord and two angels visited Abraham and told him of the pending judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Or when the angel visited Daniel and interpreted the vision of disturbing future events.

Though we see it throughout Scripture that the natural response of a person seeing an angel brought fear, the shepherds didn’t have anything to be afraid of in his showing up. He brought them good news of hope and joy, not despair and sorrow.

The praise of the angel was relevant because of the joyful news of the Savior’s birth. Second, we see that the angel’s praise was reverent.

B. Their Praise Was Reverent – vv. 13-14

Appropriately our doxology is an anthem of God’s worthiness to be praised.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

The angel, now accompanied by a **“great company of the heavenly host”**, praised God by giving Him

glory. These angels were doing what comes naturally to them. They were praising God. It’s what they do. They love praising God.

Isaiah 6:2-3 describes a vision by the prophet who witnessed the throne room of heaven. God was on His throne with angelic beings surrounding Him. They joined in an antiphonal response: **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is filled with His glory.”** One group would say it, and another would repeat it back in response. It was continuous. Paul echoes that very same idea when he writes in **I Thessalonians 5:17** that thanksgiving should be without ceasing. Their repetition of praise tells us that our praise should also be constant throughout our lives.

This past Wednesday we were looking at **Psalm 119:164** **“Seven times a day I praise You.”** Seven times doesn’t mean that I only give praise seven times a day. Instead, the word speaks of completeness, meaning that throughout the day, all day, I am offering thoughtful and heartfelt praise to God. There is a completeness to the praise of the angels who constantly give praise to God.

We see the same nature of ongoing praise by the angels in Revelation. I think what John saw in his vision of angels around the throne is similar to what both Isaiah and Ezekiel saw in their respective visions. In **Revelation 5:11**, John saw many angels numbering a vast host. A couple chapters later, he sees another vision of an unnumbered multitude of people and angels around the throne expressing their praise and worship of God. Their worship is unceasing praise of God’s worthiness to receive praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength forever and ever.

In **Psalm 148:2** we read **“Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts.”**

We may look around and be dismayed by all that’s wrong in the world today and consider that there doesn’t seem much to give God praise for, but know that there is an unseen realm in which angels circle the throne and offer God praise continually.

The book of Psalms concludes with the injunction to **“Praise the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens. Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness...Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.” (Psalm 150:1-2, 6)**

There is a reason they give glory to God, why they praise Him. He is the sovereign ruler of everything. And here, they praise Him for sending His Son to be the Savior. Their praise was reverent. God is worthy of all praise.

Third, notice their praise was revelatory.

C. Their Praise Was Revelatory – vv. 11, 14

First, they spoke of a person.

Second, they spoke of His place.

Third, they spoke of peace. Peace in this case tied to the person.

Fourth, they spoke of potential.

1. They spoke of a person

This wasn't just any person, this was a newborn. A baby born in the humblest fashion. It shouldn't have been a surprise because after all, the prophet Isaiah announced the Messiah would be born, born of a virgin. It was a miraculous conception between God's Spirit and Mary. But this little person, wasn't just any baby. This baby was declared by the angel to be the Savior, the Christ.

Friday morning Grandchild number 8 arrived. With the invention of the ultrasound, they can determine gender. It was a boy. Once the gender was known he was given a nickname, but they wouldn't reveal his real name. Beyond that we knew nothing. We have no idea what this child will grow up to be. But the angels announced things that revealed the babies name and nature.

Jesus – Savior

Christ – Messiah (anointed one)

He will save His people from their sins. Those are revelatory. That's the person they spoke of.

2. They spoke of a place

Among the people in all Israel or perhaps even the world, the angel told the shepherds where this child

could be found. He wasn't revealed to the religious leaders or societies elite class, but to shepherds. The angel said He was born in the nearby town of Bethlehem. But among the throngs of people who had swelled the town beyond capacity, how would they find this Savior?

He would be wrapped in swaddling strips of cloth. That doesn't seem to narrow down the prospects because the probability is that most, if not all newborn babies, would be attired the same way. So they are given a further qualifier. He would be lying in a manger, a crude fixture for feeding animals. That meant this baby would be in a barn or cave in some animal pen. He wouldn't be born in a nice hospital birthing room like our grandson. He wouldn't even be born in a quaint little house out of the elements. It would be an animal shelter. The place was revelatory.

Then they spoke about peace.

3. They spoke about peace

Last night we talked about the kind of peace given through Jesus. As Savior, Jesus came to offer peace between God and man whose relationship since near the beginning of time had been kidnapped by sin. As Savior, He came to eventually offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sin, paying our debt so that we could have peace with God.

Romans 5:1 tells us that since we have been made right through faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. Only through Him can we have peace with God. This too was revelatory.

4. They spoke about potential

The peace offered through Jesus was for all people. It wasn't just for the Jews.

It wasn't just for the religious or pious.

It wasn't just for those who were good givers.

It was for all people. That He is described as Savior for all people, means that all people had the same problem. We're all sinners and this Jesus was born to be the Savior for all who accept Him by faith.

The potential for salvation is also revelatory.

What the angels declared to the shepherds was

indeed worthy of praise and praise God they did.

So what would you do with such news? In the next section of verses, we see the praise of the shepherds.

II. THE PRAISE OF THE SHEPHERDS – vv. 15-20

I like that their praise was spontaneous.

A. Their Praise Was Spontaneous – vv. 15-16

There is no hesitation on their part.
There is no question on their part.
There is no debate on their part.
There is no doubt on their part.
They didn't wait till morning.
They didn't wait for a more opportune time.
They didn't worry about the sheep they were watching.

And did you notice they concluded the message came from God? **“Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”** That they were initially terrified leads me to believe they had never seen an angel before. The angel didn't tell them he had come with a message from God. They didn't chalk it up to indigestion or a hallucination. They knew instinctively that this message was from God. Maybe they knew it and believed it because they had known about the Old Testament prophecies and put it all together. Regardless, their wonder was spontaneous.

The question that looms in my mind is this: **Am I willing to listen and eagerly obey the Word of God, knowing that it is a message from Him?**

Do I question it?

Do I hesitate to act?

Do I wait for a more opportune time?

Do I hope someone else will do it instead of me?

God has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus (**John 1:18**). God has revealed His salvation to us in the baby Jesus. **Are we willing and eager to see it, to receive it, to proclaim?**

It was with joyful wonder that they hurried off to Bethlehem, which brings us to the second point. Not only was their praise spontaneous, their praise was also contagious.

B. Their Praise Was Contagious – vv. 16-19

There is something about joyful people that rubs off on others. I'd much rather hang out with happy people than a bunch of Eeyore's, people who always have a storm cloud hanging over them. That's why I think so many people liked my Mom. She was always joyful. If I went home for the weekend on a college break when there was a retreat going on, I could expect Sunday afternoon goodbyes to take a long time. There I was standing in line with dozens of women just to say goodbye to my own Mother. They loved her joyful spirit.

As the shepherds spread the joyful news about what they had been told about the child, those who heard it were amazed. Maybe some thought they had been out in the fields too long. Others may have thought they needed a good psychological evaluation. Still others would have considered the source since shepherds had little status among the residents of any town. They couldn't testify in court and couldn't go to the synagogue because of their occupation and reputation. But one thing they could do and that was share their experience.

What they told others wasn't a story you could come up with sitting around a campfire. And why would they need to concoct such a story, especially when the proof of their news was lying right there in a manger. Regardless of how anyone else responded, we are told that Mary listened with great interest and treasured them in her heart. Even if no one else believed them about their story, she did. I truly believe some went to see for themselves because that kind of praise is contagious.

The third thing I see about the shepherds is that their praise was continuous.

C. Their Praise Was Continuous – v. 20

Their praise was visible.
Their praise was verbal.

Their praise was volitional.

They came. They saw. They praised God. The trip into town and the trip back to the fields was filled with exuberant praise, the kind you remember for a long time.

How about us? Do we dread Christmas or are we excited to share with others the reason we celebrate Christmas, that the Savior has been born, just as the angel announced in God's Word?

Is there praise in our heart and on our lips for what we have experienced because the Savior came and that through Him we now have peace with God?

Glorifying and praising are in the present tense indicating that their praise was ongoing. **How about your praise to God for His indescribable gift?**

Lastly, I want to talk about the praise of Simeon.

III. THE PRAISE OF SIMEON – vv. 25-35

First, his praise was passionate.

A. His Praise Was Passionate – vv. 25-30

In fulfillment of the law, Joseph and Mary traveled to Jerusalem to consecrate Jesus to God at the Temple and offer the required sacrifice. In their case, because they were poor, the offering was a pair of doves. Moved by the Spirit of God, Simeon, who lived in Jerusalem also made His way to the Temple in time to meet the baby Jesus. We are not told, but somehow he knew that this child was the Savior. He engaged Joseph and Mary, and joyfully took the baby Jesus in his arms and gave praise to God that he had been able to see with his own eyes God's salvation. It is a praise filled with passion. But he didn't end there.

His praise was also prophetic.

B. His Praise Was Prophetic – vv. 31-35

He spoke of salvation extended to the Gentiles.

He spoke of Jews who would welcome Him as Savior.

He spoke of Jews who would reject Him as Savior. He spoke of how one day Mary's own heart would be broken by this child, referring of course to His

crucifixion.

All of that was wrapped up in this little one called Jesus, the Christ. And that's the case today. Some gladly receive Him as their Savior. Others are offended by Him and reject the gift of salvation He brought with Him through His birth, life, and death. Can we like Simeon, give praise to God for Jesus and the salvation He brought with Him?

This story appeared in *A Compassionate Heart* devotional by Bill Crowder. No one watching *Britain's Got Talent* expected much when mobile phone salesman Paul Potts took the stage. The judges looked skeptically at one another when the nervous, unassuming, ordinary-looking chap announced he would sing opera – until Potts opened his mouth.

He began to sing Puccini's 'Nessun Dorma' – and it was magical! The crowd roared and stood in amazement while the judges sat stunned in tearful silence. It was one of the greatest surprises any such television program has ever had, in large part because it came wrapped in such an ordinary package.

Wander back in time 2000 years ago to a little unassuming village described by the prophet Micah as small among the clans of Judah. The prophet reveals that out of this inconspicuous town would come one who would be ruler over Israel. And so it was that 2000 years ago, what we celebrate each December 25th, is the birth of God into humanity in what appeared to many to be an ordinary package, just a baby. But that baby was the Savior of the world. He would grow up to be the One who had long ago been foretold would come. When the smell of earth's newness was still lingering in the air, the promise of His coming has been passed on throughout history and with pinpoint clarity arrived on the scene given to a peasant couple to nurture and raise. It's what Paul describes as **“the fullness of time, when God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” (Galatians 4:4)**

His name says it all – Jesus – Savior.

His title declares it Christ/Messiah – anointed one.

His actions prove it – Sacrifice – declared by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Indeed, that's how the angel described Him to Joseph.

And like the angels, the shepherds, and Simeon, He deserves our praise. While our hearts and spirits are lifted this time of year, great joy and praise can be yours if you have claimed this Jesus as your Savior.