

Luke 2:13-15
"Angels We Have Heard on High"

1. THE REALMS THAT WERE BLENDED AT CHRISTMAS

- A. We see it in this scene
- B. We see it in the Savior

2. THE RESULTS THAT WERE BEGUN AT CHRISTMAS

- A. Who was exalted by the birth of Jesus
- B. What was established by the birth of Jesus

3. THE RECIPIENTS THAT WERE BLESSED AT CHRISTMAS

- A. People with favor from God
- B. People with faith in God

1. On December 12th, President Obama and his family attended the 29th annual holiday program called, "Christmas in Washington".

2. The show was hosted by Ellen DeGeneres, and featured songs by everyone from Mariah Carey to Miranda Cosgrove (aka iCarly).

3. In what could be described as a moment of irony, singer Annie Lenox performed the classic Christmas hymn, "Gloria in Excelsis Deo".

4. I say it was ironic because in a recent interview with a gay and lesbian magazine, she stated that she is *not* a Christian, and views the birth of Jesus as a metaphorical symbol of humanity.ⁱ

5. "Gloria in excelsis deo," is the Latin translation of what the angels sang in Luke 2:14: "*Glory to God in the highest...*"

6. There was no irony at all when the angels first sang these words. They understood fully the true meaning of the birth of Jesus, and meant every word they said that night.

7. As we look at the angel anthem that Luke recorded for us, we are reminded afresh of the miracle that occurred the night Jesus Christ was born into this world.

8. The Christmas story is no religious myth or literary metaphor. It is the story of the eternal God becoming flesh and dwelling among us for the sake of our salvation.

9. I want to focus our attention on the words of the angel choir in verse 14. The angels said, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" As we consider those words, we are pointed to some truths about Christmas.

10. Firstly, in this angelic message, we are pointed to:

I. THE REALMS THAT WERE BLENDED AT CHRISTMAS

1. In the song of the angels, two different realms, or worlds, you might say, are addressed. The angels sang something about God in heaven, and something about the people on earth.
2. Their messages addressed the highest and the lowest. Their song was a blending of heaven and earth; the realms of glory as well as the realms of the lowly.
3. If you think about it, the message of Christmas is the message of how heaven and earth were connected by the birth of Jesus. He that had lived eternally in heaven came down to be born mortally on earth.
4. Consider the blending of these two realms – heaven and earth. Notice that:

A. We see it in this scene

1. Remember the context of this angel anthem. Luke 2:8 tells us that there were shepherds watching over their flocks in the region near Bethlehem.
2. It was to those shepherds that these angels appeared and announced the arrival of the Savior, Christ the Lord.
3. Imagine in your mind those humble, lowly shepherds looking up into the eyes of those luminous, glorious angels.
4. Those shepherds had slept outside on the ground next to their flocks of sheep. The angels had just left the portals of heaven, and the presence of God.
5. Those shepherds were the outcast of their society, unwelcomed among the respectable citizens of Jerusalem. The angels were the highest order of God's creation, allowed to stand by His very throne.
6. When we visualize this scene, we see a wonderful illustration of the words they sang, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*"
7. Heaven and earth blended at Christmas. The birth of Jesus brought angels and shepherds together. The highest met the lowest, and it was all because God's Son had been born.
8. When we consider this blending of heaven and earth that the angels sang about, consider not only that we see it in this scene, but consider also that:

B. We see it in the Savior

1. In the words of the angels and in the image of them with the shepherds we are reminded of how heaven and earth came together at Christmas.
2. Yet, nowhere do we see this blending of realms more clearly than in Jesus Himself. He was the perfect blend of heaven and earth.
3. He was the only begotten Son of God, and yet He was Mary's firstborn child as well. He was the Son of the Father, full of grace and truth, and yet He was the Son of man in flesh and blood.
4. He was so much God that He healed the woman when she touched the hem of his garment. Yet, He was so much man that His mother had to wrap Him in swaddling clothes at His birth.
5. He was so much God that the demons of hell recognized His voice and trembled. Yet, He was so much man that He wept in Gethsemane and prayed, "Let this cup pass from me."
6. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and in Him also beat the heart of a man born of a woman.
7. He walked like man and worked like God. He spoke with a man's voice but His words were the oracles of heaven.
8. He had human eyes, but could see into the heart. He had human ears, but could hear the thoughts of those around Him.
9. He was a king, but had no palace. He was a preacher, but needed no pulpit. He was a healer, but used no medicine.
10. He was not part God and part man; but the God-man. He was so equally God and man that both heaven and earth were seamlessly wed in Him.
11. His birth glorified God in the highest, and gave peace to men on earth. In Him we are reminded of *the realms that were blended at Christmas*.
12. Looking further at the anthem of the angels, we see a second truth, and that is:

II. THE RESULTS THAT WERE BEGUN AT CHRISTMAS

1. Look again at what the angels declared to this little band of shepherds. They said, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*"

2. They were not only addressing two different realms, but they were also announcing two different results.

3. The birth of Jesus produced a result both in heaven and on earth. Notice what it meant for both, according to the angels. First of all, consider:

A. Who is exalted by the birth of Jesus

1. The first thing this group of angels declared was, "*Glory to God in the highest...*" It is fitting that their anthem begins with the glory of God, for that is the first objective in all that He does.

2. God works in this world for the sake of His glory. Everything He does is so that men will recognize Him, and look to Him, and give their praises to Him.

3. God does not exist for our benefit. No, rather, man's chief end is to glorify God! All that God does is for the purpose of exalting Himself, bringing glory to His name, and honor to who He is.

4. With that being said, notice again what the angel's declared at the birth of Jesus. They said, "*Glory to God in the highest...*"

5. The idea behind that phrase, "in the highest" is to the highest degree. In other words, the highest glory comes to God through the birth of His Son.

6. Yes, God is glorified by the wonder of His creation. It is true that the heights of the mountains and the depths of the oceans declare His glory.

7. Every star that shines, flower that blooms, bird that sings, and creature that moves gives glory to the God who created it.

8. Yet, nothing has ever so glorified God, and exalted the greatness of who He is like the sending of His Son, Jesus into the world!

9. You could look at this way. God was never so highly glorified as when He was so humbly manifested in the body of the baby that Mary called Jesus!

10. As Hebrews 1:3 says, Jesus is "the brightness of His glory". Jesus is the clearest revelation of the glory of God. He is the glory of God in the highest – to the highest degree!

11. The angel's anthem reminds us of who was exalted by the birth of Jesus, but it also points to a further result of that birth. Consider with me:

B. What is established by the birth of Jesus

1. The angels not only announced that Jesus had brought glory to God in the highest, but they also said, "...and on earth peace..."
2. The Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon said, "The swaddling band with which He was wrapped up was the white flag of peace. That manger was the place where the treaty was signed..."ⁱⁱ
3. In what way did Jesus bring peace on earth? Well, consider how this is *presently* true. There is a sense in which the peace that Jesus brought to earth was a peace between God and man.
4. Colossians 1:20 says that Jesus has, "...made peace through the blood of his cross..." In other words, by dying for the sins of man, Christ has put away that which is the source of conflict between God and man.
5. As a sinner I was an enemy of God. I had rebelled against Him, breaking His commands, and my sins were like so many attacks upon His holiness.
6. When Jesus bore the wrath of God for me on the cross, He purchased for me an eternal peace with God. That is how this "peace on earth" is true presently.
7. However, consider also how this is true *prophetically*. The angel declared, "peace on earth", and yet there remain wars and rumors of wars until this very day.
8. Yet, what the angel announced at the birth of Jesus will one day become a physical reality at the return of Jesus. When the Prince of peace comes, there will be peace on earth!
9. Micah 4:3 says, "*And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*"
10. In 1967, during the six-days war that raged between Israel and the Palestinians, a politician from Australia made a bit of a blunder when he said he hoped that the Jews and Arabs could, "...settle their differences in a truly Christian manner."
11. One day, all the differences in the world *will* be settled in a Christian manner, so to speak. Christ Himself will bring peace to this war-torn world.

12. Looking at the anthem of the angels, we are pointed to *the realms that were blended at Christmas, and the results that were begun at Christmas*. Consider also thirdly that we see in their song:

III. THE RECIPIENTS THAT WERE BLESSED AT CHRISTMAS

1. Look again at what the angels sang in verse 14. They said, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*"
2. Notice that last phrase, "good will toward men." The birth of Jesus was not only for the glory of God, it was also for the good of men.
3. Humanity received the gift of God's Son, and while the glory is God's, the gift is ours! We are the recipients of the blessings that come to us in Christ.
4. Think about the recipients the angels spoke of in verse 14. First of all, these recipients are:

A. People with favor from God

1. That last phrase, "good will toward men", has caused no shortage of debate among Bible scholars. In the original language it is not exactly clear what the phrase means.
2. Some interpret it to mean "men of good will", as if the peace that comes from Christ is for those who are of "good will" towards God.
3. Others think that the phrase speaks of the good will of God toward men. That is, the good will, or good pleasure, is of God and not of man.
4. The *ESV* follows this line of thinking, and translates the phrase as, "...with whom he is pleased." Another translation renders it as, "...to people he favors."ⁱⁱⁱ
5. The reality is that the peace Jesus brings comes only to those who are given the grace and favor of God. Or you could say that those who are given the grace and favor of God will find the peace that comes through Jesus Christ.
6. Either way, let this last phrase of the angel anthem remind you that apart from the grace of God, you would have no peace, no hope, no joy, and no reason to celebrate Christmas.
7. It is the good will of God that has revealed to you the truth of Jesus. It is the gracious favor of God that has opened your eyes to the news of His birth, and to the reality of His lordship.

8. Not everyone in Israel heard about His birth. In fact, the night He was born, God chose only to tell a handful of lowly shepherds.
9. If you know Him today, recognize it was the good will of God to make Him known to you! God shows us favor when He points us to His Son!
10. Most people recognize that December 25th was not the actual day of Jesus' birth. In fact, it was not until 336 AD, that Roman Emperor Constantine declared the birth of Jesus as a holiday.
11. Whatever the actual date of His birth, the words of the angels remind us that the fact of His birth is something we know because of the grace of God.
12. In considering those who receive the blessing of Christmas, we are mindful not only that they are people with favor from God, but also, they are:

B. People with faith in God

1. I want to remind you again that the angels were speaking to a group of shepherds. They were the humble men upon which God chose to show His good will the night of Christ's birth.
2. And how did they respond? Look at verse 15. It says, *"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."*
3. When God in grace revealed the news of Christ's birth to these men, they believed what he said, and exercised faith by going to see the baby Jesus for themselves.
4. We are reminded by these lowly shepherds that the real blessing of Christmas can only be received by faith.
5. Unless we are willing to believe God's Word about Jesus Christ, and receive what is revealed to us about Him, we will find no benefit or blessing from Christmas.
6. The good news of the gospel is only good to those who will believe it and act upon it in faith! Christmas is nothing but a date on the calendar unless we believe what God reveals about Jesus.
7. In the opening line of the classic book, *Little Women*, the character Jo grumbles, "Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents."

8. The reality is that many people will have a house full of presents this year, but will not really celebrate Christmas.

9. Without faith in Him who is the Christ in Christmas, there really is no Christmas. Those who receive the blessing of the birth of Jesus are those who have faith in God!

1. The hymn "Angels We Have Heard on High" was originally a French carol that was translated into English in 1862 by James Chadwick.

2. In my research this week I found an alternate version of the song, written by a George Radcliffe Woodward.

3. His version says:

*Shepherds in the field abiding,
Tell us when the seraph bright
Greeted you with wondrous tiding,
What you saw and heard that night.*

In the second verse, the shepherds answer back:

*We beheld—it is no fable—
God incarnate, King of bliss,
Swathed and cradled in a stable,
And the angel strain was this:*

Gloria, in excelsis Deo^{iv}, that is, Glory to God in the highest.

4. Though we were not there to hear the angels sing on high, we nonetheless celebrate the birth they heralded.

5. We recognize that at the birth of Jesus, heaven and earth connected in Him who was the God-man.

6. We glorify God for what He has done in Jesus, and we thank Him for the peace that He has given to us.

7. Lastly, we enjoy the blessing of the grace of God in Christ, and we respond in faith to Jesus, and what He has done for us.

8. We are not angels, but this Christmas we say with them, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

ⁱ Azzopardi, Chris, “Annie Lennox Speaks Out”, 12/9/10, *Qsaltlake.com*, accessed 12/16/10, <http://qsaltlake.com/2010/12/09/annie-lennox-speaks-out/>

ⁱⁱ Spurgeon, Charles, Great Preaching on Christmas, (Sword of the Lord Publishers, Murfreesboro, TN, 1988), p. 52

ⁱⁱⁱ HCSB

^{iv} Angels We Have Heard On High, *cyberhymnal.org*, accessed 12/16/10, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/a/n/angelswe.htm>