

# Christ's Birth: From the Angels' Perspective

Luke 2:1-20

*Halifax, 26 December 2004*

## **Introduction:**

The elders of this congregation make a concerted effort to avoid enforcing anything upon the members but what God has commanded.

- We try to make sure that the commandments of men are always distinguished from the commandments of God.
  - And for this reason, we do not require the keeping of Christmas or any other holy day that is merely of man's institution.
    - We do not forbid families to observe these days if they wish,
      - It is certainly a fine thing to set a day apart to meditate on some particular aspect of God's work and to praise Him for it and rejoice before Him...
      - but we do not require the observance of such days as a church.
    - We only expect the members to keep the Lord's Day each week...
      - This is the only Christian Sabbath that God has appointed for us in the New Testament.
- It is clear from history that when holy days instituted by man are set up together with the holy days instituted by God,
  - the holy days instituted by man always seem to be preferred...
    - sometimes even to the extent that the Lord's Day is no longer kept holy at all!
      - Communicants will worship on Christmas and Easter who do not worship regularly on the Lord's Day!
      - Thus, the commandments of God are supplanted by the traditions of men!

While all this is true, I also believe that it is profitable in preaching to focus on those subjects that are on the minds of the people.

- For this cause, I often break from whatever regular series I am doing to preach occasional messages...
  - In the same way that Jesus preached about the tower of Siloam when it fell,
    - I preached about the fall of the world trade towers on the Sunday following September 11.
  - And when there is an ordination or a baptism or discipline in our congregation,
    - I often preach on those topics.

- Likewise, because Christmas is such a significant and dominate holiday in our society,
  - I ordinarily address the subject of Christ's birth on the Sunday closest to December 25.
    - Since this wonderful subject is something that is brought to the attention of our society each year,
      - I want to speak to it.

And today in particular, I want to present to you the birth of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the angels.

- It is not very often that we get to peer into heaven and see what the angels are doing,
  - but every once in while, God has pulled back the veil to allow the earth to gaze upon their praises.
  - And one such time was at the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
  - In Luke 2, we are shown how the angels responded to this momentous event!
- The inhabitants of the earth did not know what a glorious person had come down from heaven and what that meant for the earth!
  - But the angels knew...
  - And so to show us the glory of it,
    - God opened up heaven to a company of shepherds who were keeping watch over their flock by night...
      - They were able to peer into heaven and see the angels' erupting in praise for the wonders that God had performed.
      - Surely this blazing fire of holy praise in heaven is presented to ignite the earth with similar praise!
- Let us then consider the birth of Christ from the angels' perspective.

**I. First of all, I want you to consider that the angels live continually in the realms of God's glory!**

A. For proof of this, look at what happened when the angel appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem:

1. We are given this account in verses 8 & 9:

- v. 8-9: Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

- a. You see in these words that as soon as the angel appeared, so did the glory of God appear...
  - The glory of God is said to have “shone around them.”
  - They were surrounded by an atmosphere of holy splendour so marvellous that it made the shepherds not just a afraid, but greatly afraid!
  
- b. Even these rugged shepherds—
  - Men who were accustomed to the terrors of the night—
    - the howling of wolves and the roaring of lions...
    - the sound of thieves in the darkness of the night...
      - even these men who were not easily frightened are terrified.
  
- c. Scripture records many instances of similar responses to God’s glory...
  - 1) At Sinai the people saw His glory on the mountain and they could not bear it.
    - Afterward, they begged Moses not to let God speak to them in this way lest they die.
    - Now you might say,
      - “Yea, but no wonder,
      - for they were a disobedient and stubborn people...”
      - Indeed they were...
  
  - 2) But consider the prophet Isaiah.
    - a) Isaiah is often thought to be one the holiest of God’s prophets.
      - Yet, when he saw a vision of the glory of God in the temple with angels surrounding God’s throne and covering their faces he tells us what he said:
        - Isa 6:5: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
        - Even this holy prophet thought He was done for!
  
    - b) And so we find it again with Daniel and others...
      - Even the aged apostle John who had leaned on Jesus breast at the Last Supper tells us of his vision of Jesus in glory:
        - He says:
          - Re 1:17: And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.
          - It was too much for him handle!

- d. Every man is terrified when He is confronted by the **numinous**...
- 1) The numinous is the mysterious glory of the presence of God.
    - It is that sense of being completely overshadowed and overwhelmed by holiness over which you have absolutely no control or mastery.
    - A cheap imitation of this that feeling you get at a horror movie when something is presented over which you have no control...
    - It is that deep shivering within your body and soul, that shaking of your whole frame when you know that you are before the Presence of the One who transcends your understanding.
  - 2) The apostle John presents numinous in Revelation when he refers to God's face as:
    - "that which makes heaven and earth flee away."
    - You feel like you are going to come apart at the seams...
2. But God always comforts His people when they are terrified by the numinous.
- a. You can see this in verse 10—
    - The shepherds tremble and immediately the angel says,
      - "Do not be afraid, for I bring you good tidings of great joy."
    - One day we will see the glory of God,
      - but God will look after His elect to comfort them.
  - b. It is God's way with His people to reveal His grace together with His glory...
    - 1) When He presented His glory to Isaiah and made Him tremble,
      - He also immediately sent forth an angel to cleanse His unclean lips...
      - It was as if to say,
        - "Though you are indeed a man of unclean lips fear not, for I myself have cleansed you."
    - 2) And likewise, when God presented His glory to John so that John fell down as dead...
      - John tells us that He also revealed His grace to Him:
        - Rev. 1:17-18: "He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, amen, And I have the keys of Hades and death.'"
      - It was as if Jesus said:

- “John, You see Me as this glorious personage, and so I am...
    - but know that I am the same person who came to earth and died for you...
    - Do not be afraid of Me.
- c. In this we see a wonderful picture of what it will be like for us in glory!
- 1) God will not comfort us by hiding us from His glorious and holy majesty...
    - He will let us see His glory that overwhelms...
    - But He will also let us see that all this glory is directed for our good...
      - It will be power and majesty that refreshes us and comforts us because it will be a majesty that is directed to protect us and bless us.
  - 2) God’s purpose is not to take away the numinous...
    - so that we become bored and familiar with God as if He were just like us...
      - It is a great loss if that should happen...
      - but His goal is to astound us with the fact that His glorious presence before whom heaven and earth flee away loves us and is going to bless us!
    - We gain nothing by bringing God down to our level...
      - Everything by the discovery this high God comes to us with a purpose of mercy and grace.

B. This is the gracious glory that the angels continually dwell in!

1. They spend their days revelling in the excellence of God’s majesty!
  - a. In Matthew 18 Jesus speaks of the angels as being “always before the face of my Father in heaven!”
    - You can be sure that in such glorious, blessed, inexhaustible company they are continually filled with rapture and adoration!
    - Boredom is entirely unknown to them!
  - b. Consider that the glory in which they dwell is even greater than the glory that the shepherds saw or that Isaiah saw!
    - It is a greater glory because in order to reveal this glory to man on earth,
      - God must always condescend—He has to reveal Himself on a level that we can understand.

- We who live on earth are only permitted to see the back parts, as Moses was told.
    - To look upon His face now, in our state of corruption, would truly burn us up in the fires of judgement.
    - Someday, we will see Him face to face and not be burned...
      - but now we see through a mirror...
      - we see a reflected glory.
2. But it is the great privilege of the angels to live in the numinous now.
- a. They never get used to it.
    - When Isaiah saw God's glory revealed in the temple,
      - He saw the beings who dwell before His throne continually—and even they were still amazed and dazzled by His holiness...
      - So much so that they covered their faces in His presence!
    - Listen to what Isaiah says:
      - Isa 6:1-4: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; The whole earth *is* full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.
  - b. What a difference there is between the honour that these seraphim show in the court of our great God,
    - and the honour that servants are sometimes commanded to show kings on the earth...
      - The honour of servants of earthly kings is an honour that they are ordered to affect or put on in the presence of the king...
      - But the honour of the angels and the living creatures before God is an honour that wells up out of the depths of their being!

TRANS> What a privilege the angels have to dwell in the realms of glory.

**II. When you understand the glory in which they dwell, it helps you to better understand their reaction to Christ's birth.**

- A. Can you imagine how astounding it must have been for them to see the One whose divine glory they knew born in human flesh?
  1. From the day of their creation until the night Christ was born...

- The angels had only known the glorious majesty of the Son of God.
  - For thousands of years,
    - They had worshipped before Him in the numinous.
    - They had celebrated when He created the worlds by the mere speaking of a word!
      - suddenly, at His words, a whole material universe is formed,
      - something entirely unknown to them!
    - They had seen Him seated above the great flood in the day of Noah, pouring out His wrath upon the sons of the earth...
      - They lived in the glory of the Son of God as numinous
2. This same person they knew only in His unapproachable glory, they now saw in human flesh!
- Consider it!
    - a. The ancient of days who sits on the throne of Heaven and earth is lying in a manger!
      - This same august personage who speaks creation and destruction is nursing at the breast of the woman he fashioned from the rib of a man!
      - The majestic deity who cannot be contained by heaven and earth is wrapped in swaddling clothes!
    - b. How can it be so?
      - The One before whom they hid their faces for thousands of years because of His glory has come to this dark, sinful, dull world...
        - clothed in the weakness of human flesh.
    - c. What a marvellous condescension!
      - What a glorious person has come to the earth!
        - The Son of God had gone from the place of highest glory to the place of lowliness.
        - How could it be?
- B. The angels knew that this was done because of His great love!
1. All their days they have behold the love that He has for the Father and for the Spirit...
    - They have seen His love continually displayed...
    - They have seen His love for themselves...
    - They have seen His love for the inhabitants of the sinful earth...

- But never yet was love displayed like this!
2. They knew that He had come to bring peace on the earth...
    - a. They knew that with Him here, the earth would never again be the same—
      - By His coming all things in this dark sinful world would be made new!
      - They were waiting with eager anticipation to see what He would do now that He had come!
    - b. How full of praises they are for such grace!
      - “Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”
- C. And now, on the night of Jesus birth, the angels are dispatched to display their praise to the earth for what God has done!
1. The inhabitants of the earth knew very little about the wondrous birth that had just occurred...
    - Tonight it is the high privilege of these angels to make known to the earth the glorious things that have been done!
    - They are to show the world how the birth of this child is regarded in heaven!
  2. And to whom are they sent?
    - a. Not to Caesar Augustus, the great emperor of the world...
      - Not to King Herod the Great, the King of the Jews...
      - Not to the High Priests at the temple...
      - But to lowly shepherds, keeping watch over their flock in the open field by night!
    - b. These lowly shepherds, disregarded by men, are to be the world’s apostles!
      - It is through them that the whole world is to learn about what heaven did when Christ was born!
  3. How excited these angels must be to come!
    - a. This night the curtain will be drawn back and the earth which lives so far from the glory of God will see the praise of heaven!
      - How they want to ignite the earth to blaze with glorious praise to their God who has come to them in this babe!
    - b. “Let us go and wake up the earth to praise,
      - for the Son of God has come to them and they are clueless about it all!”



- “Oh that the earth could understand something of the glory of the One who has come among them!”
- “We will go and we will tell them!”

TRANS> And so dear congregation, wake up! Wake up to glorious praise!

- Behold the praise of the angels!

### **III. Hear what the angels say!**

A. First, a spokesman appears to the shepherds and says....

- v. 10-12: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

1. See how the angel calls his message “tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people.”

- Do we not love to hear good news!
  - Good news, you got the job!
  - Good news, you passed the test!
  - Good news, the surgery has been successful!
  - Good news, the war is over!
- Good news brings great joy
  - but here is good news for all people...
  - good news that will bring great joy—
    - much greater than the end of a war or the saving of a life on earth!
    - This is news of salvation for the whole world!

2. “Unto you is born this day a Saviour!”

a. The angel stresses the words “unto you.”

1) This is not for the angels, but for the fallen sons and daughters of Adam!

- This is for the earth...
- It is for the poor as well as the rich,
  - it is for the miserable as well as the happy,
  - the outcast as well as the honourable,
  - the weak as well as the strong,
  - the Gentile as well as the Jew.
- It is good news for all who truly want to be saved from their sins.

- 2) But of course, this is no occasion for joy for you if you do not **want** to be saved that you might live before God...
  - If you are perfectly content to carry on in your sins and you do not want to be delivered,
    - This good news is rather an offense to you...
      - What do I need to be saved from?
        - I like the way I am just fine!
        - I do not wish to live for God.
        - I wish to be left alone.
- b. But if you wish to be saved...
  - 1) If you want to fellowship with the glorious God...
    - to have your sins forgiven...
    - to be reconciled to Him...
    - to live in the delight of His glory and to have His delight in you...
  - 2) Then the news of great joy is that “a saviour has been born who is Christ the Lord!”
    - a) He has come to save His people from their sins.
      - From the dominion and power of the sin that keeps them God...
      - From the guilt of their sin that brings them under God’s judgement...
      - From the curse of sin that is an expression of that judgement.
    - b) And this Saviour, born in Bethlehem, is none other than Christ the Lord!
      1. Christ another name for Messiah or anointed one...
        - Here is the One that God promised to send as our prophet, priest, and king...
          - As prophet to dispel our ignorance...
            - to open our eyes to see our sin and to see God’s salvation in Christ...
          - As priest to offer Himself for our sins so that we might be forgiven...
            - to go and suffer in the place of guilty sinners on the cross so that we might be pardoned...

- As King to bring our hearts and lives into subjection to God and to destroy all our enemies.
- to bring us to live for Him and to free us from sin, Satan, and death.

TRANS> He is the Christ!

2. And if anyone should wonder if this One who is born should be able to pull all this off...

- The angel declares that it is Christ **the LORD!**
  - This is none other than the One who is called Jehovah, **the LORD**, of the Old Testament!
  - The Self-existing God....
    - He is a spirit, in and of Himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection;
    - all sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, every where present,
    - almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.
- The LORD Himself is born to you a Saviour!
  - The LORD whom the angels have worshipped in reverence and fear for thousands of years is wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger!
  - Unto you is born a Saviour!

TRANS> And as soon as this angel is finished declaring this wonderful news...

- It is as though the rest of the angels cannot keep silent:
    - v. 13-14: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”
    - Do you suppose that any of the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands that beheld in his vision of heaven were absent?
      - The shepherds saw heaven bursting forth with praise!
- B. The angels want **you**, the inhabitants of the earth, to know **who** has come and what it means for you...
- “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace goodwill toward men!”

1. The angels want you to behold the glory of this One who has come!
  - a. They want us to worship Him with them!
    - How dull our praises must seem to them...
    - How they must pity us who are so blind to the glory of God and see Him so darkly.
  - b. They want us to realise what a marvel it is that the Son of God has come to earth in human flesh!
    - They want us to be fired with praise for such grace, such condescension, such love...
      - That One so glorious should come here—in our fallen flesh that dies—to save us!
      - That this One, so meek and lowly, is none other than the LORD of all Glory and Power!
  
2. And they want the earth to know that His coming means **peace** for us!
  - a. They know that to have this One come to earth and become a man means that God's grace has come to men.
    - 1) If the glorious Son of God has become one of us...
      - a) If He has come as Messiah to represent us...
        - the fallen human race is brought into everlasting peace by Him!
        - He brings the peace with Him from heaven.
          - He so associates Himself with the people of His kingdom that He cannot and will not be separated from them...
            - Their sins are His sins, His righteousness is their righteousness, His victory is their victory, His inheritance is their inheritance.
            - He truly brings eternal peace to this dark sinful world!
      - b) This peace speaks of the Old Testament promise of Shalom...
        - Shalom involves not only the removal of trouble,
        - but also the addition of the fullness of blessedness.
    - 2) The scripture does not teach that every person will experience the blessing of this peace, for they will not...
      - but the earth collectively will experience it...
        - Jesus Christ will give it to all those who come to Him for salvation and He will cut off from earth those who reject Him.

- Everyone wants Shalom,
    - But those who reject Christ want Shalom by their own efforts...
    - They want this fullness of life by their own devices...
      - They reject the counsel of God and pursue it in their own way.
- b. You see, the fall came about, you could say,
- When mankind determined that he would pursue shalom by human effort.
- 1) Ever since, people have been trying and trying to find shalom and have failed again and again...
    - Some try to find Shalom by means of romance...
    - Some pursue it by escape into fantasy or drugs...
    - Some pursue it by striving to establish world peace...
    - Some pursue it by means of affluence and wealth...
    - Some pursue it by striving for perfect health...
    - Some pursue it through family...
    - Some seek shalom by means of personal achievement and success...
    - Some even seek to find it by morality, spirituality, or doing good to others.
      - What sacrifices are made, what effort is expended!
      - All for Satan's lie that "you shall be as God!"
  - 2) But Shalom by human effort (no matter how great that effort) has always failed!
    - It has always led to disappointment and it always will...
  - 3) Of course not everyone is actively pursuing shalom...
    - many have become cynical and bitter...
      - especially now that the dreams of modernism are dying away and all the wind has been taken out of our sails...
    - But realise that even though this is so...
      - the underlying reason for the bitterness of the cynic is because he has concluded that shalom is out of reach...
      - He is upset because he wants shalom and knows he can't attain it!
    - Now all he wants to do is escape...
      - he wants to try to forget the dream and be lost in the mundane...
      - but even that becomes his effort at Shalom...

- Even suicide is an attempt to gain Shalom by self effort.
- c. But the angels recognise that Jesus Christ brings Shalom with Him to earth...
- And that every person who is willing to stop looking for Shalom by his own effort or mere human effort
    - and to look for Shalom from Jesus Christ... will find it.
  - It will not be given to you all at once because you must continue for a while in a world that wants to put human glory above God's glory...
    - But the promise of Jesus is that He will deliver you and bring you into perfect shalom at the last day—
      - He will bring you to behold the glory of Himself and of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, and the love between them from all eternity.
  - This is the eternal Shalom of the Trinity!
3. When Jesus finishes bringing Shalom to His people...
- a. We will live in the rapturous delight of God's glorious excellence!
- Shalom will be ours because we will live in the realm of the glory of God where the angels live!
  - There will never be a moment of boredom or sorrow...
  - There will always be a rejoicing in the inexhaustible glory and greatness of our God.
- b. And most amazing of all, not only will we delight in Him, but He will also delight in us!
- Jesus will present us as His bride, without spot or wrinkle or blemish!
    - And **He** will be ravished with our love for all eternity!
    - We will pour out our lives as continuous offering to our God, and He will pour out His life for us...
      - And so it will be forever.
- C. So the message of the angels is "Wake up you blockheads!"
1. You have nothing but misery in your own glory...
- you can do nothing...
  - you can never produce peace
  - If only you knew how dull you are and how foolish you look trying.
    - How can you bear to live so low... estranged from the glory of God?
    - What do you want?

- What are you looking for?
  - What will you have even if you get it?
2. But here is your salvation!
- The Son of God Himself has come to earth!
    - He has come to save you.
    - He has come to give you peace.
  - Give up on yourself!
    - Repent and cast yourself on His mercy!
    - All you must do is look to this One and He will surely save you!
      - What could you possibly want that He does not have?
3. Oh my friends, do not be afraid to come to Him!
- a. The shepherds might have hesitated if He had come to a palace,
- but He came to a manger...
    - He came to a lowly manger to show that He came for the poor as well as the rich...
    - He become poor that we might be made rich.
- b. It was not much different to Him anyway... a stable or an earthly palace...
- But He came to a lowly place to make Himself approachable!
  - You do not have to go up into heavens, or go to the lowest part of the earth.
  - He is meek and lowly and He calls you in His word to come to Him and believe...
    - He does not receive you because you **have** the fullness of the life of God... shalom...
    - He rather receives you who come to Him because you **do not have** the fullness of the life of God...
      - He came to this dark and sinful world not to **find** shalom,
        - but to **bring** shalom to those who had lost it and were cut off from it by their sin.
          - He had to give up His Shalom in order to bring it to us...
          - He had to bear our sins on the cross in order that we might have Shalom, living in the eternal glory of God.

- The only way for us to have Shalom was for the Son of God to bear God's curse that we brought on ourselves when we set out to find our own Shalom...
  - And I tell you that He has done it!
  - He has been to the cross for us to purchase our Shalom.
- When everything is said and done,
  - the only reason you have for rejecting this lowly saviour is your own wicked pride...
  - You think you must have the glory of producing your own shalom and so you refuse to enter into His shalom.
    - God's curse be upon you if you will not repent...
    - The Lord Jesus will cast you away from the presence of His glory...
      - into the outer darkness where there is weeping gnashing of teeth--
- But you who sick of trying to make your own shalom...
  - and not only sick of it, but are now prepared to humble yourself and come to Him for shalom His way...
    - "There is born to you a Saviour who is Christ the LORD."
    - "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."
  - To you He says,
    - Matthew 11:27-30: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*. Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."