

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A machinery manufacturer received an order for some equipment from another country. He arranged to supply this. The customer sent his own staff to the factory for training in its use so that, when it was installed, the equipment would all work well. The machinery was delivered and installed and the staff began to use it. How sorry they all were to find that when they began production they could not produce the quality which was promised when the order was placed. A complaint was lodged with the manufacturer and lawyers were instructed to try to obtain some redress. The manufacturer knew the equipment should work completely to pattern. There was only one thing for it. He sent his son. On investigation the problem was discovered and all was put right. The father and the son were both experts with the equipment they had designed and manufactured and the coming of the knowledgeable son soon settled the matter.

Romans 8:3 tells us, 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.' This is what God has done for man. God has sent His own Son to deal with the problem of sin, and has settled the matter. At this time of the year we rejoice at the coming of the Lord Jesus. We are going to talk about this today. The story is found in Luke 2. After this programme, why not read it again.

A demonstration of the Divine Desire

We will begin with thinking about a demonstration of the Divine Desire. It is with tremendous gratitude that we remember that God was behind all that took place. We may delight in God's perfect creation, the exquisite beauty of plants, the remarkable variety and ability of animals, and a creation all in such harmony. When Adam came along, how quickly all was spoilt by sin. Then we see God's delight in separating a nation, Israel, for a possession just for Himself. Of Israel He says, 'I will be your God, and ye shall be my people'. Leviticus 26:12. Even this relationship was spoilt by man. Now, at last, God begins His masterplan for a people devoted to Himself. It had to begin with 'God sending His own Son'.

God's desire is demonstrated to the full in the extremely humble coming of the Son and in the life the Lord Jesus followed. He set aside His glory. He took the lowest place, humbling Himself to the lowest point, even to the death of the cross. All the divine purposes were to begin with the Babe at Bethlehem. Only in this way could God become fully man for the purpose before Him. Charles Wesley wrote: 'Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man'. Here is 'God sending His own Son'.

Simple but Stupendous story

Now consider this, Simple but Stupendous story. Luke's story is brief but factual. How different it would be if man was writing this. There would be stress on the grandeur of His coming, a lodging in the palace and every comfort for such a babe! But Luke records 'God sending His own Son' in a way which fully answered to God's own purpose.

This simple story begins with Mary being told of God's plan. When Joseph heard the news he was concerned but, again, God spoke to him, setting his fear to rest. Everything was done in a way which encouraged this believing couple. All the affairs of men are so arranged and dovetailed together to meet God's will. Caesar issued his edict; the nation had to return, each to his home town for enrolment for the purpose of taxing. This is the reason which brings Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, previously prophesied as the place for the birth, Micah 5:2. Surely here there would be comfort and all the necessities of the occasion would be available. No, writes Luke, 'there was no room for them', verse 7. Bethlehem was full of visitors. Even the inn was full. 'The inn' would have been built as a high surrounding wall, a shelter from heat and dust and a refuge from thieves, where a man and his beast could lodge. It would have a range of arches round the four inside walls and probably a tower where a watcher could see the approach of marauding bands. Water would be provided but the traveller would bring food and bed. Outside the square there would often be a group of sheds for stabling the animals. It is likely that our wonderful Saviour was born in one of these sheds.

Luke records that Mary 'brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger', a feeding trough for the animals. What love she would have shown! He was warmly wrapped, swathed in clothes. We can understand the peace of that moment as the Lord of glory came amongst His creation. As Mary looked down on this Babe she knew Him to be, not just her firstborn son, but 'the Son of the Highest', 1:32. What grace, what lowliness for the birth of the Son of God! Yet not one thing failed in the plan of God. The hymn writer could say, 'But of lowly birth cam'st Thou, Lord, on earth, and in great humility'. Throughout His life that same humility marked the Lord Jesus. Paul writes to the Philippians in Philippians 2:5 about that humble mind of the Lord Jesus, 'Let this mind be in you'. There is no room for pride in ourselves when we see His way in this world. The author Edersheim comments, 'On such a slender thread as the feeble throb of an infant life, the salvation of the world lay'. We need to pause and wonder at this holy scene, 'God sending His own Son'.

The action of the angelic announcement

We can now note, the action of the angelic announcement. The whole plan on the part of God was for the Lord Jesus to live as a man, live amongst men and be free to make known the love of God to men. He came to the people and for the blessing of all people. Thus the humble birth. But God wanted men to know of His coming although, again, not in the way man might have expected. The quietness of the night was suddenly broken by the blazing glory of the Lord shining round the shepherds as they rested with the sheep. An angel, sent as a direct emissary of God Himself, appeared. The angelic message must be accepted. The angel Gabriel had twice been used for a similar task, Luke 1:19, 26. Perhaps this was the same angel. What an impact the message of the angel had as he spoke of the birth to these shepherds. These men were of a lowly class and, because of their work, were unable to observe many of the religious ordinances. So they were not admitted to the Temple worship. Perhaps they were caring for the sheep needed for temple sacrifices. Shepherds, naturally, are men who have a heart to care for the sheep with which they are concerned. They watch for sickness or weakness. They encourage in difficulty. To such, God, who knew their hearts, revealed the wonderful news through an angel of 'God, sending His own Son'.

Writing to the Corinthian church Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:26-30, 'Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen...the weak things of the world...that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus...'

This dramatic visit brought news. Though not of any political matter, it was news of the highest import to a nation controlled by Rome. This was news from God Himself concerning His Son and of the greatest cheer to all who heard it. Never, in the annals of man since Adam had God visited His people in such a way. Is it any wonder that we can now understand that God loves each one and cares for each one of us? His coming into this world confirms His love. How often God would seek the lowly, the weary and the heavy laden for blessing!

Manner of the momentous message

So we can now try to glimpse the manner of the momentous message. What a message this was to fearful shepherds! 'Fear not:' said the angel, 'for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people'. How long the people had lived under the Roman yoke! How they desired to be free from oppression! But the message brought news of a very different kind. It was a message of great joy; great joy to the angel, it should have been great joy to man but more than all, it was great joy to God Himself. Now God was announcing through this angel the coming of 'a Saviour, Christ the Lord'. The master plan was commencing! This was really good news.

Not only was a Saviour needed but those who believed the Word of God had been looking for the promised 'Messiah'. How clearly God keeps His Word! He never promises without fulfilling His promise. We can rely on that.

This was also a message of hope. Listen to it, 'Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord', verse 11. Just imagine yourself there! The angel is announcing the coming of the Saviour, Christ the Lord. There seemed no hope for Israel. But this announcement went far beyond all that Israel looked for. It was an announcement for all people. The angel was announcing a Saviour for you and me. So we come to the whole purpose of 'God sending His own Son'. He sent His Son to be a Saviour who is now able to save from every sin I, and you, have committed. He gave Himself, suffered at Calvary, died to redeem us to God, shed His precious blood so that we might have eternal salvation. 'Hallelujah, what a Saviour'.

It was also a message of real power. This Saviour is none other than 'Christ the Lord.' What greater power could there be! We may question any act of an angel or archangel as saviour, but never that of the Son of God. God has sent His dearest and best for us all. We should acknowledge Him as Lord.

If the announcement itself was not enough, the angel also gave details of proof which could be obtained by visiting the child 'lying in the manger'. What wonderful consideration of God Himself to meet every doubt of man.

Anthem of Angelic Adoration

Lastly we should note – the Anthem of Angelic Adoration. When the announcement had been completed it was followed by a whole host of angels praising God. It must have been so amazing to them that the One whom they had known as Lord in the heavens and whose word they had always obeyed, had deigned to come in the human form of a Baby to this earth. They could not know the reasons but they could willingly join in the praise to God.

From the reading of the Scriptures this praise would seem to be quite spontaneous. To the angels, every act of God will demand praise. Yet when we look at the Scriptures it seems that the angels praise is in connection with all God's actions for man. Job speaks of the wonderful works of God in the creation of the world and the angels praise which accompanied this, Job 38:7. In Luke 15:10 we find there is 'joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth'. Yet how much more should that joy break forth from our own hearts when we know what we were and what the Lord has done for us! 'God, sending his own Son'.

We also know that the angels gave their praise to God quite unselfishly. They had gained nothing. But their praise was to a God they knew to be overflowing with mercy. This is truly heaven sent joy, joy in perfection.

The terms of their praise went further than 'glory to God'. They also desired peace on earth. Did they ever see this? This world has never been a centre of peace since Adam and Eve sinned. Sin has destroyed peace in this world. Peace can never prevail, as well we know. Peace is that harmony with a perfect Saviour which exists in our hearts through the work of the Cross. That cannot be seen in a world of sin. The angels saw that 'Christ the Lord' had come. How much opportunity there then was for true peace to become a reality in the world. Today the world knows no peace. It can only seek peace from hostility of man against man. It knows nothing of peace with God.

In addition the angels claim 'goodwill towards men', that is, God's good pleasure towards man. Certainly there was a display of that good pleasure from God in 'sending His own Son'. The full sense of peace and God's good pleasure can only be enjoyed when He is Saviour (having dealt with sin), and Lord, having control of what we do. He can be Lord of your life and you will know peace then. 'O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord'.

Lastly, we note that the praise of the angelic host was echoed by the shepherds. The shepherds had to act; they could do nothing else. Here were men who, like John after the resurrection, 'saw and believed'. They followed the directions given to them, they found the baby just as they were told and it filled them also with joy and praise. They could go on their way 'glorifying and praising God', verse 20.

In these days of the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ we need to find some time away from our busy lives to give our attention to the reason for the coming of the Lord. Perhaps we can join the hymn writer in saying:

*O Lord, in my heart there's a welcome for Thee.
Gladly I now would say,
Come in, blessed Saviour, my heart and my life
Henceforth would own Thy sway.
Long hast Thou waited and long knocked in vain
Outside my heart's closed door;
O cleanse me from sin, then, dear Lord, enter in
And dwell there for evermore.*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we gladly praise and worship Thee for coming into this world. May we ever remember, and gladly thank Thee for the work of the Cross, for which Thou didst come. We look forward to the moment when we shall see Thee and worship Thee evermore. Amen.

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