

An All-Important New Year's Resolution

In this series of articles from Luke 2, we've seen that the birth of Jesus Christ is not a random event in history. We saw initially that God has a sovereign plan which included a Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, issuing a decree for the purposes of taxation. Because of this, it was necessary for Joseph, who was of the family of David, to return, "...to his own town" of Bethlehem to register. While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, "she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn." In my most recent article in this series we were introduced to a nameless group of shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem. "An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were filled with fear.....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 among those with whom he is pleased!'"

So, then, along with God's sovereign plan to use a Roman Caesar, he also sent heavenly angels to appear to an unnamed group of lowly shepherds with the message of salvation: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Again, we can't help but notice an important *contrast*. Caesar had been given the title of *Augustus* meaning, "highly exalted or majestic one." And yet the heavenly angels declare that it is *God* who is truly the exalted one. It is *God* who deserves our exalted praise.....praise given, *even* by heavenly angels. We also don't want to miss the difference in the "peace" that each one brings. Even though Caesar has brought relative stability and external peace in the *Roman world*, God's plan is to bring *true peace throughout the world* to all those "with whom he is pleased!"

Going back to our text, we can see that God has already been at work in the hearts of these shepherds. "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which *the Lord* has made known to us." These men were aware that these angels were heavenly messengers sharing a message that ultimately comes from God. The shepherds rush to find Mary, Joseph and the child. And "they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child." Mary was left "pondering these things in her heart." This section ends with the shepherds going back "glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen..."

In our text from Luke 2:21 we see that, at the time of his circumcision when the baby is eight days old, he's given the name that the angel Gabriel gave Mary in Luke 1:31. The name "Jesus" is the Greek derivative of the Hebrew name Joshua which means "God is our salvation." Matthew records for us that the baby is given the name Jesus, "because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

As we conclude this series from Luke 2, allow me to share some points of practical application.

—We've been reminded of God's sovereignty over all the events of life. *He* has determined to work His will through governments, kings, presidents, and even ordinary people like us! We also saw the sharp contrast between earthly rulers like Caesar Augustus and the Heavenly King of

Kings and Lord of Lords. God is at work in this world of darkness. He is at work in the lives of Christians including our families and our churches! We can take comfort from that truth.

—With the angels' proclamation of "peace," we see that Jesus is the only one who can bring true peace to a world in turmoil. The apostle Paul said it this way in Romans 5:1. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" In a world of darkness that's clamoring for peace; in individual lives and families that are hurting and need peace; true peace only comes through salvation in Jesus Christ.

—We've seen that the good news of the gospel of Jesus should go out to everyone. No class of people is exempt. Not shepherds, not an insignificant Jewish couple; not even former thieves or Supreme Court judges. God determines who is being saved. It's not determined by our social status or education. When you and I think of those who need God's peace in Jesus Christ—and given the fact that there's nothing more important in life—just like the lowly shepherds who shared the message of Jesus, may all Christians everywhere resolve in this New Year and beyond to share the love of Jesus Christ in word and deed at every opportunity!

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