

CHRISTMAS EVE

Luke 2:1-21

Tonight, more than a billion people around the world will celebrate Christmas. Amid candlelight, carols and the smells of cedar and incense, the old story will unfold again: Gabriel's visitations, the journey to Bethlehem, the arrival of the baby in a stable, the glorious announcement to the shepherds in the night, the star in the East, the mission of the Magi. The story is familiar, and in a world of great religious diversity where there is great doubt and disbelief about all things biblical, it is not doubt or disbelief that you and I, who have gathered here, must typically guard against. The danger we face each year is simply familiarity: knowing the story all too well, so well in fact that we miss its wonder.

Some wonderful things happened on that night long ago, and from this passage in Luke's Gospel we can see that Christ's birth resulted in three things.

First, the birth of Christ resulted in praise. We can only speculate on how much the angels knew about what would take place when Christ was born, but there's no questioning that they were excited when it finally occurred. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Creator of the universe and the angels themselves, left the glories of heaven and made Himself completely vulnerable as He inhabited the womb of Mary. Here is their Creator, their Lord and Master who has submitted Himself to this lowly position.

While we sing Silent Night, we forget that Revelation 12 tells us this night was far from quite and peaceful. There was an all out

war being waged. Satan and all his demons vigorously opposed this birth. In fact, they had been working since the Garden of Eden to prevent the birth of Christ, and now that it has happened, and Christ has shown Himself to be the victor, the angels are singing great praises in plain sight of the shepherds.

Luke tells us that after the shepherds raced to town and saw for themselves the things the angels said, they too left the stable praising God. Imagine the scene as these men left that place with great joy in their hearts, knowing they had just seen the salvation of Israel, the Promised Messiah, the King of kings before their very eyes! They told everyone what they saw. It causes us to wonder on Christmas Eve, if the people who attend church and hear the wonderful story once again, will sing praises to God on their way home.

Why bring all this up tonight? Because it is important to understand why praise is so important in our life, and why the absence of it ought to be an alarm to us. We all praise what we delight in and enjoy. Has anyone ever known a fisherman who told no one about his big catch? Have we ever know a golfer who never talked about his game? What parent here tonight told no one when his or her child or grandchild was born? We praise those things and communicate to others our love for them because we delight in them.

The birth of Christ resulted in great praise from everyone involved because they delighted in the news they heard and the baby they saw. When they got a glimpse of the hand of God at work in their midst they rejoiced and praised God.

Second, the birth of Christ resulted in great news. The words “good tidings” mean good news. The Angels brought good news of great joy. It was great joy because it had been long anticipated. It was great joy because this was the Messiah, the

Savior. He was finally here!

The great joy didn't end with that. It had to do with the joy He would give to all who called on Him as their Lord and Savior. It brings us great joy to know that the all powerful and all knowing and ever present God of the universe was born into this world for us!

Not only was there good news of great joy, but this was good news concerning peace. When the apostle Paul wrote about Jesus and the gospel, he called it a gospel of peace. God is called the God of peace. Jesus is called the Prince of peace.

However, if the peace we're looking for is peace and quiet and a life without troubles, then Jesus is not for us. The Bible says that by nature, we are at odds with God. We're out of sorts with Him, but Jesus came to change all that. He came to remove that hostility and reconcile us to God. The greatest peace a person can have is to have peace with God: to know that he or she is right with the Creator and that when it is all said and done here on earth, that something even better awaits us.

How can we have peace with God? The Bible says that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, when we place our faith in Christ, that is, when we finally admit that we have no hopes of eternal life in and of ourselves, and that nothing we can do will earn us favor with God; when we quit trusting ourself and our ability to please Him, and simply trust that the sacrifice Jesus Christ made was for us; when we exercise faith in Christ, God does His part, that is, He gives us Christ's righteousness, we have the peace Christ came to offer.

Third, the birth of Christ resulted in glory. The life of Jesus Christ is an amazing testament to the glory of God, in that over and over, God put His name on the line by giving us exact

details about the life of Christ. Christ's birth is glorious in its wonder. The whole story of the incarnation is full of wonder.

When we think of all the wonders surrounding the birth of Christ: the angels, the shepherds, the star of Bethlehem, the journey of the Magi to see the Christ child; one cannot help but delight in the glory of God.

Tonight, the Holy Spirit is extending to each of us the opportunity to see with eyes of faith, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Do not miss the wonder of the birth of Christ this Holy night. His birth is the greatest news in the world and should lead us to praise God as we leave this sacred space tonight and return to our homes!

AMEN.