

## A Message of Peace and Joy Part 2

As we discussed this morning, Jesus came in the fullness of time. The time of salvation is now. Let us all rejoice at this season that the Royal Son, King Messiah, came and established His Kingdom. Let us be encouraged that millions around the world are coming to faith, embracing His rule, and being transformed from the dominion of darkness and death to the dominion of life and light. The Messiah was born of a virgin, not born through natural human means (Isaiah 7:14). He was rejected by religious leaders, but chosen by God (Psalm 118:22-24). His salvation comes solely from God, without human effort or human merit. How fitting is it that His Kingdom should be symbolized by a rock not hewn by human hands that grows into a mighty mountain that fills the Earth!

Jesus is the sure foundation of the Kingdom of God. His Empire, the mountain of Daniel's vision, is destined to fill the whole Earth and endure forever, just as Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream had promised. It has done that, for His Kingdom has encircled the globe, and it is found in every nation of the Earth.

Jesus the Messiah came in the fullness of time. He inaugurated the final era of human history, the ***"latter days"*** spoken of by Hebrew prophets (Hebrews 1:1) of antiquity. He brought this Earth's final age when salvation was proclaimed to all nations.

Jesus' Kingdom, that mountain growing from the uncut stone, is going forward. No one can stop it. Let us proclaim to Jew and Gentile alike that the hopes of the prophets are realized through the One born during the Roman Empire in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2).

Luke 2:7 [NKJV] says, ***"And she brought forth 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."***

Now Joseph was there alone with Mary. There were no other people there. Now the Son of God had come into this world. Shall there be no announcement given? Shall this event not be proclaimed? But nobody knew about it. Joseph and Mary would not tell anyone. They were far too just and meek to do that. They patiently waited for God to do His work. When no one knows and when humans can make no announcement, God sends His angels to announce the coming of His Son into this world. God sent His angel to shepherds who were out in the fields of Bethlehem to proclaim peace to them, saying in Luke 2:10 [NKJV], ***"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."***

When were these good tidings of great joy first proclaimed? They were given in the same night the Lord Jesus was born. For the angel said, ***"For there is born***

**to you this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:11 [NKJV]). It was a dark night, darker than what we are used to seeing with our city lights all around us. These shepherds were rough men, for that is how shepherds were considered to be: Untrustworthy, low class people. They were watching over their flocks as shepherds had been doing for thousands upon thousands of years. Watching against animals of prey. Some may have been sleeping while others took their turn to watch over the sheep. All was quiet, except for the sounds they usually heard at night.

Then suddenly a great light shone forth, driving the darkness away. An angel of the Lord came upon them, taking them by surprise. Before they realized what was happening the angel was there. “. . . **and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid**” (Luke 2:9 [NKJV]). There was suddenly this dazzling light before their eyes, and they had never seen or experienced anything like it before!

The shepherds looked up, and those who previously had been sleeping arose from their slumber, alert, but greatly fearful. They saw this brilliant light all around them and they were shocked. What is this? The text says “. . . **they were greatly afraid.**” That means they were terribly frightened. The glory of heavenly light shone all about them. In the literal darkness of the night the good tidings of the Lord came to those lowly shepherds.

But it was also a time of great spiritual darkness. The Pharisees had succeeded in keeping the people of God under an iron yoke of legalism. They laid burdens upon the people that even the Pharisees themselves could not even keep. The way to life and salvation was blocked off by the Jewish spiritual leaders, the very people who should have been shepherding the people to biblical truths, not burdens. Those shepherds were hearing the most joyful news they had ever heard in their whole life, the most glorious announcement ever uttered. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born! The long awaited Messiah had arrived, and peace and joy would reign in His Kingdom!

You know what happened next. Those shepherds, whose great fear had just turned into overwhelming joy, went with great haste to do as they had been commanded. They were obedient and they found the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, just as the angel had said. But they did not keep the good news to themselves, for they in turn went about proclaiming to all who would listen that the Savior of Israel was born!

Yes, the angel first appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of the Messiah, the King of the Jews, but the angel also included more than the Jews as beneficiaries of this most wondrous of gifts. The message of the angel was “**I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.**” The Messiah was not coming only for the sake of the Jewish people. No! He had come to bless the entire world, and to cleanse both Jews and Gentiles of their

sins. God Himself first proclaimed these good tidings to Adam and Eve. This was fulfillment of prophecy after prophecy, beginning way back in the Garden of Eden when God Himself promised, ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”*** (Genesis 3:15 [NKJV]). It was proclaimed to the men of Noah’s generation. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and he proclaimed God’s grace and justice and that salvation comes only in the Lord for 120 years while the ark was being built, but the people rejected that message and mocked Noah. It continued in the giving of the promise to Abraham when the Lord told that great patriarch in Genesis 12:3 [NKJV], ***“ . . . in you all the families of the Earth shall be blessed.”*** Later on, the other patriarchs and prophets of Israel took up this message of salvation, as well as the prophecies of the coming Messiah Who would free the people from their bondage of sin.

This gospel was proclaimed to all kinds of people, whether they were wicked or righteous people. It was brought to sinful and unworthy people. The good tidings of great joy were brought to King Ahaz of Judah, a wicked king, and to King Ahab from Israel. This gospel of salvation and deliverance was brought to King Zedekiah of Judah and so on. Many did not want to accept this gospel. They rejected it. But still the good tidings of great joy were proclaimed. King Nebuchadnezzar heard it. Even the men of Nineveh in the days of Jonah understood some aspects of this proclamation, and they repented.

The Messiah would be set as a Light for all nations. The Lord tells us in Isaiah 42:6 [NKJV], ***“I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a Light to the Gentiles.”*** God was speaking of Jesus here! This is exactly what Simeon understood in his song he sang in Luke 2:29-32 [NKJV]: ***29. “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; 30. for my eyes have seen Your salvation 31. which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32. a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”*** Because the Lord Jesus is a perfect Savior for all people, He has come also for you. Because He has come for sinners and you and I are sinners, Jesus came to this Earth. We need this Savior. He has come also for you and you. He has come for all of us. This gospel of salvation comes to all of us.

This evening Jesus looks at us and says, “These good tidings are also for you.”

How are these good tidings applied? We all belong to the lost, fallen race of humanity. Now God comes to us in His Son to offer you and I peace and joy. He offers forgiveness of all of our sins. God has sent an Ambassador from Heaven Who will not make us afraid, He came as Child lying in a manger, and died as a Man hanging from a cross. His Ambassador does not come with a helmet and with a stern look in His face. He does not come with a spear or a sword in His hand. He came bearing a white flag and it was in the hand of a Child, One

chosen out of the people. God offers us pardon through His Servant Who was meek and lowly. He simply preached the gospel and healed the sick. He let Himself be crucified because He knew it was the will of His Father for Him to suffer and pay the price for our sins. They could do with Him as they wanted. Through Him God let it be proclaimed: **“Be reconciled to God”** (2 Corinthians 5:20 [NKJV]).

The announcement of good news and great joy made by that angel includes all people everywhere, all nations in general. Jesus is the Savior Who came for all people, **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23 [NKJV]). We are all are sinners, and we all are perishing. All of us are in misery, and we all are dead in our trespasses and sins. We all need a Savior. And once you realize this and see the utter depravity of your sins, then this gift becomes very personal. The birth of Jesus is very personal because its need refers to you and me. It refers to all men everywhere. We are all in this together. We are in a boat without oars, sinking in a sea of sin. But God Himself threw us out a lifeline, and He sent Jesus to be born of a virgin in a stable. All men everywhere need to hear this good news of great joy first proclaimed the night of Jesus’ birth, for all must hear and all must repent. All people everywhere must see their need of a Savior, and know that only Jesus can provide the remedy to our sinful state and condition. All people are bowed down in sin and guilt. No one can save himself or herself. Romans 5:12 [NKJV] tells us, **“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”** We are lost! Only Jesus saves!

Yes, the scarlet thread of redemption began in the Garden of Eden and followed all the way through the prophets of God until Jesus was born, lived His life perfectly and without sin, becoming that perfect sacrifice without blemish, pleasing to God in order to satisfy His justice. He willingly took our sins with Him as he bore them on the cross of Calvary, pouring out His precious blood in our behalf. But in His dying all was not lost, although it appeared that way to His closest friends and companions, for Jesus would rise triumphantly on the third day, victorious over death, to reign as King of kings and Lord of Lords in the Kingdom of God.

We must not forget the Man as we gaze upon the Babe lying in the manger, but we cannot have the man hanging on the cross unless that Baby was first born in Bethlehem of Judea, either.

Following the birth of Jesus Christ, His message of peace and joy continued. Matthew records the arrival of the wise men from the East who followed the star of Bethlehem which pointed them to the Savior.

**1. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2. saying, “Where is He Who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His**

***star in the East and have come to worship Him.” 3. When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5. So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6. `But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.”***

***7. Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search diligently for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”***

***9. When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.***

***11. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:1-11 [NKJV])***

With the advent and influence of rationalistic thought that seeks to explain everything in the Bible through natural means, the acceptance of the miraculous is increasingly difficult to embrace as an explanation for biblical events, even among professed Christians. Nowhere does this seem to be so true as it does when addressing the case of the star of Bethlehem that announced the birth of Jesus Christ to these Gentile magi. All sorts of natural phenomena have been proposed to explain the occurrence of this star: It was Jupiter in Aries; it was Jupiter in Pisces; it was a supernova; it was Jupiter and Saturn in close proximity; it was a comet.

I, for one, in the case of the star of Bethlehem, am content to accept its appearance as falling within the realm of the miraculous, and leave it at that. As far as I can see from Matthew’s account, which is the only Gospel record which includes this event, the star is revealed only to these Gentile wise men. Herod’s men had not seen the star themselves, but they did understand that the King of the Jews was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem, in the city of David. Numbers 24:17 [NKJV], which is a Messianic prophesy, states, ***“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.”*** So when Herod and the people learned that these magi have seen the star announcing the birth of the King of the Jews, they were troubled (Matthew

2:3), because a new King would be a challenge to the authority of Herod, and most likely it would have resulted in war.

Throughout the history of God's direct interaction with people He has oftentimes appeared as a bright light of some kind. This is part of His "*glory.*" To the children of Israel He became a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). At the transfiguration of Jesus Christ His face shone with a light as bright as the sun and with garments as white as the light (Matthew 17:2). When the Lord appeared to Saul while on the road to Damascus, Saul was blinded by the light which the others with him saw as well (Acts 9:3). When God was imminently present, a bright light was associated with His presence. Additionally, God has chosen in times past to have selective revelation to certain individuals. Why not in the case of the magi, these Gentile men who were so intent on joyfully seeking the Lord in order to worship Him? May it be said of us, as it was of them, that we rejoice with exceeding great joy as we fall down to worship Him!

Later the Lord Jesus would stand on the Temple square and say, "***If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink***" (John 7:37 [NKJV]). Jesus invited the weary, the burdened to come to Him. This gospel is proclaimed to us. Nobody is excluded. Christ is a suitable Savior, a Savior of the whole world. His blood is sufficient for the sins of the whole world.

How do you receive these good tidings of great joy? Do you realize that this is indeed great joy? Do you believe that the true message of Jesus coming to this world is one of deliverance, one of redemption, one of love, and one of mercy? It is life in the midst of our death. It is salvation and it is far more blessed than you and I can imagine.

This gospel comes to us, and what a privilege that is! For although this gospel is preached many do not hear it for they do not wish to hear it. You may hear this proclamation. But how do we hear? Many have heard the good tidings of great joy, but they did not receive the message. They laid it down beside them and went on with life. They refused to bow before this King.

No Jesus means no joy and no peace, but if we know Jesus, then we know both joy and peace. This is not anything new or innovative. I have seen this little phrase floating around for years and so have many of you. But maybe there is more than just clever word play here. Maybe these words are wisdom in miniature. The absence of Jesus makes any consistent, enduring quality of God's peace or joy impossible. People without Jesus may experience fleeting moments of peace or joy, perhaps even seasons of life that are relatively peaceful or joyful. But a deep, abiding quality of God's peace and joy, the sort of peace and joy that remain and sustain despite the worst of circumstances, can that be achieved? No, without Jesus, that kind of peace and joy are nowhere to be found.