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THE BEST NEWS IN THE WORLD

Luke 2:8-11

By

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Special Christmas Message

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A wife said to her husband, "Shall we watch the six o'clock news and get indigestion or wait for the eleven o'clock and have insomnia?" One wag put it, "The evening news is where they begin with 'Good evening'--and then tell you why it isn't."

We live in a world filled with tragedy. If there's anything this hurting world desperately needs, it is good news. Not only the world in general, but individuals need good news because their lives are strewn with suffering and sorrow. The Christmas story as told by Luke offers not only good news, but the best news in the world: The angel told the shepherds, "I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

The best news in the world is that Christ the Lord
has come as the Savior for all.

Maybe you're thinking, "That's nice, but to be quite honest, it doesn't relate to the problems I'm facing. It may give people a brief feeling of hope and peace every Christmas, but then we have to get back to reality. To be honest, this story doesn't touch the pain I feel or the tragedy I struggle with on a daily basis."

But if you're thinking that, you don't understand the significance of this news as it relates to you personally. The news that "there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord," is absolutely the best news there is or ever could be.

1. This is the best news because it centers on the most unique Person in history.

"There has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (v. 11). I'll focus in a moment on the fact that He is the Savior. For now, consider that ...

A. Jesus is the Christ.

The word is Greek for “anointed one” (the Hebrew is “Messiah”). It means that Jesus is the one sent and anointed by God the Father for His mission of salvation. He was anointed as a *prophet* to preach the gospel, as *priest* to offer Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, and as *king* to reign. He alone is able to reconcile sinful people to God through His sinless life, sacrificial death and resurrection.

B. Jesus is the Lord.

The same word is used in verses 9, 22, and 23 to refer to Jehovah God. What a mystery, yet true: The Savior born in Bethlehem is God in human flesh. If He had been only a man, He could not have died for the sins of the human race. If He had been an angel, He could not have borne human sins. But He was Christ the Lord, God! God alone is great enough to deal with our sins.

C. Jesus is a man.

He was *born* in Bethlehem. He didn't descend from the sky, fully grown. He was conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb and went through the stages of development just like any other human baby. What a wonder! As a man, the representative Man, He could bear the sins of the human race.

As God in human flesh, Jesus Christ is unique in all the world. He alone qualifies to be the Savior of the world. If you doubt the uniqueness of Jesus, I invite you to read the Gospel accounts with an open heart, and you will be convinced that He can be nothing other than fully God and fully man united in one person. That makes the news He brings about salvation the best news in the world, “good news of a great joy.”

2. This is the best news because of the type of news it is.

A. It is the best news because it is the most important news in the world.

Jesus did not come as a nice man offering a new philosophy about life. He did not come as a great moral teacher, giving some interesting tips and helpful insights on how to live a happy life. He came as the *Savior*! The only people who need a Savior are those in great peril. Even though you may not be aware of it, without Jesus

as your Savior, you are lost, under God's judgment! If you die without Him as your Savior, you are eternally lost!

A number of years ago, a toddler fell down a narrow well. Her mother went looking for her as soon as she realized she was missing and was horrified to hear her daughter's voice coming from this deep, dark shaft. Fire fighters and other rescuers soon swarmed on the sight. News media arrived and for hours the attention of the nation was riveted on that field where desperate attempts were being made to rescue that little girl before it was too late.

That little girl didn't need anyone to give her some ideas on how to live a happy life. She was doomed if someone didn't save her from certain death. The most important news that desperate mother could hear in that situation was, "The rescuers have reached your daughter and she has been saved!"

You could have walked up to that mother as she anxiously awaited the outcome and told her, "I just heard on the evening news that it's going to be sunny and warmer tomorrow." Big deal! That's nice news, but it's not important when your child is lost down a deep well. You could have reported to her, "They just said on the news that the economy is on an upswing." Wonderful, but trivial compared to the only news that mattered to that mother. When someone is lost and within hours of death unless they are saved, the only news that matters is that a savior has come who can rescue that doomed person.

That's why the good news that a Savior has been born who is Christ the Lord is the best news in the world, because it deals with the most important issue of all, namely, where a person will spend eternity. Each person in this world is lost without the Savior. It is only a matter of time until they die without Christ and enter eternity under the judgment of a holy God. But in His mercy, God sent Jesus to save us from our sins. That is the most important news in the world!

B. It is the best news because it is true news.

Good news is only good if it is true. If I told you, "You've just inherited a million dollars," you would only regard it as good news if it was true. If I was just making it up, it isn't a cause for great joy.

The news that Jesus Christ is born as a Savior is nothing more than a sick joke if it is not true news. If it's just a nice legend that warms our hearts every Christmas, forget it! If it's not absolutely true, then it only offers false hope for eternity, when really there is none. But if it's true that Jesus Christ can save us from our sins so that we do not come under the judgment of a holy God, then we must believe and act on it.

The Christmas story is not a fairy tale. It happened in history: "Today in the city of David there has been born ..." (v. 11). It happened on a particular day in history in a geographic location that was prophesied centuries before. The shepherds went and saw a live human baby. We're not talking make-believe; we're talking true history.

Luke begins his gospel by telling us that he investigated everything carefully from the beginning (1:3). Most scholars think that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was Luke's direct source for the information in the birth narrative (2:19). To doubt the veracity of these events as recorded is to pit your word against that of a woman of integrity who was personally closer to these events than anyone else.

The historical accuracy of these events is further confirmed by the witness of the shepherds. There was no reason for them to fabricate a story about seeing the angels. Mass hallucinations of this sort are highly unlikely. In verse 20 we're told that the things the shepherds heard and saw were "just as had been told them."

The things they heard and saw--a common couple and their baby in a stable--were not the sort of things one would fabricate. If you were going to make up a story about the birth of the Savior, surely it would have sounded more like a fairy tale in a palace, with royal attendants and a baby that had a special glow around him. Instead we read of a common couple and a baby lying in a feeding trough.

Yes, there were miracles--the virgin conception of Jesus in Mary's womb; the angels appearing to the shepherds. But these events are presented matter-of-factly, not embellished in a way that sounds make-believe. Unless you rule out miracles because you

assume they can't happen, there is no reason to doubt these reliable eyewitness accounts.

The truth of the narrative is further confirmed by the fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Luke states that Jesus was born in the city of David. Micah (5:2) had prophesied 700 years before that Bethlehem would be the place of Messiah's birth. In Luke 1, Zacharias' prophecy shows how the birth of John the Baptist fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy and would be followed by the coming of Messiah. In Luke 2:29-32, Simeon recognizes that this child fulfills the Old Testament hope for Messiah. In Luke 3, Jesus' lineage is traced back through David, thus fulfilling God's promise to David 1,000 years before.

We live in a culture that has largely abandoned the notion of absolute truth. Truth, for most Americans (and for many who claim to be evangelical Christians), is whatever works for the individual. If Zen Buddhism works for someone, then it is true for him; if Christianity works for another, then it is true, too, even though the two systems are mutually contradictory. The notion of objective truth has been replaced with subjective experience.

But if Jesus was born in history to the virgin Mary, if He is the fulfillment of prophecies made hundreds of years before His birth, and if the events surrounding His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are verified by hundreds of reliable eyewitnesses, then you can't shrug it off as a nice story that is true for some but not true for others. Believing in Jesus as your Savior is not just one option among many. It's not something you can believe if it helps you to feel good inside, but if it doesn't work, you can discard.

If Jesus is who the prophets predicted, who the angels proclaimed, who He Himself claimed to be and verified by His miracles, then your eternal destiny depends on your response to Him.

C. It is the best news because it is timely news.

News isn't really exciting news if it's old or if it relates to something in the far-distant future. If you tell me that President Kennedy was shot, it doesn't greatly affect me, because that's old news. If you tell me that I will inherit a million dollars when I turn 70, that's great, but it's so far off that it doesn't help me much right now. The best news is news that relates to me right now.

Notice the words in the story that give a sense of urgency to this message to the shepherds: “today” (v. 11); “Let us go straight to Bethlehem” (v. 15); “they came in haste” (v. 16). The good news about Jesus the Savior is timely, urgent news because it comes to people who, like these shepherds, sit in darkness and the shadow of death (1:79). Last Sunday, Don Massey didn’t know that it would be his last time in church. He went home, began to shovel snow, had a heart attack, and died at age 34. If he had died outside of Christ, he would have been lost.

Scripture implores us, “Now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). You may not have tomorrow. It’s not something to put off for another day. It also promises, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31). As many Scriptures show, God saves you the instant you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior. You need not clean up your life first. You don’t have to attend classes to learn more. No matter how great a mess you’ve made of your life, if you will turn to Christ as your Savior now, He will save you now.

If you’re putting off trusting in Christ as your Savior, you don’t understand your true condition before God. To put it bluntly, if you’re outside of Christ, you’re terminal! Like the little girl trapped in the well, it’s just a matter of time until you die. Can you imagine her telling her rescuers, after all the effort they went through to reach her, “I think I’ll stay down here a while longer, thanks”? If you know you’re doomed, you’re greatly relieved when a rescuer arrives, and you grab the life line they throw to you.

Some people once told Jesus about some Galileans who had been ruthlessly murdered by Pilate. Jesus must have startled them when he responded, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Then He related a situation where some people were killed when a tower fell on them, and repeated His warning, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3-4). He meant that we all are like the little girl trapped in that well. We soon will die, and unless we repent before then, we come under God’s judgment and will perish. It is to doomed people that this urgent good news comes, “*Today* ... there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord.”

Thus the news about Jesus is the best news in the world because it centers on the most unique Person in history, Jesus the Savior, who is Christ the Lord; and, because of the type of news it is: important, true, and timely news. Finally,

3. This is the best news because it comes to all people.

The angel announces it as “good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people” (v. 10). No doubt these Jewish shepherds understood that to mean the Jewish people. But there is also no doubt that Luke, a Gentile, would have his readers know that “all the people” means that there is no one to whom this good news does not apply. It is a fact of history that the good news of Jesus applies to all and transforms all who will believe. Savage tribesmen have been converted into peaceful missionaries through believing the good news about Christ. Civilized, educated savages as well have been transformed through believing this simple good news.

Shepherds were a despised group in Israel. They were not considered fit to be witnesses in court. Their work rendered them ceremonially unclean. The fact that God chose to reveal the Savior first to these shepherds shows that God often chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He often picks common, working people--shepherds and fishermen--in whom to display His grace.

The fact that these shepherds were sitting in darkness is symbolic of the whole human race, lost in the darkness of sin (1:79). It reminds us that the good news about Christ is only for sinners. As He told the self-righteous Pharisees, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). The sudden bright light of God’s glory terrified the shepherds, as is always the case when sinners encounter the holy light of God’s presence. But the angel quickly relieved their fears and told them this incredibly good news. As John Newton put it in his classic hymn, “Amazing Grace,”

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

But the best part of this good news is not that it is for all people in general, but that it is *for you* personally: “there has been born *for you* a Savior” (v. 11). That means that this good news requires a personal response. Each person must respond as these shepherds did. They didn’t say, “Wow, that was really some experience, seeing all those angels,” and sit there the rest of the night with their sheep. They didn’t sit around discussing theology after the angel spoke to them. They didn’t say, “Thanks for the news, but we’ve always believed this” and stay where they were at.

No, they responded to the news by believing what God had revealed to them through the angel. Their faith was demonstrated by their going straight to Bethlehem to see it for themselves and then to return glorifying and praising God (vv. 15, 20). And what did they see? “Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger” (v. 16). No halo. No angels hovering there. Jesus didn’t look like a Savior. The place smelled like a barn, because that’s what it was. Very common, very simple. They could have scoffed and stumbled over it, as many do.

What about you? Will you scoff or stumble over the simple but profound message that the baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem, whose birth was announced by the angels to these simple shepherds, is Christ the Lord, a Savior born *for you*? That is absolutely the best news in the world, no matter what your situation in life. Jesus didn’t leave heaven and come to this earth and go through the suffering of the cross just to give you a boost or a few tips on how to have a happy life. He knew that *you* desperately need a *Savior*. He alone can save you from the penalty of God’s wrath because of your sins.

Conclusion

A sergeant was explaining to a group of soldiers about to make their first parachute jump what to do if their main chute did not open: “Snap back immediately into a tight body position. Then pull the rip cord of your reserve chute, and it will open, bringing you safely to the ground.”

A private nervously raised his hand. “What’s your question, soldier?” the sergeant called out.

“Sergeant, if my main parachute doesn’t open, how long do I have to pull my reserve?”

The sergeant looked directly into the young private’s eyes and replied earnestly, “The rest of your life, soldier. The rest of your life.” (*Reader’s Digest*, [2/82].)

How long do you have to respond to the good news that Christ the Lord has come as your Savior? The rest of your life! And since you’re already on your way down, but you don’t know how long before you hit the ground, I’d advise you not to delay!

Discussion Questions

1. Some say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, just so you believe.” Why is the content of faith crucial?
2. How can we know that there is such a thing as absolute truth? How can we know what that truth is?
3. Is it necessary to feel lost in order to get saved? How can we share the gospel with people who don’t know they’re lost?

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