

## THE SONGS OF CHRISTMAS: Angels' Song: Gloria In Excelsis Deo' Luke 2:1-14

### WELCOME:

Good morning, Trinity! It is so good to see you this morning. And I want to say a special welcome to those of you that are our guests. We are thrilled you have joined us today.

We love to connect with guests. You can help us know about your time with us today in a couple of different ways. You can text the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword to that number, you will be sent a link back that is safe to click on. It will take you to a short form. When you fill out and submit that form, it notifies us, and we look forward to the opportunity to connect with you.

Or you can stop by Guest Connect located in the main lobby just outside the worship center. We have a team of people that would love to meet you and give you a small gift as a token of thanks for you being here with us today. Even if you text in, stop by Guest Connect and pick up your gift. We are so glad you are here today.

### CHRISTMAS EVE ANNOUNCEMENT:

I am really looking forward to Tuesday evening. That is our Christmas Eve Candlelight services at 3 and 5pm. These services are my favorite of the entire year. Our services will feature a fun Christmas Carol sing along with none other than the one and only Chris Reese, Kids Storytime with Pop, Christmas themed worship music, a message of hope and encouragement, and then a moving candle lighting. I don't promise a whole lot, but I promise you it will be an awesome time together that you will not want to miss. So, gather your family and friends and join us for one of our Christmas Eve services.

Now, sources say that the 3pm will be packed. We will have overflow available in our newly renovated Student Center, but it's just not the same. You may want to consider coming to the 5pm service. It will be identical. It's going to be a ton of fun! I can't wait.

### SERIES INTRODUCTION:

We are in the middle of a teaching series that we've called, "The Songs of Christmas." And what we are doing is examining, studying, the original songs of

Christmas written over 2,000 years ago. They are songs written by Biblical characters that were a part of the very first Christmas and they are powerful.

So far, we've looked at Mary's Song, The Magnificat, and Zechariah's Song, The Benedictus. Today we are going to look at The Angel's Song, we actually sang it earlier in the service. It is called "Gloria in Excelsis Deo." And just like Mary and Zechariah's songs, that title is taken from the first words in the song, "Glory to God in the highest."

You know, glory is not the first word you think of when you think about Jesus' birth. We will get into that as we study another incredible Song of Christmas.

I want to invite you to turn with me to Luke chapter 2. We are going to look at verses 1 through 14 this morning as we see in the angel's song that Christmas proclaims God's glory, peace, and good news for all. That will serve as our outline this morning.

### **OPENING ILLUSTRATION: A Christmas Musical**

How many of you have watched the movie, "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever?" How many saw the original in 1983? Of course, the movie is based on the international best seller book written by Barbara Robinson in 1972. But it is an awesome show. If you have not seen it, you have to rent it on Amazon and watch it this Christmas with your family.

The show centers on the Herdmans, the worst kids in the history of the world, as the book opens. Not to spoil the movie, but the Herdmans terrorize everyone into making them the stars in the church's Christmas play, a musical. But they wind up hearing the true story behind Christmas and they are the ones that teach the entire community the true meaning of Christmas.

Well, in the opening pages of the Gospel of Luke, there is a musical taking place.<sup>ii</sup> It seems as though everyone has a song on their hearts. Mary is singing, Elizabeth is singing, Zechariah is singing, and now the angels are singing. And on Tuesday, at our Christmas Eve service, we are going to look at Simeon's Song, he's singing. And like the storyline of The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, they are singing about the true meaning of Christmas, and it is powerful and heartwarming.

Let's jump into the song the angel's sing on the very first Christmas.

**BACKGROUND:**

Luke 2 begins by giving us some background information that sets the stage for the songs that lead up to the song the angel's sing as an announcement of The Messiah. Now, while this will be very familiar to you, don't allow the familiarity of the story to cause you to lose sight of the context of what is happening. You follow along in your copy of God's Word. Luke 2, beginning in verse 1.

*1In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.* Caesar Augustus' actual name is Octavian. His grandmother was the sister to Julius Caesar. Julius adopted Octavian and became a joint ruler in 45 B.C. with Mark Antony. After decades of Civil War, Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra to become lone ruler. After his victory, he brought relative peace to the region and was touted as a savior. The Roman Senate gave him the name Caesar Augustus, which literally means majestic one.<sup>iii</sup> That's important to the story as we will see in a moment.

Verse 2. *2This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.* Now, I want to point something out to you here so that you are aware of it. Skeptics will point to this verse as an apparent error in the Bible and use it to try to discredit the entire Bible.<sup>iv</sup> History tells us that Quirinius did not govern Syria until 6 or 7 AD. Well, Jesus was born in approximately 3 BC. Luke places Jesus' birth when Quirinius was governor. What's going on here?

Well, the term translated "first" can also be, and is most often, translated as before.<sup>v</sup> So, more than likely what Luke is saying is that this census was the one that was decreed **before** Quirinius became governor and thereby making sense of the timeline. I just want you to be aware of that, so you are armed if you come across someone using that to try to discredit the Bible. And the way in which Luke dates this passage indicates that this was not a "once upon a time" kind of story. No, it was actual and historical and there is a time tied to it.

Verse 3. *3And all went to be registered, each to his own town.* The Romans probably didn't require traveling to their hometown, but because that was important to the Jews, each one went there.

Verse 4. *4And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who*

*was with child.* Nazareth to Bethlehem is about a 90-mile walk. That is quite a walk for a lady who is almost full-term.

Verse 6. *6And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.* Now, let me set the scene here because our nativity sets don't do it justice. More than likely, Jesus is born in a cave. The inn was full, so they found a cave.<sup>vi</sup>

Swaddling cloths would have been strips of cloth tightly wrapped around the baby because it was believed that the early stages of being tightly wrapped would help baby's bones to grow straight.<sup>vii</sup>

A manger in a cave would not have been made out of wood like our nativity set depict. It was a large stone with the top carved into a bowl. And people that would stay in these caves would use that to feed their animals.<sup>viii</sup> So, that's the setting of Jesus' birth.

Then the camera pans to the countryside in verse 8. Let's read the remainder of the passage. *8And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* We will dive into this is just a moment, but a little background about angels.

There are 287 verses in the Bible about angels, yet we know very little about them. For example, we only know the names of 3 angels. We do know that there were a certain number of angels God created.<sup>ix</sup> A third of them fell with Satan. Angels are depicted as doing God's bidding and speak on behalf of Him. They are angelic beings that carry with them a fraction of God's glory as the shepherds in the field are both blinded by their light and overcome with fear. And these representatives of God sing praise to Him in light of Jesus' birth. And there are three things that I want to point out in light of the angel's song.

**MESSAGE:**

The first thing we see in the angel's song is that Christmas proclaims...

**1) God's Glory.**

The first line of the song in verse 14 is, *"**14** Glory to God in the highest."* But when you consider the scene surrounding Jesus' birth, glory is not the first word that comes to mind. Humility is more of the word that comes to mind. But everything surrounding the birth of Christ is glorious. I say that for a few reasons.

First, God is glorious by nature of who He is. At just the sight of the angels, the shepherds were struck with fear, that is awe and reverence. The glory of the angels, only a fraction of God's glory, dispels the darkness. In Revelation, heaven is pictured as not needing light because the glory of God is bright enough to light all of heaven. And solely based on the nature of who God is, the angels ascribe the highest glory to God.

But the second way that the angel's song testifies to the glory of God is by coming to lowly shepherds keeping their sheep. Why does this reveal God's glory?

Well, shepherds were a despised class of people. Their work was not glorious. And because they would constantly be dirty, they were not allowed to participate in Jewish ceremonial laws. And because they were considered to be unclean, their testimony in courts was dismissed. Plus, these shepherds were the lowest of the lowly, working the graveyard shift. But it is to these lowly men that the angels give the highest theology, Emmanuel, God in flesh appearing.<sup>x</sup>

The glory of God is most manifest in the weakness of humanity. It is the apostle Paul that most notably recorded this truth. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, he says, *"**9** But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."* It is in the weakness of the shepherds that the glory of God is revealed and entrusted.

The third reason that the angels' song proclaims God's glory is in revealing God's power. Think about the backdrop of Jesus' birth again. Caesar is touted as being in control and a census is issued to claim more wealth and power. And while Caesar thinks he is ruling, God is overruling.

See, God is controlling the circumstances to fulfill His promise of a Messiah. God is arranging everything behind the scenes. The issuing of a census at just the right time, got Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, at just the right time, to fulfill a long-foretold prophecy.

Micah 5:2 says, *"**2** But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."* For Jesus to fulfill the prophecy here, He had to be born in Bethlehem. And God used the, quote, powerful Caesar, as simply a pawn to accomplish His work. This pointing to the Sovereignty of God, which ascribed the highest glory Him.

The angels' song demonstrates that Christmas proclaims God's Glory. Secondly, Christmas proclaims...

**2) Peace.**

The angels sing, *"**14** Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **peace.**"* This also is odd given the chaos of the day. Let me explain.

Caesar Augustus has taken over as lone ruler of Rome after a tumultuous time. Civil war, violence, destruction, brutality, and immorality. To regain control and a perceived peace, Caesar instituted what is known as the Pax Romana, translated as the Peace of Rome.<sup>xi</sup>

Now, this was a false peace because of the Roman understanding of peace. Either submit to their rule or you will be punished.<sup>xii</sup> It was peace but enforced by brutality and might.

There was also constructed during this time the Ara Pacis [Aira-Pack-us], and altar of Peace, dedicated to the Pax Romana.<sup>xiii</sup> People would go there to seek peace because their lives were so chaotic.

A census had been decreed to discover the number of men available for amassing a military? For what? Enforcing Roman law and bringing others under their rule. Also to get as much tax as possible out of people in order to fund the Roman military. The first century world was anything but peaceful.

Compare that to the Hebrew equivalent for "peace." It is the Hebrew word "Shalom." And that word literally means "completeness, welfare, safety,"<sup>xiv</sup> and,

“everything as God intends it to be.”<sup>xv</sup> This is not the picture that the setting of Jesus’ birth displays. Yet the angels sing “peace on earth.” How can they sing that?

Well, the angels witnessed how sin had broken God’s original good and perfect design. And in Jesus, God was bringing a way to redeem the brokenness of the world. The Messiah was called the “Prince of Peace” in the Old Testament text. And here He is in the birth of Jesus. And in the Christ-child, born in the midst of chaos, was a proclamation that God is restoring peace in the person of peace.

In John 16:33, Jesus says, *“<sup>33</sup>I have said these things to you, that in me you may have **peace**. **In the world you will have tribulation**. [You will experience the brokenness of the world.] **But take heart; I have overcome the world.**”* True and lasting peace is not something that is brought by force, but by relationship with Jesus.

Perhaps you can relate. If you are like me, your life is anything but peaceful. It’s chaotic. Especially this time of year. But the one thing that can bring you peace is to focus on the true meaning of Christmas, the coming of the Prince of Peace, Jesus.

So, we see in the angels’ song that Christmas proclaims God’s glory, and peace. Thirdly, finally, Christmas proclaims...

### 3) Good News for All.

Not a part of the song itself, but a part of the angelic announcement, good news for all people is proclaimed. Look at verse 10 of Luke 2. The angel said to the shepherds, *“**Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.**”* A couple of things of note here.

First, the term translated, “good news,” is the Greek word, euangellon.<sup>xvi</sup> It literally means to bring good news. Now, what’s interesting about this word is that while we take it to mean preaching the gospel, and that is what that means, the Romans used this word to announce victory.

Through the brutal victory of the Roman empire, quote, “good news” of the victory was announced. The problem with that is that Roman good news wasn’t good news for everyone. The news of Roman victory was bad news for whom they defeated. And it was further bad news to the Jews awaiting liberation from

Roman oppression. But the angels’ announcement is good news for everyone, not just Romans.<sup>xvii</sup> Why? Well, it is the announcement that peace has come and is available to everyone, not just the Romans enforcing the fake peace.

And furthermore, the proclamation of the angel is that the good news of a Messiah’s birth is news even for those outside of Judaism. See, the Jews thought that because the Messiah was to come from their lineage that salvation would be made available just for them. However, as we see in the institution of the Church in Acts 2, that salvation would be for the gentiles as well. Salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ is news for all the people.

And the Good News is made even better to know that no human could be a Savior, but only God. Caesar may have been called a savior, but true salvation cannot be offered in a governmental leader, but only in God Himself.

We see yet another powerful song of Christmas. The angels’ song declares that Christmas proclaims God’s glory, true and last peace, and good news for all.

### **CONCLUSION:**

One more thought here as this song applies to us. The shepherds out in the countryside keeping watch over the sheep were doing so because those sheep had a destiny. They were caring for the Temple’s sheep that would ultimately be sacrificed for the sin of the people. And isn’t it ironic that God would appear to the men, caring for the sacrificial lambs, to announce that the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world has come.

You know, God makes this same announcement to us. Romans 1 says that no one has an excuse of not knowing the good news of the Gospel of Jesus. That we have sinned, but God loved us, and sent His Son for us, to die for us, that we might be saved. Have you responded to the good news of Jesus? Have you been born again unto a relationship with Jesus? If not, today can be the day of salvation for you.

Maybe you are in need of peace. You need prayer to sense God’s peace. Maybe it’s a relationship, a situation, a job, or even health that has you without peace. Let us pray with you and over you that you may know the Prince of Peace is with you this Christmas. [PRAY]

## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation for this message: Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Holman Reference: Nashville, 2018; David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary: Luke 2 – Jesus' Birth and Boyhood*, accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-2/>; John MacArthur, *Testimonies to the Incarnation*, sermon published by Grace to You, December 20, 2015, accessed online: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-427/testimonies-to-the-incarnation>; Skip Heitzig, *Expound: Luke 2*, message taught at Calvary Albuquerque, July 16, 2014, accessed online: <https://connectwithskip.com/teachings/#/series/186/sermon/2489>; Brad Gray, *Proclamations of Christmas: Angel's Song*, published by Walking The Text, accessed online: <https://walkingthetext.com/episode-183-proclamations-of-christmas-pt-3-angels-song/>.

<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from Brad Nelson, *Proclamations of Christmas: Zechariah's Song*, published by Walking The Text, accessed online: <https://walkingthetext.com/episode-182-proclamations-of-christmas-pt-2-zechariahs-song/>.

<sup>iii</sup> Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary*.

<sup>iv</sup> Heitzig.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary*.

<sup>vii</sup> Heitzig.

<sup>viii</sup> Guzik.

<sup>ix</sup> Gray.

<sup>x</sup> Anyabwile, page 43.

<sup>xi</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax\\_Romana#:~:text=The%20Pax%20Romana%20\(Latin%20for,hegemonic%20power%2C%20and%20regional%20expansion.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_Romana#:~:text=The%20Pax%20Romana%20(Latin%20for,hegemonic%20power%2C%20and%20regional%20expansion.)

<sup>xii</sup> Gray.

<sup>xiii</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ara\\_Pacis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ara_Pacis).

<sup>xiv</sup> Strong's Concordance, 7965. אֱלֹהִים.

<sup>xv</sup> Gray.

<sup>xvi</sup> Strong's Concordance, 2097. Ευαγγελιζό.

<sup>xvii</sup> Gray.