

§ 011

THE PRAISE OF THE ANGELS AND THE HOMAGE OF THE SHEPHERDS

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And 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!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. ¹

Luke 2:8-20

Introduction

1. It is not unlikely that the *shepherds* were pasturing flocks destined for the temple sacrifices.
 - Flocks were supposed to be kept only in the wilderness (Mishnah, *Baba Kamma* 7:7; Talmud, *Baba Kamma* 79b–80a), and a rabbinic rule provides that any animal found between Jerusalem and a spot near Bethlehem must be presumed to be a sacrificial victim (Mishnah, *Shekalim* 7:4).
 - The same rule speaks of finding Passover offerings within thirty days of that feast, i.e. in February.
2. Since flocks might thus be in the fields in winter the traditional date for the birth of Jesus is not ruled out.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (Lk 2:8-20). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

- Luke says nothing about the actual date and it remains quite unknown.²
3. As a class shepherds had a bad reputation.
 - The nature of their calling kept them from observing the ceremonial law which meant so much to religious people.
 - More regrettable was their unfortunate habit of confusing 'mine' with 'thine' as they moved about the country.
 - They were considered unreliable and were not allowed to give testimony in the law-courts (Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 25b).
 4. There is no reason for thinking that Luke's shepherds were other than devout men, else why would God have given them such a privilege?
 - But they did come from a despised class.³

Commentary

1. *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field.* There may be several reasons for the special role of the shepherds in the events of this unique night.
 - Among the occupations, shepherding had a lowly place.⁴
 - Shepherds were considered untrustworthy and their work made them ceremonially unclean.
 - Thus the most obvious implication is that the gospel first came to the _____⁵ of Jesus' day.
 - This would accord with a recurring emphasis in Luke.

² That the shepherds were out in the fields at night does not preclude a December date, as the winter in Judea was mild. But, of course, the text says nothing about the time of year. The traditional date for the Nativity was set, long after the event, to coincide with a pagan festival, thus demonstrating that the "Sol Invictus," the "Unconquerable Sun," had indeed been conquered. December 25 was widely celebrated as the date of Jesus' birth by the end of the fourth century. January 6 was also an important date in the early church, held by many as the occasion of the arrival of the wise men and known as Epiphany. (See Frank E. Gaebelien, "The Most Beautiful Story Ever Told," CT 23 [1979]: 161–214 [18–20].) Morris (*Luke*, p. 84) suggests that, if the birth did take place in winter, the shepherds may have been raising sheep for sacrifice at Passover a few months later. [Leifeld, W.L. (1984). *Luke*. In F.E. Gaebelien (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (F.E. Gaebelien, Ed.) (845). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.]

³ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (101). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ Strack and Billerbeck: *Kommentar vein Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrash*, 2:114

⁵ social outcasts

2. Moreover, it may be significant that in the Lord's instructions to Nathan about giving David the covenant the Lord reminds David, who was to become Messiah's ancestor, that he was called from the shepherd's life (2 Sam 7:8).
 - Finally, in both testaments shepherds symbolize those who care for God's people, including the Lord himself (Ps 23:1; Isa 40:11; Jer 23:14; Heb 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2).
 - The shepherds of Luke 2 may, therefore, symbolize all the _____⁶ people who have joyfully received the gospel and have become in various ways pastors to others.⁷

3. *An angel of the Lord appeared to them.* The angel first reassures his hearers (cf. 1:13, 30).
 - He goes on to explain that he has come with good and joyful news (the verb translated *bring ... good news* was later to be used characteristically of the good news of the gospel; it had been used in LXX of the deliverance of God's people, e.g. Isa. 40:9; 52:7; cf. also Isa. 61:1).
 - *Good news* translates the Greek verb *euangelizō*, which means *to preach the good news*.
 - The noun (*euangelion*) is translated by the word "gospel."
 - This verb is found eleven times in the Gospels, and ten of these are found in Luke.⁸
 - Thus early the note of *great joy* is struck.⁹

4. *That will be for all the people.* *The people (laos)* normally means 'the people of Israel', not people in general.
 - The news of the Savior would mean much to people in every land, but it came in the first instance to God's ancient people.

5. *A Savior, who is Christ the Lord.* Jesus' role as Savior is qualified by the title "Christ" and "Lord."¹⁰

⁶ ordinary

⁷ Leifeld, W.L. (1984). Luke. In F.E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (F.E. Gaebelin, Ed.) (845). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

LXX The Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament).

⁸ Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (108). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁹ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (102). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁰ This verse gives a brief summary of the gospel message and provides the reason for the statement found in the previous verse. It tells of the birth of a Savior. This title is applied to God in Luke 1:47, but its use here of Jesus is prepared for by 1:69 (cf. Acts 5:31; 13:23). There is a sense in which this statement is not only Christological in nature (in what it says about Mary's child) but also anthropological, for it says that the

- The *Savior* (a title used of Jesus here only in the Synoptic Gospels; John has it once) is called *Christ the Lord*.
 - This renders a Greek expression found nowhere else in the New Testament and meaning, literally, ‘Christ Lord’.
 - Perhaps we should understand it as ‘Christ and Lord’ (cf. Acts 2:36; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11).
 - The term *Christ* is Greek for ‘Anointed one’, and *Messiah* is our transliteration of a Hebrew term with a similar meaning.
 - Anointing was for special service like that of a priest or a king. But the Jews expected that one day God would send a very special deliverer.
 - He would be not simply ‘an’ anointed, but ‘the’ anointed, the *Messiah*.
 - It is this one whom the angel announces.
 - *Lord* is used in the Septuagint of God (it is used in other ways as well, but it is the translation of the name Yahweh).
 - *Christ the Lord* thus describes the child in the highest possible terms.¹¹
6. *This will be a sign for you.* The angel completed his message by giving the shepherds *a sign*.
- This would help them _____¹² the baby, but it would also attest the truth of the angel’s words.
 - In Bethlehem that night there might be one or two babies *wrapped in swaddling clothes*, but surely only one *lying in a manger*.¹³

Gospel’s readers, both past and present, are the kind of people who need a Savior! This verse also states that the child’s name is *Christ*, for *Christ* functions here primarily as an identifying name. Although “*Christ*” is actually a title (Acts 5:42; cf. also Acts 17:3), this verse reveals that the title was so closely identified with Jesus of Nazareth that it soon became part of his name—Jesus Christ. The reader has been prepared for the use of this title by 1:32–33, 69; 2:4. This Savior is also the Lord. See comments on 1:43; cf. also 1:17, 76. (In 2:26 we have the expression “*Lord’s Christ*,” but here in 2:11 the title “*Lord*” clearly refers to Jesus rather than God.) Although the realization of the authority of the titles “*Christ*” and “*Lord*” would await the resurrection (Acts 2:36), Jesus at his birth was already both *Christ* and *Lord*, for the one born to Mary in Bethlehem is the same person who is raised in glory and given the authority to be *Lord* and *Christ*. ... No doubt for Luke’s readers this description of the child would have far greater theological meaning than for its original hearers. These three titles also appear together in Phil 3:20. [Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (108). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.]

¹¹ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (102). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

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¹³ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New

7. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.* The message ended, there suddenly appeared a multitude of other angels praising God.
 - They are called a *host*, i.e. 'army', paradoxically an army that announces peace, as Bengel sagely remarks.
8. *Saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*¹⁴ They speak of *Glory to God*, a necessary preliminary to real peace on earth.¹⁵
 - The angelic song is in effect a proclamation of the results of the birth of Jesus rather than a hymn of praise directly addressed to God.¹⁶
9. *They went with haste.* The shepherds hurried to see for themselves.

Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (102). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁴ "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!*" is not merely a matter of exegesis of the meaning of the Greek, but is first of all one of text criticism. Does the Angelic Hymn close with εὐδοκία or εὐδοκίας?

The genitive case, which is the more difficult reading, is supported by the oldest representatives of the Alexandrian and the Western groups of witnesses. The rise of the nominative reading can be explained either as an amelioration of the sense or as a palaeographical oversight (at the end of a line εὐδοκίας would differ from εὐδοκία only by the presence of the smallest possible lunar sigma, little more than a point, for which it might have been taken — thus εὐδοκία^ο).

The meaning seems to be, not that divine peace can be bestowed only where human good will is already present, but that at the birth of the Saviour God's peace rests on those whom he has chosen in accord with his good pleasure.² Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls it was sometimes argued that "men of [God's] good pleasure" is an unusual, if not impossible, expression in Hebrew. Now, however, that equivalent expressions have turned up in Hebrew³ in several Qumran Hymns ("the sons of his [God's] good pleasure," 1 QH iv.32 f.; xi.9; and "the elect of his [God's] good pleasure," viii.6), it can be regarded as a genuinely Semitic construction in a section of Luke (chaps. 1 and 2) characterized by Semitizing constructions. [Metzger, B.M., & United Bible Societies. (1994). *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament, second edition a companion volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th rev. ed.)* (111). London; New York: United Bible Societies.]

¹⁵ There are problems of both text and translation in the expression rendered *among men with whom he is pleased* (more literally 'among men of (his) good pleasure'). But RSV is right over against 'peace, good will toward men' (AV), a reading supported by many late MSS. The angels are saying that God will bring peace 'for men on whom his favour rests' (NEB). There is an emphasis on God, not man. It is those whom God chooses, rather than those who choose God, of whom the angels speak. *Peace*, of course, means peace between God and people, the healing of the estrangement caused by human evil.¹⁵ [Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (102). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.]

¹⁶ Marshall, I.H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke: A commentary on the Greek text*. Includes indexes. The New international Greek testament commentary (111). Exeter [Eng.: Paternoster Press.

- It is not easy to convey in English the sense of _____¹⁷ imparted by the particle *dē*, but Leaney tries with, 'Come on, let us go ...'
- They found all as the angel had said, with the baby *lying in a manger* (the third mention of this humble article).
- Luke records the wonder with which everybody received the news of the reason for their coming.¹⁸

10. *All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.* While Luke does not state what results the initial surprise at the words of the shepherds had in the case of the other listeners, he makes express mention of the fact that Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

- The story told by the shepherds concerning the tidings and the appearance and song of the celestial beings was to her yet another link in the golden chain of miraculous happenings that had commenced on the day when the angel Gabriel brought her the news that she would become the mother of the Messiah.
- Every one of these events made her realize better the divine glory of her Son.¹⁹

11. *Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.* This along with Luke 2:51 indicates that Mary did not fully understand the implications of all that happened to her.²⁰

¹⁷ urgency

¹⁸ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (103). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁹ An extremely superficial objection is raised here by some critics (e.g. Luce, *in loc.*), to the effect that if Mary had really lived through these occurrences and taken them to heart she would not have acted as described in Mark 3:20–35. Was Mary, then, a perfect being who immediately, perfectly and permanently grasped the full significance of the angels' tidings, the supernatural conception, and so forth? Would she not, as a fallible mortal, also sometimes through the years (as was likewise the case with John the Baptist) have times of doubt and uncertainty? This 19th verse is a clear indication that it was Mary herself who in later years related this story (probably to Luke himself, or else to some person or group of persons standing in intimate relation to her, who afterwards communicated it to Luke in speech or writing). Dr. W. Sanday (*Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 193; *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, 266.) and many more of the most sober and learned expositors of the Scriptures agree that Luke received from Mary, directly or indirectly, practically all the data related by him in the first two chapters of the Gospel. He had splendid opportunities of acquiring such first-hand information. [Geldenhuis, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (114). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]

²⁰ Compare Dan 4:28 (LXX) and Gen 37:11, where this word or a similar one is used to describe a person who is puzzled by what they have heard but keeps it in mind in order to understand, often with divine help, its meaning.

- Luke did not specify exactly what the object of this pondering was.
- Was it the titles Savior-Christ-Lord? Was it the nature of what had taken place in her life?
- Probably Luke intended his readers to think of all that had happened in Luke 1:5ff., i.e., how God had visited his people through the miraculous conceptions of John the Baptist and Jesus and the significance of all this.^{21 22}

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Conclusion

1. The doxology “Glory to God in the highest” is the climax of the story.
 - Its two parts relate to heaven and to earth respectively.
 - In Luke’s account of the Triumphal Entry, the crowds say, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest” (19:38).
 - In Ephesians 3:21, Paul ascribes glory to God, not now in the heavens, but “in the church and in Christ Jesus.”
2. Verse 14b is best translated as in NIV: “and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”
 - Luke emphasizes the work of Christ on earth.
 - (See also Jesus’ own declaration that “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” — Luke 5:24; Matt 9:6; Mark 2:10.)
3. The “peace” here is that which the Messiah brings (cf. 1:79).
 - Those whom Jesus healed or forgave on the basis of their faith could “go in peace” (7:50; 8:48).

²¹ It has been argued that the Lukan portrayal of these events cannot be historical because of the lack of understanding portrayed in Mark 3:21, but it would have been remarkable indeed for Mary not to have been confused about the significance of all that had happened to her. No doubt she recognized her child’s divine calling and destiny; but exactly what that entailed was not known to her, and she may at times have had the same kinds of questions that John the Baptist had in Luke 7:18–23. Earlier commentators held that this reference to Mary’s inner thoughts (cf. also 2:51) indicated that Mary was the source for this account. [Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (110). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.]

²² Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (110). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
NIV The New International Version

- Those on whom God's "favor" (*eudokia*) rests are the "little children" (10:21) to whom God graciously reveals truth according to his "good pleasure" (the only other use of *eudokia* in the Gospels, except for the parallel in Matt 11:26).²³

4. The birth of the Christ bears the richest significance to the world—it brings peace, real peace on earth.

- When Christ was born, some form of external peace (the "pax Romana") did prevail.
- But, as was declared by Epictetus, the pagan thinker of the first century, "while the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief and envy.
- He cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace".

5. Through the coming of Christ, however, as the angels sing, true peace will come on earth.

- Here in the first place is meant peace with God and a peace given by God through Christ.
- And when the inner harmony is there because the human soul has peace with its Lord, peace also spontaneously comes about in mutual relations between human beings.
- It is the work of Christ to bring peace into all human relations—in man's relation to God, to himself (his own feelings, desires, and the like), to his life's circumstances (calamities and trials), and to his fellow-men.
- According as Christ is honored and is given admission to human lives, to that extent the peace on earth, which He came to bring, becomes a glorious actuality.
- In so far as people live outside Him, the earth remains in a state of disorder and strife without real peace.²⁴

²³ Leifeld, W.L. (1984). Luke. In F.E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (F.E. Gaebelin, Ed.) (846). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²⁴ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (112). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.