

~ The Birth of Christ ~ Luke 2:8-20

The Bible has recorded for mankind many wonderful events of history. One of those events is the birth of Jesus found in Matthew and Luke. In both of these Gospels, the wonderful 2000-year-old story of Jesus' birth is provided for us as evidence of God fulfilling His promises and how those witnessing the birth were inspired to greater faith.

For as great an inspiration as this story is, few people seem to retain the spirit of Christmas throughout the year. Has the spirit of the story been lost with all of the present day's commercialization and worldly allurements?

Matthew's account of the story includes three travelers. They were "wise men from the east" who studied the prophecies of Daniel and knew of the foretold timing of the Messiah. And, when seeing the "star in the east", they proceeded to find and give royal gifts to the new born king. Their task did not end in Bethlehem; the "wise men" returned home to the once great Kingdom of Babylon, to give a witness to the remaining exiled Jews of the fulfilment of Daniel's prediction. The Luke account includes different witnesses, the shepherds, who played another key part to spread the announcement of Christ's birth.

The purpose for Jesus' birth had its origins before the creation of Adam. God foreknew of Adam's disobedience and the need for a redeemer. "Who [the Logos or Christ Jesus] verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (Revelation 13:8). And with the fall of Adam, God made His first promise that Eve's seed (Jesus) would bruise the head of Satan. (Genesis 3:15) This promise was expanded in Old Testament prophecies and pictures for nearly four thousand years.

The timing of Christ's birth was given to Israel while in captivity when the angel Gabriel informed Daniel: "Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince *shall be* seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof *shall be* with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make *it* desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." (Daniel 9:25-27) History has shown that Daniel's 70 weeks began in 454 BC and ended in 36 AD with Jesus' death on the cross at the age of 33 in the middle of the prophetic 70th week.

The story of Christ's birth begins with Joseph and Mary, both of the tribe of Judah and of the line of King David, traveling to Bethlehem, the city of David, as the result of Caesar Augustus' decree of a census/taxation. "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:6,7) Jesus' entire earthly life was a humble one of which his birth was the beginning of humbleness.

How was the birth announcement made and to whom? "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid." Luke 2:8,9

The angels did not reveal the birth to King Herod, or to the religious Jewish leaders. No, God chose the lowly shepherds amidst the hills of Bethlehem. That night the shepherds had only the light of their fire, the faint lights of the stars, and the city's lights below to fill their night sky until the glory of the angels appeared before them.

The shepherds' fear was soon overcome by an angelic message. "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10,11

The long sought promise to Adam and Eve was answered by the angels with the birth of a savior in the foretold city of Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2) The meek and humble shepherds were ready and willing to receive the message realizing that the announcement was not only for them, not only for Israel, but for all mankind. Their faith in the promises gave them hope for peace and life which the Law could not do because of their imperfection to keep a perfect Law. (Hebrews 7:19; 10:1) The birth was a reassurance of God's promise to Abraham that through the Savior, the seed of Abraham, Israel would bless the world – those alive and those in their graves. Genesis 22:15-18

By the grace of God, in order to be the Savior, Jesus tasted death for every man. He gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time – to ALL. (He-

brews 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:6.) The testimony, however, is equally as necessary to the salvation of the sinner as the fact that Christ gave himself a ransom for all. The favor of salvation will not be forced upon any; but the testimony that it has been provided for every man, on condition of his accepting the favor upon God's terms, is to be given to every man, for his acceptance or rejection. And though millions of the race for whom Christ died have gone down to the grave without such testimony, still the fact remains that the testimony shall be given ***in due time*** – which due time, to all such, must be after their awakening from death.

And to this agree the words of the Lord: "The hour is coming in which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and shall come forth; they that have done good [who during the present life have come into judgment and who have passed their trial successfully], unto the resurrection of life [the full reward of the faithful. Such will be the overcoming Church]: and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:25-29.) That is, the latter class will come forth from the grave to have the truth testified to them then, for their acceptance or rejection; and their final judgment of worthiness or unworthiness of life will be based upon their course under trial after the truth has been testified to them – in the Millennial age. Thus the angel of the Lord preached the good tidings of the restitution of all things to the shepherds on the plain of Bethlehem.

"And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:12) How would the shepherds find this child where there would have been newborn babes in the homes and in the lodgings for the travelers? The angels gave them

a sign: the newborn would be wrapped in a small blanket lying in a manger, a stone animal feed-trough. His birth was a very humble beginning much like the shepherd king, David.

To accentuate the announcement, there was added "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." This shows how the angels of God are interested in the affairs of men, and how they sympathize with us and rejoice over our prosperity. And this reminds us of other statements to the effect that there is joy in heaven among the angels over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:7); and again that they are earnest students of the plan for human salvation; and that they are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation. (1 Peter 1:12; Hebrews 1:14.) Thus we see the angels to be creatures of God, full of loving benevolence even toward a fallen race, and esteeming it a privilege to serve the heirs of this salvation, although they know, as they studiously look into God's plan, that some of this fallen race are by and by to be highly exalted, even above the angels who never sinned. (Hebrews 2:9; Romans 6:5)

Thus we see their humble recognition of the right of the Creator to do what He will with His own, and their cheerful and joyful acquiescence in His perfect Will, which they know to be determined by his unerring wisdom and his fathomless love. Oh! what universal joy will prevail when the whole family of God in heaven and in earth is brought into fullest harmony under the headship of Jehovah's Anointed.

"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let

us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." (Luke 2:15,16)

God in His wisdom sought hearts having a teachable attitude. The shepherds recognized the angels and their message as from the Lord. Their fears were being allayed, their hopes were revived and their faith was increased. They felt that they must go at once and see this which had come to pass. Their joy might have been similar to the delight felt by the two disciples traveling to Emmaus when the risen Jesus revealed himself to them. Luke 24:28-35

"And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." Luke 2:17,18

The shepherds, seeing and believing, could not, did not keep the wonderful Good News to themselves. They immediately set forth to share their experience with the angels and their observance of the babe in the manger to every hearing ear. The news must have reverberated from house to house, from street to street and from town to town. The people's response might have been "Hallelujah! Our Savior is born."

"But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart." (Luke 2:19) The story of the angels visiting the shepherds might have brought her mind back to the angel Gabriel visiting Daniel many years before telling of a savior or of her own encounter nine months earlier. (Luke 1:26) She might have remembered "... Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his

name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:30-33) She might have recalled her words, "...My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name." Luke 1:46-49

"And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them." (Luke 2:20) For over 2000 years the present-day shepherds, those who love the story of Jesus' birth and God's plan for mankind's salvation, have been echoing the message of the angels, have been reliving the first shepherds' travels to find the babe in a manger, have shared the meaning of the spirit of Christmas in their hearts and actions. Have you not heard their song "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."? (Luke 2:14)

Not only have Christians been looking back and remembering Christ's birth, many of them have been looking forward to Christ's promised return. The angels spoke of Peace on Earth, yet there has not been any lasting peace on Earth for over six thousand years. Yes, there is a degree of peace between God and faithful believers. Yet, the hatred of brother against brother began with Cain against his brother Abel; it still remains after Christ's death.

Is this story complete? For all who pray for God's Will to be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven, they longingly await Christ's parousia (presence and not

his coming). (Matthew 24:3, 27, 37; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13) His return will be observed and heard by the humble shepherds in their fields of Christian life in their "due time". They are reviewing the prophecies of Daniel and counting the days. They are seeing the signs of his presence. And when all shall see Christ's return, the end result will bring Peace on Earth and Good Will toward all Men. ◇

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