

# What Good News?

Micah 5:1-5a, Luke 2:1-21 (ESV)

October 10, 2004

“Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.” What good news is this? What good news could there be for shepherds in the field? What good news could there be for all the people? What good news could there be which might reach all the way to us? Yes, the angel said, “Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.” But the question arises: What good news? What good news? What good news could there be for us?

We live in what seem to us to be strange times. I am not sure how unlike they are from other hard times, but they seem strange to us. We are at war with a largely non-geographic enemy, or at least a non-national enemy. We are under attack for our faith, or at least for not having another faith. All that we hold dear is at stake: gospel, freedom, democracy. Terror stalks the night. The nation hovers on the edge of an election, not sure which way to go. Young men and women prepare for war. Some whom we know are already there. Then, in the midst of it all there steals upon the ear the distant song of angels: “Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.” But still the question arises: What good news? What good news could there be for us?

Presumably the good news is not financial. Presumably it is not political. Surely it is not military. At the same time, it cannot be philosophical or ideological. Nor can it be merely social. These all represent broad areas of human concern, but they do not get at the root of the problem. They do not address our most serious concerns. They do not touch our deepest wound. But what does? What good news is there for us?

The answer is short but comprehensive: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Here is the “good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.” “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” The weight of the world is carried in these few words: Savior, Christ, and Lord. What good news do they carry for us?

First, in the birth, in the person, and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we have our Savior. He is not merely a teacher. He is not simply a moral guide. He is not an example. He is not a counselor. He is not an assistant. He is our Savior! He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. If we could save ourselves, we would not need saving, or at least we would not need a savior. But he is our Savior! He saves us. He rescues us. He delivers us. He redeems us. According to the

angel—and we remember that the word “angel” means messenger, in this case a messenger from God, speaking the word of God and bringing good news from God—according to the angel, the Savior of humanity, the Savior of the world, your Savior and mine, was born in Bethlehem, was born on earth, was born into humanity. This is good news.

Second, our Savior is also Christ. The Savior of the world is also the long-expected, long-awaited Christ. The word is familiar to us, but it must have been shocking in this first announcement. “Christ” is the Greek word, used in the New Testament, for the Hebrew word “Messiah,” used in the Old Testament. They both mean “the Anointed One.” It has connotations of royalty. Just as we inaugurate presidents, just as some countries crown kings, so did ancient Israel anoint their kings. The Anointed One was king of Israel. But when this announcement was made to the shepherds, Israel did not have a king of their own. They had not had a king for centuries. In fact, they suffered much under alien kings who served under the Roman emperor. The shepherds probably looked over their shoulders to make sure no Roman soldiers were near to hear such treasonous news.

And yet, there had been an ancient promise. God had told King David that his dynasty would rule forever. And Bethlehem was the city of David! The prophets, such as Micah, had spoken the word of the Lord that his Anointed One would come. Could it be? Could it possibly be? A thousand years after King David, when hope had worn thin and expectation had vanished, could it be that the Anointed One was to come? And now more than that, the Christ who was to come would be not only King of Israel but also Savior of the world. This is good news. Thanks be to God!

Third, our Savior who is Christ is also the Lord. This is the most astounding of all. For the Savior to come was wonderful beyond comprehension. For the Savior to be the Christ was a blessing beyond all deserving. But for the Savior and Christ also to be the Lord, also to be God Almighty, was absolutely unanticipated, unheard of, unimaginable, unexpected, never dreamed of, and incomprehensible. God is God, and we are not God.

And yet, by the choice, initiative, love, and wisdom of God, God came to us as one of us, and nothing has been the same ever since. Our Savior is not just any savior. Our Savior is not a military general or a political liberator. Moreover, our Savior is not only the Christ of ancient hope, the Anointed One sent from God. Our Savior and Christ is also the Lord God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them. Now, that is good news! That is hope beyond hope! That is reason to rejoice. Though all the world be against us, the creator of the world is with us, and the Lord of the universe is for us. Nothing can count against that. Not the emperor. Not the cold of night. Not the threat of terror. Nothing.

“Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” An implication of this good news is, of course, the reality that we need good news. Outward appearances to the contrary, we are poor beggars in the night. Apart from this announcement that we have a Savior, we might not even have realized that we needed to be saved. But now that we have been told, it would be foolish and fatal to deny our neediness. Now that the Christ has come, it would be insane to turn away from Bethlehem. Now that the Lord is with us, it would be the height of ingratitude, that sin of sins, to try to go our own way.

What is the bad news to which the good news of Christ is the answer? We who were created to be God-centered have fallen instead into being self-centered. And once having started down that road, there is nothing we can do, *ourselves*, by our own efforts, to become un-self-centered. It is simply impossible. And so we wither and die.

And yet, God has come to us in Christ our Savior to recenter us upon the Lord God Almighty. God does this at Bethlehem. “This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” God does this at Golgotha, too. And God does this at the empty tomb. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Christ is our salvation. Thus do we thrive and live. Only thus do we thrive and live. The gone-wrongness of our existence is undone by the One who is greater than ourselves. Thanks be to God!

It took the church centuries of reflection to articulate this good news of Savior, Christ, and Lord in what we know as the Nicene Creed:

We believe in...one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
Very God of Very God,  
begotten, not made,  
being of one substance with the Father;  
by whom all things were made;  
who for us men, and for our salvation,  
came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.

Here is the heart of the Christian faith, without which there is no Christian faith: Jesus, the son of Mary, is the Lord God Almighty in the flesh. God is with us. This

good news stands over against anything else that can be said about us or to us. God is with us in Jesus Christ. This is not a general truth. This is a particular reality. Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, about two-thousand years ago, a real human being. God is with us in Jesus Christ alone. There are no other saviors. There are many pretenders. But there are no other saviors. Do not be deceived.

“Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” What does this now ancient good news have to do with us? We have already said that we have a Savior. And we have already said that we have been saved from ourselves, from our self-centeredness. By extension, we can understand that we have been saved from sin, death, and evil.

But what we have not said yet is that we have been saved to and for God. This is extraordinarily important. We are saved to and for God. We are not saved to ourselves! We are saved from ourselves. If we were saved to ourselves, that would be more of the same. We are saved to and for God. We are not saved for ourselves! We are saved from ourselves. If we were saved for ourselves, that would be more of the same. We are saved to and for God. The point of salvation is God, not us. A lot of people miss that point, and when they miss that point, they miss the main point. The point of salvation is God, not us. That is to say, we are not saved to or for ourselves. We are saved to and for God. That is good news.

Why are we saved to and for God? To what end? For what purpose? For what reason? For the glory of God, of course! For the glory of God! That is the greatest goal of all. That is the reason we live. That is the reason we breathe. That is the reason we worship. That is the reason we are saved. Do you remember the parting words of the angels? “Glory to God in the highest!” “Glory to God in the highest!” “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” And that is good news.

If it had been for the glory of humanity, it would have been announced to Caesar Augustus in Rome. As it turns out, by his decree for a census, Augustus unwittingly served God’s larger purposes. If it had been for the glory of humanity, it could have happened in Jerusalem. But it happened in tiny Bethlehem. And it was announced to shepherds, of all people. At least they were unpretentious enough to get the message. After visiting the manger, after seeing their Lord and our Lord, “the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” They got it. And so does this good news call us, too, back to our proper lives of praise and thanksgiving.

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What good news? “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who  
is Christ the Lord.” This is good news! So let us sing with the angels:

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace  
among those with whom he is pleased! Amen.*

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