



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V25 N51 December 24, 2023

FROM THE REALMS OF GLORY

"Announcing Joy"

Luke 2:8-20

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Joy

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

John 15:11



How is the "inner contentment" of joy best expressed?

Joy can be expressed in many different ways. Perhaps the most readily accessible avenue for the expression of joy is through the medium of music. Psalm 98:4 exclaims, "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music!" The Psalm continues in 98:8-9, "Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth." Music and singing are highly compatible with joy. Not all music is joyful, but it is such a short distance between exuberant joy and expressive musicianship. Both often feed each other. A heart full of joy is a heart that wants to sing.

For over 280 years Christians and even non-Christians have been captivated with the joyful musical masterpiece of George Fredric Handel's moving oratorio, *MESSIAH*. The work takes selected texts of the English Authorized Version of Bible and sets them to beautiful Baroque music to tell the story of Jesus Christ through Old Testament prophecies and New Testament depictions of Jesus' birth, ministry, death and resurrection. Through a combination of expressive solo vocal arias, powerful group choral anthems, and masterful orchestration, Handel reflected the glory of the story of Jesus through a meditative reflection upon key biblical passages depicting the timeless story of the good news of God's greatest gift of love for the world.

MESSIAH has been associated with the Christmas season due to the large number of pieces dedicated to the predictions of Jesus coming from Isaiah and other OT prophets and the birth narrative of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke. The entire English text of *MESSIAH* was collected and arranged by Charles Jennens. Jennings called it a "Scripture Collection" and passed this libretto on to Handel for him to compose a musical score for the biblical text. Handel started work on the music in August of 1741 and completed over 260 pages of music in a total of 24 days. Handel often wrote in fits of inspiration, frequently skipping food or sleep while composing. The first performance of *MESSIAH* was held in April of 1742 in Dublin,

Ireland for the celebration of Easter. The first performance was at a music hall and not a church. Proceeds from the performance were dedicated to the support of local charities including a hospital and a society supporting those suffering from debtors' prisons. Later, Handel would perform *MESSIAH* repeatedly in London.

The Christmas section of *MESSIAH* focuses exclusively on Luke 2:8-14. Five different movements highlight the message of the angel to the shepherds with a beautiful soprano solo about the great joy coming to shepherds because of the child who was born for them. The Advent movements climax with the glorious choral recitation of the heavenly host found in Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men" (KJV). Many churches, cities and concert halls today host performances of *MESSIAH*, often in December. Perhaps some of the most famous pieces from *MESSIAH* are the moving "Hallelujah Chorus" and the powerful conclusion "Worthy is the Lamb." Legend has it that in one London performance of *MESSIAH*, King George II was so moved during the "Hallelujah Chorus" that he stood up in honor of the piece's theme and the power of the music. Because the King stood, the audience around him followed suit. Today it is customary in every performance of *MESSIAH* for the audience to stand during the "Hallelujah Chorus."

Classical music may not move you like it did King George II, but there should be some style of music in praise of Jesus that should move you to joyful praise. Listen for songs of worship at church, on your radio or streaming service that move you to express joy. Sing with these as best you can to express your appreciation for your Savior. The angels of heaven are loudly calling out God's praises (Rev. 5:12). Figuratively, the rivers are clapping their hands (Ps. 98:8). Don't be left behind. Express joy to God through music and praise. Do so at Christmas and at all other times of the year! Your inner joy needs to come out! Music and singing are not the only ways to express joy but they may be "just the ticket" for you experiencing and expressing joy.

Read Luke 2:8-20

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. [NIV]

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline the word "shepherds" in the passage.
- Double underline each word or phrase describing angelic beings in the passage.
- Draw a box around the phrase showing the results of the good news mentioned in v. 10.
- Put brackets around the phrase that shows the contents of the good news in v. 11.
- Draw an arrow from "heaven" in v. 14 to what was to be expressed there as a result of the good news.
- Draw an arrow from "earth" in v. 14 to what was to be expressed there as a result of the good news.
- Circle the word "Bethlehem" in v. 15.
- Draw a box around the result of the shepherds' message in v. 18.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. What did the angels do in this story related to Jesus' birth?
2. What contrast do you see between angels and shepherds in this story?
3. What were the contents of the message the angels delivered to the shepherds?
4. What did the shepherds learn from the angels about the newborn child?
5. Even though shepherds heard from angels, to whom did the shepherds attribute this sign?
6. Contrast the response of the shepherds to the angel's message (v. 16) to the responses of Zechariah and Mary to angelic messages (Lk 1: 18, 34).
7. What did the shepherds do after they saw the baby in Bethlehem?
8. What was the response of those who heard the testimony of the shepherds?
9. How would have Luke heard about this story of angels and shepherds?
10. What amazes you the most about this story?

Commentary On The Text

Angels appear in the Gospel of Luke five times. In the birth narratives, angels appear three times, once to Zachariah, once to Mary and once to the shepherds. The remaining two appearances take place in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before crucifixion and at the garden tomb after the resurrection. In the third and final appearance of angels in the birth narratives, a single angel announced the actual birth of Jesus and then was joined by a multitude of angels whose praise for God rose to a crashing crescendo. The birth of the Savior was heaven's angelic anthem of praise. Lowly, earthly shepherds couldn't help but continue to repeat the heavenly refrain after they had seen all that the angel had told them they would find in Bethlehem. The joy of angels in heaven is sourced in the Savior (Luke 2:10-14). Jesus said angels rejoice when sinners are saved (Lk. 15:10). If angels "get loud" about the Lamb of God who was slain (Rev. 5:12), then we as lowly humans would do well to follow suite and enthusiastically praise our Lord.

Luke 2:8-20 begins and ends with shepherds, with the message of angels sandwiched in between the actions of these earth-dwellers. The shepherds are described as "living out" in the fields and "keeping watch" over their flocks at night (Lk. 2:8). This depiction is one of quiet tranquility. Keeping watch did involve an alertness to protect against predators, but this "night patrol" was most likely a silent affair which allowed the majority of those not on watch to sleep. Angels abruptly interrupted this slumber. The shepherds returned hours later, wide awake with witness and praise for all that they had heard and seen (Lk. 2:17, 20). The account that began with slumber ended with exuberant exultation.

The appearance of an angel to the shepherds was shocking. The angel of the Lord is described as "suddenly standing" in front of the shepherds. The sounds of sudden movements in the dark can heighten reflexive fear. This shocking and sudden appearance of the angel was escalated with the "glory of the Lord" shining around them. "The verb ἐφίστημι, 'to stand near, approach', is Lucan (2:38; 4:39; 10:40; 20:1; 21:34; 24:4; Acts, 11x; 1 Thes. 5:3; 2 Tim. 4:2, 6); it may perhaps convey the sense of a sudden appearance. The appearance of the angel is accompanied by the blazing glory which marks the presence of the divine" (I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, 109). While Zechariah and Mary were frightened by the appearing of Gabriel, the shepherds experienced the added feature of angelic appearances in the dark with God's blazing glory. The angel's words, "Do not be afraid," could not be more timely.

The angel's message to the shepherds was cause for great joy (Lk. 2:10-12). That very day, a child was born who would be Savior, Messiah and Lord. The combination of these three titles for Jesus is unique to Luke and suggests that this child was already in his birth the fulfillment of predictions made by ancient prophets. The

allusions to the city of David, Savior, Messiah and Lord cast this announcement as royal. And yet this baby was born for even lowly shepherds. In contrast to things regal, the sign to the shepherds was to find a helpless, newborn lying in the most humble of locations – a live-stock's feeding trough. Shepherds would be out of place in a palace or temple. But shepherds would know their way around stables and mangers.

If this angelic messenger and message were not enough for lowly shepherds, Luke then records that "Suddenly" a great company of the heavenly host appeared and began praising God with chants of God's glory in heaven and peace upon earth! "In the Old Testament the 'heavenly host' also refers to the armies of heaven who surround God for worship and to help his people (1 Kgs 22:19; Jer 19:13). The contrast with Rome is found at every point of this passage. Rome's armies controlled the world, but with the sword, not the 'good news,' and they prided themselves on having established the *Pax Romana*, their version of peace, which meant doing exactly what the Romans tell you to do. Here the angelic hymn began with 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,' the reminder that true splendor and glory is not an earthly thing centered on the so-called glory of Caesar but a heavenly reality centered on the Most High God (*hypsistos*, 1:32, 35, 76). Here the same term is 'the highest heaven,' the habitation of the Most High God" (Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries, 69).

And like that, the horde of angels disappeared and the night returned with its darkness. Luke recorded an instant obedience from the shepherds. "Even though the priest, Zechariah, and the mother-to-be of Jesus, Mary, initially resisted the divine message, these lowly shepherds resolve immediately to heed the command implicit in the angelic canticle to go to find this baby of whom the angels sing (2:12). Thus, these shepherds, whose vocation for the authorial audience at first conjures up an image of a despised and potentially violent group, by their actions align themselves with the more positive portrait of the good shepherd, an image already evoked by the mention of the city of David, who was, of course, himself a shepherd before becoming king" (Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament, 54).

Why would God choose for his angels to speak first to lowly shepherds to announce the arrival of his royal Son? Why would God choose a humble maiden to give birth to the Messiah in the lowly environs of a stable? Why a beginning so humble? "What is amazing is not that the child is wrapped up, but who the child is and where he is. One hardly expects to find Messiah in an animal room. One would expect a palace. But the Messiah's humble and common origins fit nicely with the task that he shall bear for all his people, including especially the humble, hungry, and poor (Lk. 1:50-53). Messiah's life will contain an unusual bookend for a king, since he was born in an animal room and will die with robbers" (Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1-9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 219).

Word Studies/Notes

v. 8 *shepherds* “Nomadic shepherds who were separated from human communities and culture for long periods of time were inevitably subjected to suspicion and scorn. Popular lore accused them of failing to observe the difference between ‘mine’ and ‘thine.’ Because they could prey on lonely travelers, they were often suspected of practicing ‘the craft of robbers’ (*Qidd.* 4:14). Their prolonged absences – and ill-repute – disqualified them from being legal witnesses. A third-century rabbi, commenting on Ps 23, said, ‘There is no more despised occupation in the world than that of shepherds. Along with gamblers and tax collectors, herdsmen were regularly listed among despised trades by Mishnah and Talmud’” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, 74).

v. 8 *fields* “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” (Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 101).

v. 9 *angel of the Lord* “Probably a reference to the personal servant of God already known to us, Gabriel (1:11, 19, 26), but here he is joined by ‘a multitude of the heavenly host’ (2:13). Given the respect assigned earlier to the Jerusalem temple and particularly to its sanctuary as the axis mundi – the meeting place between the heavenly and the earthly, the divine and the human – this appearance of the divine glory is remarkable. God’s glory, normally associated with the temple, is now manifest on a farm!” (Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 131).

v. 11 *Savior* “This verse gives a brief summary of the gospel message and provides the reason for the statement found in the previous verse. ... 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 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” (Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary, 108).

v. 11 *Lord* “The angel’s message to the shepherds stands in this whole episode in contrast to the edict of Caesar Augustus to the whole world. The essential message is that in God’s providence a child is born who is to become for human history Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Born in the time of the *Pax Augusta* and in the town of David, the Palestinian shepherds are invited to recognize in him cause of great joy for them and all the people” (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 28, Anchor Yale Bible, 396).

v. 12 *manger* “In large estates, farmers would build costly stables in caves; in farmhouses, ‘the feeding place for cattle would often be in the room where the family lived.’ Stables would also be located ‘in the ground-floor of the house or in annexes, or feeding-troughs outside, e.g., in the farm-yard.’ The manger was probably made of stone (perhaps chiseled into the wall of a cave or the face of a rock) or of mud; wood was too expensive” (François Bovon and Helmut Koester, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, Hermeneia – a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, 89).

v. 14 *Glory* “The first line ascribes δόξα [Glory] to God in heaven where he dwells (ἐν ὑψίστοις, 19:38; cf. 1:78). In 2:9 δόξα [glory] meant the bright appearance of glorious light, indicative of the presence of God. Here the reference could be to the visible majesty of God, which is based ultimately on the graciousness of his character. The phrase will then be a recognition that glory and majesty belong to God, so that as a whole it forms an ascription of praise to him. Men and angels glorify God by recognizing that he already possesses glory and worshipping him for it; in this sense they increase his glory” (Marshall, 111).

v. 14 *favor rests* “...a technical phrase in first-century Judaism for God’s elect, those on whom God has poured out his favor. In this context, God’s elect would be the God-fearers mentioned in the *Magnificat* (1:50–53), those who will respond to Jesus’ coming. Thus, to argue that the term should be seen as broad, almost universal, in light of 2:10 fails to note its technical force. It also fails to note the difference between those whom Jesus comes for (all people; 2:10) and those who benefit from his coming (men of his good pleasure; 2:14). In summary, the angelic praise contains two basic ideas: (1) the heavens rejoice and praise God for salvation’s outworking and (2) the people to whom God draws near through Jesus will experience the harmony and benefits that God bestows on his own” (Bock, 220).

v. 19 *pondered* “No doubt she recognized her child’s divine calling and destiny; but exactly what that entailed was not known to her. ... 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, 110).

4

APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Angels announced the coming of Jesus as Savior, Messiah and Lord. The first recipients of this announcement enthusiastically praised God and shared this good news. Go and do likewise.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

What's something you remember as a child that's lost today? For me it's landlines, fax machines and the dreaded rope climb in gym (look that one up and cry for us older folks; elementary PE trauma is real). This time of year, I always think about going Christmas caroling. I have such fond memories of going house to house singing Christmas carols to our neighbors. We'd ring the doorbell, sing "Jingle Bells" or "O Holy Night" and drop a gift of yummy treats. Kids would run circles around their parents and the adults would generally be of good cheer (which really meant the kids wouldn't get into too much trouble for being, well, kids). Inevitably we'd collect a few people along the way and the festive mood would continue through the evening with a beloved cup of hot cocoa topped with a dollop of whipped cream or marshmallows. I don't think too many people go caroling anymore and that makes me sad. Imagine the anticipation of waiting for the door to open or the fun we had as we sang ridiculously off key. What would your reaction be when opening your door to a whole group of friends singing "Joy to the World" or "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"? Let's bring this back! If a great company of the heavenly host gathered to praise God to the shepherds, shouldn't we do the same? Help your kids understand we don't need to be within the confines of the church walls to praise God. Gather your home group and spread the good news of great joy to those in your neighborhood this Christmas season!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Luke 2:1-21

1. Who appeared to the shepherds and what did they say?
2. Where did the angels go when they left?
3. What did the shepherds do after the angels left?

What Do You Think?

What is the good news and why would this news cause great joy?

What Do You Do?

The angels spent time praising God. Gather your family or home group and go Christmas caroling in the neighborhood.

CORE COMPETENCY: Joy

I am happy on the inside no matter what's happening on the outside.

MEMORY VERSE: Isaiah 9:6

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- I completed my Bible Study
- I memorized this week's verse
- I brought my Bible to church
- I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME _____

GRADE _____

PARENT SIGNATURE _____

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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