

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Greatest Story Ever Told
Pastor Dave Scherrer - December 7, 2014

The greatest story ever told!

That is the title of a movie on the life of Christ, with an all-star cast including a cameo part by John Wayne as the Roman Centurion who crucified Christ. It was in this movie that the line - "Surely this was the son of God little sister" – became so famous. But really the story of Christ's life is the greatest story ever told. In our study of the life of Christ we get to slow down for a few weeks and focus on one of the great moments in this greatest story - Jesus' birth. The story doesn't start in the first century, it actually start from the beginning of time and we see hints of it in Genesis 2 and outright predicted some 700 years before Christ by the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 9:6-7a

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end.

We sing this account don't we when we sing Handel's "Messiah". It is all very grand stuff! Let's look at this story again and it is a very familiar story. So familiar it is difficult to find something new in it perhaps. I'm not sure we always have to find something new in a familiar verse or passage, there is much to celebrate in what we already know of the account. But humor me, take out a pen and make a note when you run into something new or have questions or something that simply sticks out:

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And 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, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And 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.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. 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. 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." 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 among those with whom he is pleased!"

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." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

(Did you find something?)

This is not just a little cute story of a little baby and an innocent young mother

This is all a very real and very specific account of a very wonderful event! This is history not mythology.

“For unto you is born this day. . .”(verse 11). It happened on a day. A day in history. Not a day in some mythological, imaginary story, but a day when “Caesar Augustus was the emperor of Rome and Quirinius was governor of Syria.” It was a day planned in eternity before the creation of the world. Indeed the whole universe — with untold light-years of space and billions of galaxies — was created and made glorious for this day and what it means for human history. I think sometimes we are so used to the story that we forget the magnitude of the event. The heavenly host knew what was up. This incarnation was the greatest event matched only in weight of glory by the resurrection. This story is bigger than creation itself. This is the beginning of the greatest story ever told! And what an amazing event. Let’s look at Colossians 1:15-20 just to get locked in a bit more;

Colossians 1:16

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and *for him.*”

The perfect time appointed by God before the foundation of the world. “For unto you is born *this day!*” And infinite perfection became flesh. Man this is a great story line!

It was a real place in space and time not a mythical middle earth or fantasy Mt. Olympus:

*“ . . . in the city of David.”*It happened in a city. Not in Narnia. Not in Middle Earth. Not in a galaxy far far away. It happened in a city about 7,800 miles from Denver. The city still exists today. I know. I was recently there. This city is real. The city’s name is Bethlehem (Luke 2:4, “Joseph also went up from Galilee . . . to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem.”) Bethlehem, six miles from Jerusalem. Bethlehem, the city where Jesse lived, the father of David, the great king of Israel. It happened in a city. A real city, just like Sterling or Thornton or Arvada.

And a real child was the main attraction in the narrative - a child with real *Titles*

Savior, Messiah, Lord

“ . . . a Savior . . . ”“For unto you is born this day in the city of David *a Savior.*” A Savior. If you have ever sinned against God you need a Savior. The angel said to Joseph, “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). That’s why Jesus said, “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Therefore, a Savior was born.

“ . . . who is Christ . . . ”“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, *who is Christ.*” Christ is the English for *Christos*, which means “anointed one,” which is the meaning of “Messiah”. This is the one long-predicted, long-awaited, the one anointed above all others. The final anointed King. The final anointed Prophet. The final anointed Priest. In him all the promises of God are yes! But he is also . . .

“ . . . the Lord.”“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ *the Lord.*” The ruler, the sovereign, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. The Lord of the universe.

Two great purposes in one great story: The Glory of God and Peace on Earth

I want to celebrate with you this Christmas over the wonders in this text, with our focus mainly on verse 14: **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”** First and foremost, God is glorified because this child is born. And second, peace is to spread everywhere this child is received. These are the great purposes for the coming of Jesus. Let’s look at this first idea. The glory of God being established in this miraculous birth;

Purpose 1. The Glory of God

The coming of this child will be the greatest revelation of the glory of God even among the heights of heaven, and the coming of this child will bring peace to God's people — who will one day fill the whole earth with righteousness and peace. ***"Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end."*** I think it surprised the angels. They could not believe the scope of God's love — that he would send His Son to walk among creation. We get the idea when a great array of the heavenly host are revealed and all are singing glory to God in the highest. The shepherds must have been staggered. We see glory ever-ascending from man to God. Peace ever-descending from God to man. God's glory sung out among men for the sake of his name. God's peace lived out among men for the sake of his name.

Purpose 2. To Experience the Peace He Brings

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

Maybe you remember Linus from *A Peanuts Christmas* reciting this story from the old King James Version where verse 14b is translated "and on earth peace, good will toward men." Virtually all the modern translations agree that this was not an accurate translation. The ESV says, ". . . and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" or "on whom His favor rests!"

The point is that, even though God's offer of peace goes out to all, only the people who receive Christ and trust him as Savior and Messiah and Lord, will experience the peace he brings. You get a glimpse of this meaning in Luke 10:5–6, Jesus says to his disciples, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a *son of peace* is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you." God's peace in Christ is offered to the world. But only the "sons of peace" receive it. How do you know if you are a "son of peace"? How do you know if you are part of the angels' promise, "Peace among those with whom he is pleased!"? Answer: you welcome the Peacemaker, you receive Jesus. Five times in the New Testament he is called "the God of peace" (Romans 15:13; 16 :20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). And Jesus said, "My peace I give to you" (John 14:27). And Paul said "Jesus himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14).

If we want peace to rule in our lives, God must rule in our lives. Christ must rule in our lives. God's purpose is not to give you peace separate from himself. His purpose is to give you peace by being the most glorious Person in your life.

For the great and powerful of this world, there are only two places in which their courage fails them, of which they are afraid deep down in their souls, from which they shy away. These are the manger and the cross of Jesus Christ. No powerful person dares to approach the manger, and this even includes King Herod. For this is where thrones shake, the mighty fall, the prominent perish, because God is with the lowly.

Here the rich come to nothing, because God is with the poor and hungry, but the rich and satisfied he sends away empty. Before Mary, the maid, before the manger of Christ, before God in lowliness, the powerful come to naught; they have no right, no hope; they are judged. ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God in the Manger*

Three kinds of Christmas Peace is offered in this gift of the Son.

Peace with God

The most basic need we have is peace with God. This is foundational to all our pursuits of peace. If we don't go here first, all other experiences of peace will be superficial and temporary. The key passage here is Romans 5:1,

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

We are made right with God, set at peace with God - Not by works. Not by tradition. Not by baptism. Not by church membership. Not by piety. Not by parentage - But by faith alone. When we believe in Jesus as the Savior and the Lord and the supreme Treasure of our lives, we are justified by faith and the result is peace with God. God's anger at us because of our sin is put away. Our rebellion against him is overcome. He will never be against us. He is our Father, and our Friend. We have peace. We don't need to be afraid any more. But there is more . . . we have peace with ourselves!

Peace with Ourselves

And because we have peace with God because of being justified by faith, we can begin to grow in the enjoyment of peace with ourselves — and here I include any sense of guilt or anxiety that tends to paralyze us or make us hopeless. Being at peace with ourselves is no small deal. Freed from comparisons to others, freed from conditional love, we live lives of quiet confidence. John Piper looked at it this way:

“And because we have peace with God because of being justified by faith, we can begin to grow in the enjoyment of peace with ourselves — and here I include any sense of guilt or anxiety that tends to paralyze us or make us hopeless. Here again believing the promises of God with a view to glorifying God in our lives is key.” ~ *John Piper*

Philippians 4:6–7 is one of the most precious passages in this regard:

Philippians 4:6-7

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God [in other words, roll your anxieties onto God]. And the *peace of God*, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The picture here is that our hearts and our minds are under assault. Guilt, worries, threats, confusions, uncertainties — they all threaten our peace. And Paul says that God wants to “guard” your hearts and minds. He guards them with his peace. He guards them in a way that goes beyond what human understanding can fathom. Don't limit the peace of God by what your understanding can see. Do that this Christmas. Take your anxieties to God. Tell him about them. Ask him to help you. To protect you. To restore your peace. And then to use you to make peace.

Peace with Others

The third relationship where God wants us to enjoy his peace is in our relationships with other people. This is the one we have least control over. So we need to say it carefully the way Paul does in Romans 12:18;

Romans 12:18

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

For many of you when you get together with family for Christmas, there will be some awkward and painful relationships. Some of the pain is very old. And some of it is new. In some relationships you know what you have to do, no matter how hard it is. And in some of them you are baffled and don't know what the path of peace calls for. In both cases the key is trusting the promises of God with heartfelt awareness of how he forgave you through Christ. I think the text that puts this together most powerfully for me again and again is Ephesians 4:31–32, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

The hope of Christmas is for us to cultivate a sense of amazement that in spite of all our sins God has forgiven us through Christ. Be amazed that you have peace with God. It's this sense of amazement, that I, a sinner, have peace with God, that makes the heart tender, kind and forgiving. Then you will be like the angels: Glory to God in the highest is the first thing. Peace among his people is the second thing.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." This is why he came — on a day, to a city, as the Savior, Messiah, and Sovereign. That God would get glory, and that you would know peace. May the God of peace give you peace, and get his glory.

A Way in a manger

"In the Christian story God descends and reascends. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and seabed of Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him." ~ *CS Lewis*

Do you love to tell the story?