

GLORY TO GOD, PEACE TO MEN

Luke 2:1-20

Key Verse 2:14

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

First, “She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger” (1-7).

Look at verse 1. The Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. The purpose of this census was to collect taxes from its colonies more effectively. Because of this census, everyone had to go to his own town to register. So Joseph together with his fully pregnant wife, Mary, also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn.

“She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger...” The Creator God, when he came into the world in the form of a human, was rejected and pushed all the way that he was born in a stable and laid in a manger. Who can believe this? When God was coming to the world to save his people from their sins, the world offered him a stable where cows and horses were staying as his birth place, and he was laid in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Who can imagine this? God says in Isaiah 1:3, “The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” This is how we, mankind, have treated God from the beginning until now. Adam, the first man did not honor God, but disobeyed him even though God was so good to him. Israel people refused to welcome their God. John 1:10 and 11 testifies this, saying, “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”

Why was Jesus born in a stable and laid in a manger? Verse 7 says, “because there was no room in the inn.” It seemed that Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger because of this practical reason that there was no room in the inn. But actually, when we think about this carefully, we see that it was not because there was no room in the inn but because there was no room in the hearts of people that Jesus was placed in a manger. A woman in labor is the most urgent case. Even cruel high-jackers, violent terrorists show favor to the pregnant women. But in Bethlehem, there was no one who was willing to give up his or her one night’s comfortable sleep for the woman in labor. Maybe, life under the rule of the Roman Empire was tough; maybe, survival was the most important issue to them; maybe, they were too concerned about themselves, their own comfort and security. As a result, Mary was pushed all the way to the stable, and the baby Jesus was placed in a manger. It seems that people have the same

problem. In this dog-eat-dog world, people are so harassed and so concerned about their security and career that they cannot spend even one hour for Jesus. We invite them to Bible study, but they say, "No thanks. I am busy." They spend tons of time and money for other things, for themselves, but they are so concerned about gas money that they refuse to come to worship service on Sunday. Jesus is at the bottom of their priority list. In this way, people reject Jesus; they have no room for Jesus in their hearts. But it is not only the case of unbelieving people, but also of the believers. In Revelation 3, Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." (Rev 3:20) These believing people say, "I believe in Jesus," "I love God." But Jesus is not in their heart, but he stands outside and pleads with them to open the doors of their hearts so that he can come in and have fellowship with them. Even if they say that they believe in Jesus, even if they say that they love God, whenever a job matter comes, or marriage matter comes, or family matter comes, they conveniently choose such things over God. In this way, they give no priority to Jesus, and thereby, he is pushed all the way. This is how people both believers and unbelievers have treated God. We must not reject Jesus any longer; our God comes to us and wants to have personal fellowship with us. We must open our hearts and accept him giving him our first priority, making ourselves available for him all the time. The joy of Christmas is for those who have room for Jesus in their hearts, for those who welcome him and accept him as their God and King.

Jesus' birth looks so sad and fatalistic. But there is divine truth behind this. Some people may have very sorrowful life background; whenever they think about their life, they become fatalistic, and say, "Mom, why did you give birth to me?" or "Why was I born?" They compare themselves with others, and feel sorrowful, envious and angry. But when even these very fatalistic people come to Jesus and see how he was rejected even before his birth, and how he was born in a stable and laid in a manger, they are so comforted; they say, "Wow! His case is worse than mine! At least, I was born in a hospital." And they feel better. Why did God let Jesus, his Son be born in this seemingly poor and fatalistic way? The apostle Paul says in 2Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." How was your life in the year 2017? Maybe, some of us had tough time; some of us shed a lot of tears. But whenever we remember Jesus' manger, we find many thanks topics, and sorrows and fatalism disappear from our hearts. Jesus, the Son of God, truly made us rich by being born in a stable and laid in a manger.

Second, "Good news of great joy" (8-11). The birth of the Son of God was quiet. But it was a universal event that the Infinite God came into the world as a tiny baby. So his Father prepared a great birthday party for him. He sent his angels to the world and held the first Christmas worship service. How did it go? Look at verses 8 and 9. There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. They were lowly and poor people. They were not educated. But God chose them to be the audience at the first Christmas

worship service. When an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, they were terrified. Then, the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” “Good news of great joy that will be for all the people!” What a great expression this is!! This was what God had pursued for the past 4,000 years since the transgression of the first man Adam. Think about God who was pursuing this, thinking about how people would be blessed and how they would rejoice and be thankful. In that long period of time while God pursued this, how many heart-breaking moments he had, how many betrayals he had experienced. But embracing all those difficulties, He pursued this good news continually, wrestling with stubborn Israel people over and over again, all because he knew how blessed and happy people would be once what he was pursuing was completed. Then, finally the time came for him to deliver this message, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” God must have been really happy and excited when He delivered this message to the world. When we think about this carefully, we can see that our God is good; we can see that He has a good intention for us. Let’s say, “Our God is good.”

Then, what is the content of this good news that will be for all the people? The angel says, “Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” The good news God proclaims today is that the Savior who saves us from our sin was already born, and thereby, his salvation is available for us today. Why is the birth of the Savior good news for all the people including you and me? It is because all men have sinned and we all suffer from our sins; it is because this Savior saves us from our sins.

People think of sin as something fun and enjoyable. But sin is really not enjoyable, but it is really dreadful and cruel. People think that they will enjoy sin and forget about it pretending as if they have done nothing wrong. But sin is not free of charge; it demands its price, and the price of sin is really high. When you sin, sin will find you, and demand you its price. After committing sin of adultery, people pay the price of their sin – their families are broken, parents are ashamed, children are confused and all of them cry bitterly. But sin is not satisfied with this payment; instead, it demands more and more – people suffer from depression, insomnia, hatred, anger, frustration, sense of meaninglessness all the days of their lives. Because of sin, brilliant students who, otherwise, would have been great leaders, become street bums; because of sin, beautiful young ladies become teenage single mothers; their lives wither even before blossoming. Many students’ brains are so damaged because of drugs that they cannot live as normal citizens of the society any longer. After sinning and paying the price of their sins, many people are spiritually bankrupt that they weep on others’ shoulders saying, “I don’t know why my life is so hard.” Fundamentally, the price of sin is death. And after death, there is the second death waiting for all sinful people that they will be condemned, declared guilty, and be hurled to the fiery lake of burning sulfur

where they will be tormented eternally. What a serious problem our sin is! No one can say, "I am okay," because all men sinned.

For these sin-plagued people like you and me, God sent a Savior, and now God's angel shouts, "A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." Wow! Once he saves us from our sins, we are no longer obligated to pay the price of our sins; we no longer live as slaves to sin. Instead, we can live a new life in him as children of God. When we are saved from our sins through this baby, our families can be kept sound and healthy; our children can grow wholesome with sound character under their parents' love and care. When saved from their sins, young men become so powerful and passionate – they can do great things for mankind; when saved from their sins, young sisters become noble and really loving like mothers – they raise up many powerful spiritual leaders – they become mothers of many nations. When saved from our sins, we can aim to do really great things in our life. Salvation from our sins is like starting our life all over again, as if we have done nothing wrong. Isn't it all peoples' dream to start all over again? In Jesus, we experience this.

The angel shouts, "Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord." Here the word, "Christ" in Greek is the Messiah in Hebrew, which means, "the Anointed One." This title shows God's own selection of this person to be the Savior of the world. His coming was not something that happened out of nowhere, but it had been foretold in the Bible for several thousand years. In Genesis 3:15, God prophesied about the woman's offspring who would destroy Satan. Then, about more than 4,000 years later, God chose his own Son to be that Person, the Savior of the world, anointed him and sent him in to the world through the virgin birth of Mary. In Israel, actually, in the whole world in those days, there was no concept about the woman's offspring, because women were not considered at all, and there was only man's offspring. But Jesus was born of Mary a virgin, without any man involved, and thereby, the title "the woman's offspring" fits only for him. Bible scholars say that the Old Testament includes about 60 different prophecies, with more than 300 references, of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus was God's anointed One who was to come and save the world from sin.

Also, the expression, "the Lord," shows this baby's true identity. The angel called the baby, "the Lord." Then, it was obvious that he was God whom the angels had served and worshiped. He was a baby, completely fragile and dependent; he was a descendant of David, but he was more than that; his true identity was the Lord, meaning, the Owner, the Master of all mankind; he is God. If God sent us the archangel Michael to save us, we will be really thankful. But instead, God Himself came into the world as a human to save us. At this, we are stunned. Our Creator denied his glory as God and came into the world as a tiny baby and was laid in a manger for us. He did an amazing thing for us. This is the good news of great joy for all the people on earth. Christmas is the time to celebrate his birth into the world as a tiny baby; it is the time to remember his sacrifice for us; it is the time for us to remember his love for us; it is the time for

us to remember how much he did for us. God became a tiny baby for you. Merry Christmas!

Third, “This will be a sign to you” (12-20). Look at verse 12. Let’s read this verse together:

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Wow! The sign for the long waited Savior of the world, the sign for the Son of God was a tiny baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. A baby is completely dependent. A manger is a feeding trough for cows or horses. We never imagine a fragile baby as God. What kind of sign do you expect to see as the sign for God? Maybe, a thunderous voice from heaven that says, “I love you”? Or, God speaking to you in your dream, “Go to the shepherds church for Christmas worship service”? Naturally, we think God’s sign should be big and glamorous. That’s what the Magi, in Matthew’s gospel who came from the east to worship the new born king of the Jews, thought. They thought that the king of the Jews must be born in the palace of Herod in Jerusalem, as a result, they got lost. When people look for the sign of God in high places such as Caesar’s palace, or fancy church buildings, small signs like a tiny baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger looks too ordinary and insignificant that they all ignore it. In order to look for a sign of God, people go up and up, and make things bigger and fancier, while God goes down and down, and lowers himself all the way down to a manger. As a result, all these high-minded people keep saying, “I don’t know what God wants me to do.” Or they say, “I cannot find God.”

“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Where can we find the sign of God? We must go down and down; we must humble ourselves all the way down to a manger, willing to go to a stable to look for the Son of God, willing to bow down to a tiny baby. Christmas is the time when these humble people find the sign of God and rejoice. A baby in a manger is the sign of God. Your friend coming to you and telling you, “God loves you,” is a sign of God. Your son or daughter coming to you and say, “Immanuel – God with us!” can be a sign of God for you.

Look at verses 13 and 14. Now as soon as the angel finished his message to the shepherds, suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angels, praising God, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” It was the special song by the angels’ choir, celebrating the birth of the Son of God. They summed up the meaning of Jesus’ birth into the world in this short expression. Jesus’ birth means “Glory to God in the highest.” The original meaning of the word, “glory” is “to be revealed of God.” Whatever of God is revealed – his power, his character and his plan – is amazingly great, wonderful and awesome – simply, it is glorious. Through the birth of Jesus, through the baby Jesus, God’s glory was revealed and the angels saw it. The angels knew who this baby was – the Creator God whom they had seen, served

and worshiped in heaven all the time. He was the unapproachable God with almighty power. But now, in order to help miserable sinners on earth, the Almighty God became a baby, completely powerless, fragile, and dependent, even without being able to speak a word yet, let alone speaking powerfully with a thunderous voice. Now the Almighty God was placed at the mercy of two feeble humans, Mary and Joseph, all for the sake of sinners. The angels were really amazed and shocked at God's unspeakable humility and His great sacrifice for the lost sinners. They were really stunned at God's sacrificial love for lost mankind. Who could make such great sacrifice for sinners not for the righteous? Who could humble themselves to the point of being so powerless for the sake of sinners? No angel, no human could do so. Only our God could do it – He is perfect in love for us, and he is perfect in humility. The angels saw God's perfection in humility; they saw God's perfection in love for mankind – God's love and humility was indeed astounding, beautiful and wonderful. God's beauty, God's greatness that was revealed through this event was far beyond their imagination. The angels exclaimed loudly, saying, "Glory to God in the highest!" In plain terms, it means, "Our God is great! Our God is beautiful!" Christmas is the time when we can see the glory of God in the baby Jesus – his intense love for us, his amazing sacrifice for us, and his perfection in humility – at this Christmas, He proves Himself as God indeed through his birth into the world as a tiny baby. The meaning of Christmas is glory to God in the highest.

The angels also said, "On earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Jesus' birth into the world as a tiny baby means "Peace to men on earth." There is no peace between God and sinful people, because God is the Judge and they are criminals. Sinful people are afraid of God and thereby, run away from Him. The first man Adam, even though he was in the Garden of Eden, when he sinned, was afraid of God; when he heard God's voice, instead of rejoicing, he hid himself behind trees. In the same way, when people sin, they feel so burdened about God – they feel burdened to even look at the Bible; whenever they pass by a church, they are burdened; when their pastor visits them, they are so burdened. It's all because they know that they are guilty. And now the news is that, not just the Bible or a servant of God, but God Himself has come! At this news all sinners are gripped with fear, saying, "What shall I do?" They are really afraid. But when they realize that God has come into the world as a tiny baby, they are relieved from all their fears; they can see that God is not in the business of condemning them for their sins; they can see that God's intention in coming to the world is not to punish them, but to live with them. When sinners hear this, they are really shocked and relieved from their fears. They say, "Really? A tiny baby?" And they are even encouraged to come near him and look at him, stretching out their necks carefully. When they see the tiny baby, they are so touched, and say, "He is so cute! Oh, my... He smiles even at me!" God coming to the world as a tiny baby is like God's gesture of extending his hand of reconciliation to all sinners. Those who accept this love of God finds great peace in the baby Jesus – God's favor rests on them. They are the ones on whom God's favor rests – the very recipients of this good news of great joy. Christmas means "on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Today, God is extending his hand of reconciliation to you through

the baby, Jesus. Accept it by accepting the baby Jesus as your God and Savior, and you will have peace in him.

After finishing this special song, the angels left. The shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. They praised God and told everything they had heard and seen, and all who heard it were amazed. Then, they were filled with thanks and praise and returned home.

One Word: Glory To God In The Highest And On Earth Peace To Men