

Why is Christmas Extraordinary?

Luke 2:8-18

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Good morning. Merry Christmas! Before we get started, I would like to inform you of the funeral arrangements for Mr. Wilbert Terry, our friend, fellow church member, and World War 2 veteran who was just baptized a few months ago right here before his church family.

The service will be held here at Northshore Church this Wednesday at 11:30. The visitation will begin at 10:30. His daughter, Mrs. Janice, Pastor Larry and I look forward to seeing those of you who are able to attend.

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Luke 2. If you don't have a copy of God's Word, it will be on the screen for you. Over the past year, the theme has been Extraordinary. In our preaching ministry, we have focused on the life transformation that occurs in our lives when an extraordinary God moves in and does his work.

We learned about extraordinary dreams becoming reality through Joseph's story. We discovered extraordinary leadership principles through the life of Moses. Through the calling and response of Abraham, we learned Extraordinary faith.

The book of Proverbs and all of its wisdom helped us to receive extraordinary direction. We were convicted and compelled to truth through our study of the extraordinary Holy Spirit of Christ. And in our latest series, we were challenged by Jesus' training of the disciples through our Extraordinary Discipleship series.

And, before closing the year and shifting to our theme for next year which is Focus on What Matters, we want to experience an Extraordinary Christmas together.

There are various reasons why we would call Christmas extraordinary. For some, it may be Santa Claus and elves. For some, it is because of the gifts. Some may say it is because we get to spend time with family. For others, it may be Christmas lights and trees.

But today we turn to God and we seek the answer to this question from his Word: Why is Christmas extraordinary? Let's begin by reading Luke 2:8-18.

Luke 2:8 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.

Luke 2:10 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.

Luke 2:12 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,

Luke 2:14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Luke 2:15 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.”

Luke 2:16 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,

Luke 2:18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Why is Christmas Extraordinary?

1. God’s Generosity to Mankind (vv. 8-9)

Christmas is extraordinary because it displays God’s complete, incomparable, loving generosity to mankind. In the text, we see that the shepherds living out in the fields nearby are the recipients of the angel’s announcement of God’s Good News.

But, why the shepherds? Why would God choose them to be the recipients of his announcement that night? It is because the shepherds are great representatives of mankind as a whole.

We may think this is unusual, but it is not outside of God’s normal activity to fulfill his purposes through shepherds. In Genesis, Abraham, the father of the Jews, was a shepherd. In Exodus, Moses, the great leader of the Israelites from bondage of slavery,

a shepherd. In 1 Samuel, we see David, the great king who established Israel as a great nation, a shepherd.

Presently, we are far removed from an agricultural society, so we would not consider a shepherd an ordinary profession. But, in ancient times, shepherding would have been an ordinary job in the sense the occupation itself would not have been unusual and the people themselves had very ordinary characteristics.

Yet, these great human pillars of our faith story that I mentioned were ordinary and when their stories are combined, all of mankind can relate to them. Abraham was an older man who had acquired much wealth. Do you know anyone like that?

David was the youngest boy of a big family. His brothers thought he was spoiled and were jealous of the special attention he received from his father. Do you know anyone like that? Moses became a shepherd to get a wife. Many of us men can think back to the things we were willing to do to win over the approval of the father of a girl we loved, right?!

In addition to these, there are more ordinary people who were shepherds in Scripture. Adam and Eve's son, Abel, was a shepherd. Abel was one who sought to give the Lord his best. Do you know anyone like that?

All of Jacob's sons, including Joseph, were shepherds. Do you know anyone with a family business? Amos, the prophet, was a shepherd. Do you know anyone who speaks the truth of God into the lives of others? Before Rachel married Jacob, she was a shepherd of her father's flock. Do you know any women?

Shepherds work long hours to fulfill their job responsibilities. They take great care of those entrusted to them. They are leaders who help others get to where they need to go. Do you know anyone like that?

At the time of Christ, shepherds were common, but they had a lowly place. Some were considered untrustworthy because they would "borrow" land they did not own for their sheep to graze.

Because of this there are historical records that show that some shepherds were not allowed to give testimony in the courts of law.¹ So, there were some shepherds who were dishonest. Do you know anyone like that?

Some were considered unclean according to the religious establishment and therefore could not observe Israel's ceremonial laws. So these were people you would never see at a worship service. Do you know anyone like that?

Similar to tax collectors like the disciple Matthew, some shepherds were the outcasts of their society. Some were despised. Do you know anyone like that?

The work of the shepherd was hard and was not glamorous in any way. They were loners who spent many days and nights in isolation. Do you know any loners who live in isolation?

So, throughout the Bible and ancient times, we see shepherds as a good representative of all of mankind. There were men, women, old, young, rich, poor, hard-working, respectable, responsible, leaders, owners, employees, caregivers, religious, unreligious, dishonest, thieves, and those desperate for a relationship.

We may not be shepherds, but we all have something in common with them - we are ordinary humanity in need of good news. In all of the ways we are unique, we are all alike because of our incredible spiritual need.

As high as some may think their status is...as much as someone thinks they have made it...As little as someone thinks they have...as lonely as someone may be, the reality is that spiritually, every single one of us is lowly.

The fact that God would give his good news to ordinary, lowly shepherds shows something very special about God. He is a generous God. God loves humanity. He loves each of us. He cares about every single lowly person on earth.

I don't know about you, but the more I live in this new life as a Christian, the more I come to realize I am a lowly person with incredible spiritual needs that only the Gospel can meet. I resonate so much with the verses of the old hymn "Without Him":

Without Him I could do nothing

¹Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 44.

**Without Him I'd surely fail
Oh, Without Him I would be drifting
Like a ship without a sail**

**Without Him I would be dying
Without Him I'd be enslaved
And without Him my life would be worthless
But with Jesus, thank God I am saved**

So, in the Christmas story, God gives generously to all of mankind, but his generosity is experienced in a very special way only by those who realize their need for him. In his letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul proclaims this truth:

1 Cor. 1:26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

1 Cor. 1:27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1 Cor. 1:28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

Christmas is extraordinary, first, because the angel's announcement coming to lowly shepherds 2000 years ago shows us God's incredible generosity to bring his good news to all of mankind, including you and me.

2. God's Gift of the Messiah (vv. 10-14)

Secondly, we see that Christmas is extraordinary because it is all about God's gift of the Messiah.

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Luke 2:11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

On this dark night, an angel appeared to the shepherds and the glory of the Lord was shining around them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them this was no moment for fear because of the glorious gift of God's presence to the world in Christ.

What a gracious act of love and grace for God to step down from glory and reveal himself to the world in human form. The angel declared to them that on this special day, in the town of David, a baby who embodies three of heaven's greatest titles has been born.

The angel called him *Savior* - for he was born to provide for humanity the only way to be freed from the bondage of sin. He was born to identify perfectly with humanity by taking on our nature. He was born to live a perfect life. And as a perfect substitute, he was born to die to take our sins upon himself at the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 says:

Luke 2:24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

The angel called him *Messiah* - or Christ - which means "anointed one" - the promised king. David was the anointed king who first united the nation of Israel, but Jesus, the Messiah, is the King of kings who was born to bring unity for the world.

The angel called him *The Lord* - for he was born with the personal name of God himself. Lying there in the manger was God himself with all authority and all power under heaven.²

"Do not fear," said the angels to the shepherds. For the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord is born. This appeal wasn't limited to the shepherds alone, but goes far beyond them to a broken world.

Humanity hears the same call today, "Fear Not," because there is nothing to fear when God moves in grace. Instead, we can experience the joy that extinguishes fear.

The Joy of the Lord that Extinguishes Fear

1. Unlimited Joy

The angel said that joy which comes from the gospel of Christ is two-fold. The first is unlimited joy.

²Adapted from Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, The Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Publishers, 2000), 29-30.

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

The angel brought good news that will cause ‘great’ joy. The Greek word here for ‘great’ is *meGas*. This is where we get our English word mega! This gospel will cause unlimited mega joy. This is joy to the fullest extent. The Psalmist says,

You will make known to me the way of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

On that night, the earth experienced the glorious gift of God’s presence in Christ. And with his presence comes unlimited joy.

The Joy of the Lord that Extinguishes Fear

- 1. Unlimited Joy**
- 2. Unrestricted Joy**

This revelation has also ushered in another type of joy - unrestricted joy.

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

The Joy of the Lord that Extinguishes Fear

- 1. Unlimited Joy**
- 2. Unrestricted Joy**

The glorious revelation of God’s presence ushers into the world unrestricted joy because it is available for all the people. It’s not restricted to some. His gospel is available to all. Romans 16:25-27 says,

Rom. 16:25 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,

Rom. 16:26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—

Rom. 16:27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

The Lord was gracious enough to provide the shepherds with a sign that night. “Just go and see,” he told them, and you will find the joy of heaven “wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” And then to add more weight to the trustworthiness of this message, God displayed his glory for the shepherds to see.

A company of angels, not 100, not 1000, but a multitude covered the sky with all echoing the good news of Christ’s birth and joy bursting forth from heaven. They said together,

Luke 2:14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

How many of you here want peace? How many of you here want the favor of God to rest on you? The Bible tells us who has the favor and peace of God resting on them? In Romans 5:1-2 says,

Rom. 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Christmas is extraordinary because it first involves God’s generosity to mankind. Secondly it involves him giving his precious gift - the Messiah, born to give joy to the world and to make peace in the hearts of those who accept Jesus by faith as Savior.

3. The Gratitude of Messengers (v. 15-18)

Then from the text we see our third reason why Christmas is extraordinary: There is the gratitude of messengers.

Luke 2:15 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.”

The lowly ordinary shepherds were the recipients of an announcement and good news that mankind had been longing for and anticipating for generations. It is obvious from the text that this good news that causes great joy for all people was joyfully received by them.

In their excitement, they said, "Let's Go!!!!" As a coach of my kids' sports teams, I hear this phrase so much. When someone makes a great play, or the team wins a close game, you often hear them shout, "Let's go!"

For the longest time it has bothered me to hear them shout that phrase. When I grew up, you would hear people shout, "That's what I'm talking about!!" I suppose when you think about it, ours was not much better. So, I don't know why it has bothered me. But, now that I have been shown it is biblical, I guess I can't get frustrated with it anymore. Let's go!!

Remember the joy you had when you first came to know Christ. Is that still your reaction to the good news of your Savior? Do you join the shepherds in their astonished gratitude that a generous God would give his gift, his good news of salvation in Christ to you?

Do you still have gratitude which bursts forth in joyful excitement about the gospel which you have received? Or, is it possible that we have become diluted in our own pursuit of happiness during the holidays to the point we have lost our joy and wonder at the Good News of Christ? The shepherds were so amazed that they:

Luke 2:16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Through the course of your day, do you hurry off to see the Savior? His gospel should have us rushing back again and again and again.

But, you may be wondering like I did when I read this story again - who kept the sheep while the shepherds were gone? Certainly, the owner of the herds of sheep would say that their shepherd's job is dependent upon his reliability. Do you ever think this way? In my gratitude I want to hurry to see Jesus, but I have other important things that might suffer.

The shepherds set an example for us by which all else decreased in importance when compared to the wonder of what they had witnessed that night. Perhaps our priorities have become mixed up. Perhaps our gratitude and concern for the things of God have become drowned out by our concern for other things.

Earl Allen, a Baptist Preacher, once wrote of the challenge these shepherds of ancient times model for us Christians, especially the men:

Putting God first does not mean that anything else will suffer because of it; but if you don't put him first, everything else will suffer because of it.³

About three decades after his birth, Jesus would preach this word about priorities to his disciples with a large crowd listening in:

Matt. 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matt. 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Here is what you can know for sure: When your gratitude for God's generous gift of his Son results in you hurrying off to see your Savior, seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness, you will find him every time. You will find him sufficient for your needs every time.

So, Christmas is extraordinary for the gratitude that it brings to those who receive the good news of Christ. But, this gratitude has a result. The grateful recipients become messengers of the same good news.

Luke 2:17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

Luke 2:18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

When the shepherds saw him, when they experienced the Savior, they couldn't help but share the good news they had been told concerning the child. Many of you have rushed to see the Savior, and you have experienced him for yourself. But perhaps you are hesitant to share with others what you have witnessed.

I read some sobering statistics from one pastor the other day: The average Christian will, over the course of their life (about 35 - 40 years): Attend more than 1,600 church services, hear more than 1,600 sermons, sing over 20,000 christian worship songs, participate in over 10,000 public prayers...and will lead zero people to faith in Jesus Christ in the course of their Christian lifetime.⁴

³R. Earl Allen, *Sign of the Star* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1968), 71.

⁴Paul Green, "Extraordinary People, Extraordinary Lives," Sermon Central (<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/extraordinary-people-extraordinary-lives-paul-green-sermon-on-church-general-142640>), Accessed 14 December, 2022.

Similarly, I read a study from Barna Research group which found a steady decline in Christian's sharing their faith. Barna's Editor-in-Chief said:

“As spiritual leaders and practitioners, whose job it is to think and talk about matters of faith, it’s easy to imagine everyone is regularly doing the same. After all, aren’t these the big questions of life? Don’t these topics matter more than anything else?”

The truth is, most Christians are busy with other things: the day-to-day of normal life—jobs, kids, budgets, sports, weather and what’s premiering on Netflix this week. None of this is bad, but the unfortunate reality is that most adults don’t seem to connect their everyday experiences with their faith. Or, at least, they aren’t talking about it if they do.

“So what’s happening here? Why are Christians so reluctant to talk about their faith? The overarching cultural trends of secularism, relativism, pluralism and the digital age are contributing to a society that is less interested in religion and that has marginalized the place of spirituality in everyday life,”

“As a result, Christians in America today have to live in the tension between Jesus’ commands to tell others the good news and growing cultural taboos against proselytizing—a core part of Christianity from its origins, and that which is essential for the salvation of their listeners.”⁵

The reason I share this is not to make you feel bad or try to force you to share the good news of Jesus. I really don’t want this to become part of a religious checklist for you: “Okay have I shared the gospel facts about Jesus with someone today, check!”

The shepherds didn’t do that, they just hurried to Jesus, and when they encountered him, they couldn’t help but share what they had been told about him, and what had happened to them.

Unlike the shepherds, the sky didn’t open the night the gospel was shared to me. A company of angels didn’t appear to my parents and me in our living room and declare, “Glory to God in the highest heaven.” Yet, there was still rejoicing in heaven. Jesus said in Luke 15:10:

⁵Barna Group, “Sharing Faith Is Increasingly Optional to Christians,” May 15, 2018 See (<https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians>), Accessed 14 December, 2022.

Luke 15:10 - "I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Gratefulness centers not in something you earn or work for. Gratefulness comes from God's gift of the messiah if you have been saved, restored, and have experienced a portion of his unlimited and unrestricted joy.

But, my friends, realize this: there is an endless supply when you come to him for salvation, and continue to hurry to him daily. The joy of Christ will overflow in your life and you won't be able to help but share who He is and what He has done for you.

You don't have to be a theologian to be a messenger of the gospel. If you think about it, the shepherds were the first evangelists, and all they did was share what they knew. Just share what you know about Christ.

In doing so, you will become a shepherd yourself - a grateful messenger showing others what makes Christmas extraordinary - God's generosity to mankind through his precious, life-changing gift of the Messiah, born to give us the second birth of salvation. Let's Pray.

God I thank you that you became flesh and announced your birth to the shepherds. I thank you for the truths that we have learned today. But, most of all we thank you that you are The Shepherd in our lives.

We thank you that you are the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. We thank you that you are the Great Shepherd through whom we are equipped with everything good for doing your will and what pleases the Father. And, we thank you that you are the Chief Shepherd who will return from glory to take his sheep to be with him forever.