

Adoring Angels and the Incarnate Immanuel: Luke 2:8-19

Manfred E. Kober, Th.D.

Den Hirten wird die Geburt Christi verkündet.



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INTRODUCTION

The exquisitely narrated story of the nativity is peculiar to Luke. Matthew narrates circumstances that were appropriate to the birth of the King of the Jews, including the royal lineage and the visit of the Magi. Luke relates the delightful details of Christ as the Son of Man. His nativity is celebrated and announced by angelic chorus. Homage is paid Him not by royalty or aristocracy but by lowly shepherds as He lay in a manger stall among lowing cattle.

A wise heavenly Father selected the place of His Son's birth. As Merrill F. Unger notes so well:

The manger in which the babe was laid "because there was no room in the inn" (khan) was likely located in a nearby cave or stone grotto, where cattle were sheltered. This is evidently providential, a detail in the planning of the all-wise and infinitely loving God, which would prove a happy escape from the noisy confusion and lack of privacy of a public caravansary, especially so with Mary in her present condition (Unpublished commentary on Luke, pp. 4213-4214).

1A. The Recipients of the Announcement: 2:8

1b. Their location:

The shepherds were located in the high pastureland near Bethlehem where centuries before David kept his father's sheep. The shepherds were living out in the fields in rough shelters (agraulountes) keeping the night watches, taking their turn watching the flock during the darkness to protect the sheep from nocturnal marauding animals. That was their location.

2b. Their vocation:

1c. Their status in society:

Shepherds had a reputation for being untrustworthy. Their work made them ceremoniously unclean. They belonged to the lower elements of society but Luke had an interest in the lowly and outcast.

2c. The significance of their selection:

These humble shepherds were undoubtedly men of faith like Simeon (Luke 2:25) who waited for the consolation of Israel. They were honored to be chosen to be the first witnesses of the incarnate Son of God.

2A. The Revelation by the Angel: 2:9-14

1b. The appearance of the angel of the Lord: 9

1c. The startling descent of the angel of the Lord: 9

It is likely that the angelic messenger was Gabriel, who had appeared to Zecharias (1:19) and the Virgin Mary (1:26). The appearance of the angel

and the accompanying manifestation of God's glory terrified the shepherds.

2c. The singular display of God's glory:

When God manifests Himself, He does so with an ineffable radiance (Ex. 16:10; 20:18; 40:34; Ez. 1:27-28).

1d. The identification of the glory of the Lord:

The manifestation of God's presence was most likely the Shekinah glory.

2d. The implication of the glory of the Lord:

In Matthew's gospel the Magi saw a star—literally, a bright light. Could it be that the light observed by the Wise Men and the glory of the Lord both referred to the effulgent light manifesting the persons of God?

2b. The announcement by the angel of the Lord: 10-12

1c. Dispelling the fear of the shepherds:

As on previous occasions, the angel first reassures the frightened shepherds (1:13, 30) that they have nothing to fear. Apparently the awesome appearance and powerful presence of angels elicits fear among men.

2c. Declaring the birth of the Savior: 10b

1d. The universality of the blessings of salvation:

The angelic message was reassuring: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." The whole fallen, sin-cursed family of Adam had a way to be redeemed. The second Adam, the Son of God, was born to redeem Adam's race from the curse of the first Adam.

2d. The locality of the birth of the Savior: 11a

The birth took place in Bethlehem where 1,000 years earlier another shepherd watched over his sheep. The prophecy of Micah 5:2 was fulfilled, and that very literally:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

3d. The singularity of the birth of the Savior: 11

The many prophecies concerning the Savior's *first coming* were being fulfilled, prophecies relating to the place, but especially to

the person. In the angelic birth announcement three titles were given to Jesus:

Savior (from sin, Matt. 1:21)

Christ (the anointed One, Matt. 1:16) and

Lord (Yahweh or God, Luke 1:13).

A comparison of the titles is very instructive:

Soter	Savior	Ministry	Redemption
Cristos	Christ	Royalty	Rule
Kurios	Lord	Deity	Righteousness

The newborn infant was both God and man and only as such could He fulfill the role of Savior and His Messianic role as King of Israel.

The prophet Isaiah already intimated the divine and human nature of the world's Redeemer and Ruler when he announced, "Unto us a child is born [humanity], unto us a son is given [deity] and the government shall be upon his shoulders" Isaiah 9:6.



3c. The disclosure of the sign of His birth: 12

"You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

1d. Swaddling clothes:

The verb *spargano* means "to swathe" or "to wrap." Babies were wrapped in long strips of cloth for warmth, protection of the extremities and a sense of security.

2d. Stone manger:

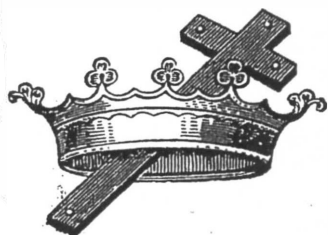
A humble stone trough from which the cattle ate their food. What an indescribable sight it must have been: eternal majesty resting in an earthly manger!

3b. The adoration of the angelic host: 13-14

The sudden appearance of the other angels indicates the sudden action in providing a savior.

1c. The glorification of God:

The angels were not only instrumental in announcing the good news of the arrival of the savior but, upon Christ's return to glory, they heralded His future advent to establish the kingdom (Acts 1:11).



It is not really stated that the angels sang but this may certainly be inferred. They sang at **creation** (Job 38:6-7), they sing here at the **incarnation** (Luke 2:13-14) and rejoice at the **salvation** of the sinner (Luke 15:10). The theme of their song is praise to God for His great gift of a savior to lost mankind. One would think that the departure of the Savior from heaven would result in angelic sadness. Rather, the salvation of sinners far outweighed the temporary loss. They may well have realized the vital truth: without a cradle, no cross; without the cross, no crown.

2c. The promise of peace:

1d. The special focus in salvation:

The AV translation, "Goodwill toward men" is misleading. The more accurate translation would be, "Peace to men on whom his favor rests" (NIV, cf. Eph. 1:9; Phil. 2:13).

As Merrill F. Unger notes, "The peace promised is not given universally to men who possess goodwill toward God, but individually to men who are the recipients of His favor and grace (Unpublished commentary on Luke, 4216).

2d. The sovereign favor to sinners:

God's gracious favor is highlighted. Philip L. Schaff understands the emphasis thus:

Glory be to God among the angels in heaven for sending the Messiah—and peace or salvation on earth among men of His good pleasure. . . i.e., "among God's chosen people in whom He is well-pleased." It is the gracious pleasure of **God** toward men by which He reconciles the world to Himself and Christ [2 Cor. 5:19] (*Lange's Commentary*, Luke [1960] 39, emphasis in the original).

3A. The result of the announcement: 15-20

1b. The ascent of the angels: 15a

1c. The departure:

Luke does not say that the angels disappeared, but they went into heaven. Apparently they returned to their heavenly home visibly and gradually as Christ did at His ascension (Acts 1:9).

2c. The destination:

The angels returned to heaven, their dwelling place and God's.

2b. The action of the shepherds:

1c. They departed the flock: 15

The shepherds followed the directives of the angel and hurried to nearby Bethlehem. Some have called this the first "Christmas rush."

There is no solid evidence to suggest that these shepherds were in charge of flocks from which the temple sacrifices would be taken. However, it would be an intriguing concept, that the shepherds who looked after the Temple lambs are the first to see the Lamb of God.

2c. They discovered the babe: 16

With eagerness and haste they found Mary and Joseph, and, as the angel had predicted, the babe lying in a manger.

3c. They declared the revelation: 17

Though the shepherds' audience might have been small, they were the first evangelists to declare the gospel, including what they had seen and heard.

4c. They delighted in their encounter:

The returning shepherds praised God and gave Him *the glory for the special, solemn privilege to see their infant Immanuel.*

The Doctrine of Angels in Luke 2

(An Exercise in Biblical Theology)

Based on the angelic announcement to the shepherds, it possible to gain much insight into the nature and activity of angels. If we had no other portion of Scripture dealing with angels, how much would we be able to learn about these heavenly messengers from Luke's account?



1A. The Abode of Angels:

2A. The Personality of Angels:

1b. Intellect:

2b. Emotions:

3b. Will:

3A. Number:

4A. Language:

5A. Activity:

6A. Appearance:

7A. Focus:

8A. Mobility:

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1A. The Abode of Angels:

v. 13 heavenly host

v. 15 angels returned to heaven

2A. The Personality of Angels:

1b. Intellect:

v. 11 communicate

v. 15 gave directions

2b. Emotions:

v. 13-14 rejoiced in the Savior's birth

3b. Will:

v. 12 desired the shepherds seek the Savior

3A. Number:

v. 13 "great company of the heavenly host"

4A. Language:

v. 10-14 able to converse with humans in their tongue

5A. Activity:

v. 9 serve God

v. 10 reveal a divine message to men

6A. Appearance:

v. 9 instill fear and inspire awe

7A. Focus:

v. 14 God, His people and the whole world
(v. 10 "to all people")

8A. Mobility:

v. 11 travel vast distances instantaneously



"BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY, WHICH SHALL BE TO ALL PEOPLE,"—LUKE II. 10.