

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL 2011, Part 4: The INFANT who turns Fear into Great Joy!

There is so much to think about at Christmas: Genesis 3:15; the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the incarnation of the second Person of the Trinity; the positive volition of young Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna; the angelic conflict; Christ as the Christmas gift; the deadness and darkness of kosmos diabolicus to God's matchless grace; how the Lord came to the few positive believers rather than to the prominent Jews; the Good News of great joy, et al.

Last evening in Bible class I focused (at least attempted to) on the angelic anticipation on Christmas Eve in Heaven just prior to the Son of God taking on a human nature (cf. Heb. 1:6). They had been waiting for thousands of years for the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15—the protoevangelium. Today I would like to turn our attention to their great message after the incarnation:

Luke 2:10-14 And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² "And this *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

What we have here is a sermon followed by a hymn on God's matchless grace. What great joy they experienced at the birth of the Son of God made the Son of Man. What a wondrous thing! Deep insights into this wondrous event evokes the highest and purest experiences! To grasp its significance is to be irresistibly drawn to it. What sacred truths! Given the sacredness of such an event, I wonder if God had the elect sinless angels *first* tell of its wonders instead of by the stammering and sinful tongue of man because it was so beautiful and sublime. It was the elect angels who first announced both the birth and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let's briefly note a couple of its more salient truths.

First, we have "do not be afraid." Man is born into this world limited, vulnerable, and beset by millions of enemies in the world—biological and anthropological. We are born into this world naked, helpless, and all wrapped up in an old sin nature. We are born into a kingdom of darkness under the hegemony of Satan himself. Although all creatures, from insects to mammals, in the world are beset by enemies ready to do them in, we have a measure of safety due to the fact that man is a *rational* animal with capacities to form relatively "safe" societies through laws and enforcement. We do enjoy a bit more safety than other creatures (e.g., the bug which fears the bird which fears the cat which fears the dog which fears the Korean) on a temporal level. However, there is one entity in which we have more to fear than all other creatures: God! Our

rational capacities that enable us to understand right and wrong and make laws against injustice, means that we have capacity and responsibility to God. God is absolute justice and we by nature are wicked and sinful. So while we can provide a measure of safety on a temporal level through laws and science, we are helpless with regard to measuring up to the perfect standard of God. Because man is created in the image of God, he has an eternity waiting for him: an eternity in blissfulness in Heaven or an eternity in torment in Hell. In Heaven there will be supreme happiness. Some philosophers have suggested that it will be like a never ending orgasm—the height of intense loving and unifying pleasure (divinely created—it is man who corrupts its original purpose and beauty; sex, unlike other instincts and desires—like eating, is designed for unity with a *person*—a spouse). I assure you they are not being crude or vulgar. They use this illustration in terms of the height of lovemaking, and how in heaven our souls will be so charged with union and intimacy of God that it will be *analogous* to two married people in union providing maximum pleasure in personal and intimate love.

Hell will be the antithesis of love and blissfulness. Hell is the place of separation from God. No love or intimacy with God—for all of eternity with no hope of escape. Hell is simply the result of people getting what they want: independence from God. Outside of the burning fire, Hell is exactly what someone wants who does not want God—as manifested in his rejection of God at God-consciousness and/or at gospel hearing. We can see the attitude of Satan reflected in all unbelievers in wanting to be independent from the Creator. The more an unbeliever rejects God, the more God hands him over to his depraved nature. In Dante's *Inferno* Satan is pictured at the bottom of Hell flapping his wings as hard as he can in an attempt to free himself. However, he is stuck in ice which is but the result of him flapping his wings. No, I don't think this is a literal picture of Hell, but it does provide a powerful point. The more one tries to get away from God, the more trapped he becomes.

What does this have to do with the first angelic announcement? FEAR NOT! Μὴ φοβείσθε, *me phobeisthe!* Everything! The angels were saying to sinful, wicked, evil thinking, fickle, prideful, hateful, superficial, unfaithful, selfish, unholy, petty, jealous, lustful, ignorant, gossipy, boastful, self-righteous, uncaring for the poor and needy, independent, ungrateful, covetous, dishonest, neighbor despising, doubting, faultfinders, irreverent, fornicating, adulterous, fraudulent, complaining, bitter, lukewarm, unsubmitive, stiff-necked, greedy, heartless, impure, hypocritical, idolatrous, murderous (mental murder), unkind, lying, malicious, mocking, partial, prayerless, manipulators of God's Word, prejudice, Mammon-seeking earth dwellers, etc. ad nauseam. Yuck! By the way there are over 600 sins in the Bible.

So what is the good news of great joy? It is that the PRINCE OF PEACE has come to remove all sins and to provide man with Christ's own righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). God has provided the Remedy to all of man's maladies! The oldest and most hardened sinner need not sink back into despair. All is forgiven! All manner of righteousness will be provided by the Infant in the manger. What a joy that exceeds all temporal joys! Nothing less than God wrapping Himself in flesh and blood in the Babe could turn the dread and fear of sinners facing the Righteous God into joy. Only through Christ can all fear be turned into great joy!

Luke 2:10 And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people;

Grace personally for "you" and "for all the people." Wow!

Pastor Don