

Advent #4

THE EU, the Angels, the Shepherds Doxological Evangelism

Luke 2:8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will 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 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." 15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

THE EU...

<https://justthenews.com/nation/religion/sundo-not-be-afraid-how-pope-john-paul-ii-stood-faith-and-freedom-against-war>

The EU Commission for Equality recently published a guidance recommending that officials not use language that might be offensive to minorities. Several of the proposed "banned" words, including "Christmas" and "Christianity," were specifically recommended to be eliminated ahead of the Christmas season. ...Fortunately, the Pope weighed in by saying, "In history many, many dictatorships have tried to do this kind of thing. Think of Napoleon...think of the Nazis and the communist. It is something that throughout history hasn't worked."

While the actions of the EU commission are extreme, it is not unusual for humanity to downplay or even ignore the REAL joy of the Christmas season.

I mentioned how as far back as 1965 in the Charlie Brown Christmas show, Lucy indicated that Christmas was a commercial racket.

Go back before that to some of the early Christmas movies such as Miracle on 34th Street and we see a Christless Christmas. Santa is front and center, but not Jesus.

Go even further back to the days of Martin Luther who was known to deplore man's inability to fully enter the joy of Christmas.

A visitor at Luther's home in 1538 comments how the Reformer was in high spirits on Christmas day and spoke, sang, and thought of nothing but the glory of Christ's birth, while at the same time he expressed his disgust at the coldness of man (A. Lauterbach).

Now let's go back 2000 years to the First Christmas, although it wasn't called that...

THE ANGELS

Luke 2:8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will 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.

The angels announce news of MEGA JOY for all the people.

This news was so good and so 'mega' that it took a multitude (plethora) of angels to celebrate it.

EX: when something really great happens the joy is not complete until it is expressed and celebrated with others. EX: 40, 50th wedding anniversary, milestone birthdays, a great piece of art or music that moves you, a movie, a youtube clip... "You've got to see this".

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. Lewis (Reflections on Psalms) quoted in Piper, John. Desiring God, Revised Edition: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist .. Location 238

The Angels are praising God for such a great salvation, and it didn't even apply to them. The angels were glad for mankind, and they understood that all the glory belonged to God. While they did not use the word "Christmas" they did announce the birth of a savior. And they announced it with joy.

This was a stunning discovery for me. I must pursue joy in God if I am to glorify Him as the surpassingly valuable Reality in the universe. Joy is not a mere option alongside worship. It is an essential component of worship. We have a name for those who try to praise when they have no pleasure in the object. We call them hypocrites. Piper, John. Desiring God, Revised Edition: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist . Location 254

This raises the question, "Do we get excited about the wrong things?" Or as C.S. Lewis put it in The Weight of Glory...

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

There was nothing half-hearted about the angels. They had to bring in re-enforcements to give full weight to the glory it deserved.

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."

Martin Luther raises a good question, "If the angels rejoice, what about us?"

They weren't given a savior; we were. Jesus wasn't made like them; he was incarnate as a man. He took on our nature, not that of the angels.

Luther: It is not for the angels to be proud of Christ's incarnation, for Christ did not assume an angelic but a human nature. Therefore, it would not be a surprise if the angels looked at us with envy in their eyes because we human beings, creatures far inferior to them and sinners besides, are placed above them into an honor so high and great. They worship Christ, who has become our Brother, our flesh and blood; and yet they are not envious but gladly grant us the honor and are sincerely pleased by the fact that Christ is our Brother. They marvel at the human nature in Christ; and yet the honor and glory are not theirs but ours. And we human beings are unable to rejoice and be proud of it.....Is this not a great pity? Accursed of God be this wretched unbelief. (What Luther Says, 458, p. 154)

VoV – Joy

For my joy thou hast sent the Comforter,
multiplied thy promises,
shown me my future happiness,

given me a living fountain.
Thou art preparing joy for me and me for joy;
I pray for joy, wait for joy, long for joy;
give me more than I can hold, desire, or think of.

In short, give me the joy of the Angels and...

The Shepherds...

15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart

20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

They acted on what they saw and heard.

Other than Mary and Joseph, they were the first to hear the gospel good news.

What did they do?

They went to see and then they went "doxologizing" and praising God for what they had heard and seen.

It sounds like they were the first evangelists. They simply went and told what they had heard and seen. They were practicing "doxological evangelism", i.e. the proclamation of the good news through joyous praise.

EX: Have you ever been to a church where folks were singing songs or hymns of "praise" but everyone looked miserable? They looked like they'd been weaned on lemon juice. How attractive was that environment?

It is hard to believe that the Gospel is GOOD NEWS when the people proclaiming it have no joy.

EX: There is something attractive about people who are sincerely joyous about something, especially when it points to something bigger than themselves. The something can be religious or secular, but when people are sincerely joyous it has an effect.

The shepherds went away doxologizing and praising God. What they heard and saw impacted them from the inside out.

Oh, that we all had the shepherds' hearts to go and simply tell what we've heard and seen God do in our own lives.

Christianity is a "O taste and see" AND a "Go and tell" sort of faith.

17 When the shepherds had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart

You and I probably haven't seen a myriad of angels, but have we seen God do something in our lives? If so, then go tell it. Don't be afraid or ashamed to tell what God has done.

If anyone should be hesitant, it would be the shepherds. They were on the margins of society, yet they got the news first. There is an interesting twist in this birth narrative. Usually, shepherds go out to seek the lost lamb to save it. Here the Lamb of God, born in the stable, saves the shepherds who find Him.

(<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/shepherds-visit-2/commentary-on-luke-28-20> O. Wesley Allen)

The report of the shepherds should make us ponder and wonder because the news is WON-DER-FUL. It is also a bit incomprehensible. THERE IS mystery to the incarnation. Don't be sidetracked by the mystery. If God is God, and He is, then there will be things that we don't fully grasp or understand.

There are plenty of people who don't believe in God, and yet they don't understand their own belief system either.

EX: In "their" world that is supposedly a random accident, how is there so much order and design? In a purely material world, where do non-material concepts such as morality, love, justice, and freedom come from? On what basis would their lives ever contain wonder, something praiseworthy, or real joy? If life is a random accident, then nothing is truly glorious. It's just a fluke. How can it be praiseworthy?

The shepherds are overwhelmed at being brought into the mystery of history. They will always have a one up story to tell.

EX: when people are telling their name-dropping attention getting stories, these shepherds will always have a drop the mic moment... 'Yeah, that's a good story, but I was there when the angelic delegation came to announce the birth of the Savior, the Messiah, and we want and saw God in a manger.' BOOM!

But notice that they didn't go away praising themselves or bragging, they went away glorifying and praising God.

They were thrilled about the news of a Savior, of a Messiah (Christos, 'anointed one'). They were ready for "peace on earth among men with whom He is pleased."

This raises the question, "with whom is He pleased?" Who falls into that category?

EX: "I want to be in that number...."

Well, Hebrews 11:6 gives us a helpful insight – **"6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."**

God is pleased with those who believe and who seek Him by faith.

If you've trusted Christ by faith, then the proclamation of the angels and the shepherds is GOOD NEWS FOR YOU.

So, if you don't have faith, then the Good News from the angels is not yours.....YET. You are stuck in the European Union where Christmas and Christianity are seen by many as taboo and offensive. You need a change of address and the hope of Good News that come by following the lead of the shepherds... Go and worship the newborn King.

The promise of the angels can be yours TODAY.

There is no better time to get in on the peace on earth than Christmas. There is no better time to put your faith in Christ – "The Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing."

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