

## LUKE 2:8-20

### WHY ANNOUNCE CHRIST'S BIRTH TO NOBODIES

“In the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’

“When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

When her child came home from Sunday School, a mother asked him what he had learned. He told her that he had learned about Moses leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt. The mother, hoping to fix the account firmly in his mind, encouraged the lad to tell her the story.

The child responded, “Pharaoh wouldn’t let the Israelites go. So God sent Moses to organise a raid to distract the Pharaoh. While the Egyptians were distracted, Moses quickly got all the people moving. They marched and marched until they came to the Red Sea. Pharaoh and his whole army were right behind them. Moses quickly ordered the engineers to make a pontoon bridge across the sea and the people marched over. Once he was on the other side, Moses sent sappers to destroy the bridge with explosive charges, but the Egyptians were moving too fast. Pharaoh was at the bridge, threatening to cross any moment. So, Moses used his walkie talkie to call the Air Force to drive the enemy back with bombs and rockets. The Israelites were able to destroy the entire army and blow up the bridge so no Egyptians could follow them.”

The mother listened with wry amusement to the child’s account before saying, “Are you certain that is what you teacher told you?”

“No,” the lad responded, “but if I told you what she said, you wouldn’t believe it either.”

Many people don’t believe the Christmas story; it seems too fantastic. Moreover, the account defies our sense of convention. Frankly, if you or I were writing the Christmas Story, we’d try to make it as exciting as possible. If the advertising we produce is any indication, we are convinced that the birth of God’s Son should be announced to great and powerful people. We want to ensure that the matters we promote give us a “leg up” in the world. However, God chose to announce the birth of His Child to shepherds. Shepherds were among the least influential people in all Israel; they were nobodies. How odd that God chose to announce the birth of His Son to people that had no stature in the eyes of this world!

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The question posed by the interlocutor betrays a misperception concerning God's character as well as an overly optimistic estimate of man's goodness. Rather than accepting that we are created in the image of God, we attempt to create God in our image, which will never do. We will do well to accept God's own assessment of His thinking. Speaking for God, Isaiah writes:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

[ISAIAH 55:8, 9]

It should be immediately obvious that if we will understand why God chose to announce the birth of His Son to the humblest individuals imaginable, we need to get inside of God's mind. Admittedly, this is an impossible task, unless we receive God's own revelation of Himself.

Mankind generally has a high estimate of himself. When confronted with God's assessment of our condition, it is almost automatic to minimise our sinfulness. We might be genuinely forgetful, not remembering our wickedness; however, it is more likely that we don't want to remember all the sin that contaminates our lives. God's assessment of mankind is pretty dark. He states, “There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” [ECCLESIASTES 7:20].

The Apostle brings together a number of dark passages to remind us of our condition in **ROMANS 3:10-18**. The darkest statement is the final assessment that was first provided by the Psalmist: “There is no fear of God before their eyes” [ROMANS 3:18]. Paul summarises all that he has written with this singular assessment: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23]. It is obvious that God's assessment does not begin to approximate man's estimate of himself.

If we were to think about this, we would know that we are sinful. If we were perfect, we wouldn't die. However, the fact that we face death is a grim reminder that we are imperfect. Therefore, our only hope is for a Saviour. That was the purpose of Jesus' birth—that He might present Himself as a sacrifice for our sin.

Contrasted to our lack of righteousness and our badness, we should be aware that God is good. Perhaps you will recall an incident that occurred during the days when Jesus walked among men. Jesus was preparing to make a tour to Jerusalem with His disciples. It is at this point that we pick up the account as Peter told it. “As he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: “Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother”’” [MARK 10:17-19].

This is a vital point: God is good. God seeks what is good for us, and not what is evil. James says of God, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” [JAMES 1:17, 18]. James' testimony of God's character is but an iteration of a truth presented much earlier by the Psalmist, who wrote: “The LORD will give what is good” [PSALM 85:12]. God delights to give good gifts to mankind, and His greatest gift is forgiveness of sin and life.

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That brings us to the next consideration. God's purpose in sending His Son was not that He might awe mankind with some a great cosmic display of His power and majesty. God sent His Son to provide a sacrifice for mankind. We are taught that God "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" [1 JOHN 4:10]. In order to ensure that this point is understood, the Apostle of Love restates the matter, noting that "the Father sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world" [1 JOHN 4:14]. In fact, Jesus was identified as "the Lamb of God." The Baptist's testimony concerning Jesus, spoken as Jesus neared John one day, was, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" [JOHN 1:29]! The next day, as though to emphasise this identification, John again points to Him as "the Lamb of God" [see JOHN 1:36]. Clearly, this One was to be presented as a lamb for sacrifice. Since the mission on which Jesus was sent was to present His life as a sacrifice because of the sin of mankind, the Father chose to present Him in the most humble circumstances imaginable.

Here is a humbling thought—God does not need man; man needs God! Because this is so, God does not consider social standing when He calls people to life. When He calls us, our wealth means nothing to Him. Our stature in the eyes of other mere mortals is unimportant to God. Whatever notoriety we may have obtained is of no significance to God. Though the churches of our day tend to look to stars to adulate, God looks for humble hearts that are prepared to enshrine Him as Master. This is demonstrated powerfully when God dispatched Samuel to anoint David as King.

Samuel was delighted when Jesse's eldest son was presented before him. However, God cautioned His prophet, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" [1 SAMUEL 16:7].

Later, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, the Apostle Paul will urge Corinthian Christians, and consequently all Christians who read his words, "Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'" [1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31].

Man's possessions, power and position dispose him to ignore God. It is only as we come to God, recognising Him as God that we receive the life He offers. We have nothing that would make Him desire us. He offers life in His Son as a free gift, which we may accept or reject. What we cannot do is negotiate! Every person should keep in mind the words of the Apostle, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" [ROMANS 6:23].

Why announce the birth of His Son to nobodies? It was His sovereign choice to do so. However, in acting thusly, God announced the birth of His Son to those who would accept the glad announcement. Having heard the celestial birth announcement, the shepherds said, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste" [LUKE 2:15, 16a].

The humble heart still responds to the Lord's announcement. God seeks those who are small enough in their own sight to recognise His greatness. I trust that you are included in that number of those who are prepared to heed the divine message of life in Christ the Lord.

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And that is our call to you. Jesus was born that He might give His life as a sacrifice in the place of sinful man. Your great need is to accept His sacrifice and receive Him as Master over your life. Do it now. The Word of God invites all who are willing to receive the promise, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." That promise is iterated as Paul cites the Prophet Joel, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. Amen.