

Series: *Christmas Messages*

Title: "Luke 2: History's Turning Point" (Luke 2:8-14, Hebrews 1:4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/14/2013

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Today I would like to call your attention to a very familiar passage of Scripture, which is found in Luke chapter 2, beginning at verse eight. This is the account of the announcement of the incarnation of Jesus Christ to the shepherds. Let me read those familiar words for you, Luke chapter 2, beginning at verse eight:

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!"

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into Heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

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The Great Hinge Point of History

Now these are very familiar words that we read at every Christmas season. But I think that sometimes, even for Bible believing Christians, these words have become so familiar that we don't really stop to consider the meaning and the importance of this account.

What we are witnessing in Luke chapter 2 is one of the greatest turning points in all of history. God taking on a body of human flesh in order to redeem fallen sinners and redeem the entire created order from the curse of sin.

The only greater turning point thus far in the history of the world was the one that happened 33 years after this, when the Lord Jesus Christ went to the cross to pay in full the price for sin with His own blood, and when He rose bodily from the grave in declaration of the fact that condemned sinners could now stand fully justified, once and forever before the judgment bar of God, because by repentance and faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ they may be clothed in His perfect righteousness, and have all of their sins and iniquities cleansed, and forgiven, and remembered against them no more. And because these two great turning points of history have already taken place 2000 years ago, we have the sure promise of the third great turning point of history yet to come, and that is the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The words of the angel to the shepherds in Luke chapter 2 beginning at verse 10 are the essential message of the Christian Gospel: "for unto you is born this day in

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the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

And the song of the angels in Luke chapter 2 verse 14 gives us the essential importance of that message: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

This was the most stupendous announcement ever made to mankind. But the tragedy is that throughout the long centuries, most of mankind has not really been interested in this message. Oh, many people may be familiar with the words of the angels because they have heard this account read at various times. Many people think that what we are told in Luke chapter 2 is a myth or a fable, or that it is some sort of mystical message.

To Whom Was This Message Given?

it is worth noting, at the very beginning, that this is a message that was given first of all not to intellectuals, not to educated theologians, not to religious leaders, not to kings and princes, not to leaders of science or industry, not to great philosophers, but first of all to simple shepherds.

In First Corinthians chapter 1, beginning at verse 26, the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says this:

For you see your calling, brethren that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has

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chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world [or the insignificant or lowly things of the world, it could be translated] and the things which are despised [even shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night] God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

There was an apostate theologian in the 20th century named Rudolph Bultmann. Bultmann was considered to be a great intellectual. He was considered to be "wise according to the flesh." And so this man who was, as Paul puts it, "wise according to the flesh" but ignorant of the things of God said that the Bible needed to be demythologized. The Bible needed to have the myths removed from it. The Bible needed to have the miraculous removed from it. And that included the account that we have just read. It also included, in Bultmann's view, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, and the miracles, and His resurrection from the dead.

But dear friends, the account that we have just read in Luke chapter 2 is not a myth. Nothing in the Bible is a myth. Nothing in the Gospels is a myth. This is fact. This is reality.

But the tragedy is that most people are not interested in the message of the

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angels at all. Or, perhaps, they are interested in it in some kind of mystical way. But that is not how we are to approach the Word of God. That is not how we are to approach the passage that we've just read in Luke chapter 2. You must believe that this message is a historical fact, in order to be saved. You must believe the facts of this message, the facts of Jesus Christ, the facts of His person and His work, in order to be saved.

And this is not only the message of salvation for mankind individually, which is so vitally important. This is also the message of the coming of the One who would redeem the entire universe from the curse of sin. That is why Luke chapter 2 is a central turning point of history. And it is vitally important for us to understand it.

In particular, I want to focus our attention on the words that we find in Luke chapter 2, verses 13 and 14: "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, goodwill toward men!'"

As we read the Scriptures, it is always important for us to ask questions to make sure that we understand what God is saying to us. And we must always keep in mind the vital fact that the Scriptures explain themselves. And so with that in mind, I would like to put before you three questions: First, Who were these angels? Second, Why did they come? And thirdly, what was their message? What is the significance of that message for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ? And, what is the significance of that message for the world at large? And so, let us

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consider each of these questions together.

Who Were The angels?

First of all, who were the angels who came down from Heaven saying these great words, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men"? Well, let me first of all tell you who they were not. They weren't greeting card angels. They were not Hallmark angels, or American Greetings angels. They were not cartoon angels. They were not Precious Moments angels.

They were not the feminized misrepresentations of angels that we so often see in advertisements, and in various Christmas displays, or in many works of art. No, these angels were not any of those things that Satan the great deceiver has put into the heart of man in place of God's truth about angels.

Who, then, were these angels? The answer is that this was an army. This was God's supernatural army. The term that is used in Luke chapter two is a military term – "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the Heavenly host." The force of the original Greek is much stronger: Literally, it reads like this: "And suddenly there was with the angel an innumerable company of supernatural beings, composed of the ranks of the Heavenly army."

In fact, when William Tyndale translated the New Testament in the early 1500s, that is how he rendered it: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of Heavenly soldiers." "A multitude of Heavenly soldiers." The angelic army of God.

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And so we have the answer to our first question, "Who are these angels?"

Why Did They Come?

And so we come to our second question: Why did these angels come? Why did God send the soldiers of the supernatural army of Heaven to announce the incarnation of God the Son?

The answer is that when God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, came into this world in human form, He invaded the territory of the Devil. Why did He come into this world? First John chapter three, verse eight tells us: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested" – for this purpose God the Son came into the world in visible, human form; why? – "that He might destroy the works of the Devil."

That He might break the hold of the works of the Devil on this world at large, and on the elect of God in particular. That He might free men from the bondage of the Devil. That He might free sinners from the curse brought on by the Devil. That He might loose the force of the Devil's hold upon them.

And so, a supernatural army came with Him as Jesus came into this world, into Satan's realm. "A multitude of Heavenly soldiers." The angelic army of God, coming, it would appear, to do battle with the forces of Satan that we see our Lord Himself dealing with so often in the Gospels, as He cast out demons and rebuked evil spirits. We don't know all of the ways in which that Heavenly army operated. But we do have glimpses of these things at various places in the Word of God.

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Back in the Old Testament, in Second Kings chapter 6, we find that the prophet Elisha asked the Lord to give his servant the ability, for a moment, to see the angelic army of the Lord when Elisha and his servant were surrounded by a physical army of horses and chariots. And we read in Second Kings chapter six that Elijah's

servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" [What are we going to do now? We're in big trouble!] So [Elisha] answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:14-17)

Just as the Lord's army came to defend Elisha and the physical nation of Israel, the Lord's army came with Christ when He entered this world to accomplish the redemption of the Israel of God, the people of the Body of Christ.

Lucifer, Gabriel, Michael

In Scripture, the angels are always spoken of in the masculine. The three angels were named for us in Scripture all have masculine names.

Lucifer, who rebelled against God and became Satan. Scripture tells us that Lucifer was God's "anointed cherub." A mighty angel. And even in his fallen

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state, Lucifer or Satan is referred to in Isaiah chapter 14 beginning at verse 16 as the one "who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed its cities..."

Christians are to put on the whole armor of God, in order that we may be able to stand against the "wiles" - the deceit and trickery - of the Devil, the slanderer (Ephesians 6:11). Peter exhorts believers, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith..." (1 Peter 5:8-9). Lucifer, Satan, the Devil, is still a mighty angel, even in his fallen state.

We also read in Scripture of two other angels by name, Michael and Gabriel, who remained loyal to our Lord and to his Christ and were sent to do mighty works for Him.

We read in the eighth and ninth chapters of the book of Daniel that God commanded the angel Gabriel to give Daniel an understanding of the prophetic vision of the times of the end that he had seen. We read in Luke chapter 1, beginning at verse 11, that it was the angel Gabriel who appeared to Zacharias to announce to him that he was about to become the father of John the Baptist, and to tell him what the work and ministry of John the Baptist would be as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. We also read in the first chapter of Luke that it was the angel Gabriel who announced to Mary that she was to become the human mother of the incarnate Christ.

We read in the 10th chapter of Daniel that an Angel who is not named, but is most likely also Gabriel, was engaged in warfare against the forces of Satan who

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tried to prevent him from coming to minister to Daniel, and we read in Daniel chapter 10 verse 13 that Michael the Archangel came to assist Gabriel in the battle. We find in Daniel chapter 12 that Michael has a special relationship with the people of God, the Israel of God, as their protector.

We are also told in the ninth verse of the book of Jude that Michael the Archangel contended with Satan, disputing about the body of Moses.

And in the book of Revelation, in chapter 12, we are told of warfare in Heaven, and Michael and his angels – the angels that have remained loyal to God – are seen fighting against Satan and the angels that rebelled with him against God. And we are told that Michael and his angels prevailed in this battle, and that Satan and his angels were cast out of Heaven, and cast down to the earth.

Mighty Beings

Dear friends, the angels who came to the shepherds in Luke chapter 2 were mighty beings. Aside from God himself, they are the most mighty beings in the universe.

Several times in Scripture the angels are spoken of as mighty creatures. Creatures of great power. We are told in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 14 that the angels, the soldiers of the angelic army of God, are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation." Once again, just as in Luke chapter 2, the language of this verse is military language. The force of the original language is that the angels are spirits under orders, who are sent out by God to

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carry out His orders on behalf of the redeemed. They operate at Christ's command on our behalf and for His glory.

And so, operating at the command of Christ as He came into this world, a supernatural army came with Him. A supernatural army at His disposal and at His command. Dear friends, we must remember what the Holy Spirit tells us through the Apostle Paul in the first chapter of the book of Colossians, about the Lord Jesus Christ who came into this world. Colossians chapter 1, beginning at verse 15:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in Heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

And we read in Colossians chapter 2, verse nine, that "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form." Dear friends, all the fullness of the Godhead dwelled in the body of a newborn baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger in Bethlehem. All the fullness of the Godhead dwelled in the body of the boy of 12 who asked questions of the teachers of the law at the temple in Jerusalem. And all the fullness of the Godhead dwelled in the body of the 33-year-old man who stood before Pontius Pilate before He went to the cross, and said, "do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He will provide me with more than 12 legions of angels?"

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The angels of whom we read in Luke chapter 2 are an army, legions of angels, operating at the command of God as the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, comes into the world, taking on a body of human flesh.

And so it is absolutely vital for us to understand clearly and exactly the message of these mighty creatures, operating at the command of Almighty God. What was their message? What is the significance of that message for mankind? Why is this the great turning point of history? Why is mankind's general disinterest in this message so very tragic? Those questions, the Lord willing, will be the focus of our next message as we continue to examine the greatest turning point in history which we find unfolding before us in Luke chapter 2.

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