

**Advent Sermon Series: “A Brief History of Salvation”
“The First Public Proclamation About Jesus”
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Christmas Eve, Thursday, December 24, 2020**

Do you remember the first time you did something of significance? There was something special in that moment. E.g., I recall the first time a youth went on one of our youth trips — he was nervous about a new experience and being away from home, but by the time the trip was over he had had a wonderful time! E.g, I recall the first time I preached in church. I was 16 and preached on King David from 1 Samuel 16, and I will never forget the feel of the pulpit and the experience— I was nervous before, but it just felt right. The first time of something significant is special, and we will see that in our text today, where there is the first proclamation of the good news in Jesus!

READ Luke 2:8-14 (p. 58)

CONTEXT: Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, “the city of David” (v 4) in response to the census called by Quirinius during the reign of Caesar Augustus. While there Mary gives birth to Jesus.

The proclamation of the angel can be summarized on two points. First, they insist on no fear but joy! READ v 9-10. We are well familiar with the Old Testament theme of the beginning of wisdom being the fear of the Lord. And there is great truth there— with great respect and awe we should approach coming into His house tonight. But as in the Old Testament, God desires a relationship with His people, one based on His רַחֲמֵי , His steadfast lovingkindness. It is kind of like that when we grew up. E.g., I recall my relationship with my Dad was different when I got out of college. When I was growing up there was a fearful respect of him, coupled with a deep love— but I knew not to cross him in disrespect. Once that foundation of respect was laid, he and I could enjoy a loving relationship known for its mutual appreciation and joy. We would go out and play golf together when I was in town and have a really good time talking about life and having fun. That is kind of where the New Testament is with Jesus. The Old Testament has told us a lot about what God is like and what He expects of us. And once Jesus came to deal with human sin, the relationship was now allowed to be based in joy and mutual affection. God still comes to us and says, “Do not fear”, and many of us still really need to hear this. E.g., I recall someone with whom I was speaking who was interested in Christianity but was afraid— what if God would make a mess of his life and have him poor and destitute? He needed to learn how trustworthy the Lord is. What God wants to give us is joy. E.g., I recall C.S. Lewis explained how he came to Christ as a former atheist. People like J.R.R. Tolkien were talking to him at Oxford University and getting through to him spiritually, and one day Lewis decided to go to the zoo with his brother, and

he rode on the side car as his brother drove the motorcycle, and by the time he got to the zoo he was a believer. And what he felt was joy, not fear, even though he described himself as scared initially with his eyes darting this way and that. It is of interest that Lewis as a confirmed bachelor in his 50s wrote his autobiography and called it *Surprised by Joy*, and later met a woman who would become his wife, and her name was Joy Davidman! God is still the judge, and He will judge humanity, but Jesus has provided a permanency to forgiveness and reconciliation which the Old Testament did not.

The second point of the angel's proclamation is an insistence on the fact that the promises have come true. READ v 11. The Savior from David, the Messiah, has come! And this one will bring peace; READ v 14. We recall last Sunday we read from Micah 5:5a that the One to come from Bethlehem will be "one of peace". This "peace" derives its meaning from the Hebrew שלום, which is translated, "completeness, soundness, welfare, peace" (*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 1022). It is a totality of wellbeing. Have you ever felt that? E.g., I recall when I graduated from high school my parents took me to a hotel with the rest of the family to celebrate, and I recall the joy and happiness I felt there. That is what God wants to give us. That is what he gave me, and saved me from a time in my teens when my life could have gone in a quite different direction, but it was like He took me by the hair and lifted me up to a safe place. E.g., I recall the story of a young boy in the 1700s whose house caught on fire with him upstairs and unable to get down; finally, before it was too late, he jumped from the open window to safety below. This was John Wesley! His mother described him as a fire brand plucked from the fire (from Amos 4:11). E.g., I recall when C.S. Lewis described his conversion, what met him was not fear, but joy. Thus, he entitled his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*.

The result is worship, as indeed is the proper response from us.