

• *“Unimportant” people*

People who spent their time looking after animals were not thought to be very important. Shepherds could not keep ceremonially clean and please the orthodox Pharisees. They spent their time in the countryside. Rural people everywhere seem to be regarded as somehow beneath their city-dwelling contemporaries.

1. God honours the under-privileged

1. **Luke lets us know that God honours the underprivileged.** God chooses such people to hear the first news of the birth of His Son. Luke likes to point out how God chooses the despised people of the world. Luke made this point before by including Mary's song which insists that God favours lowliness ^{☐1}, scatters proud people ^{☐2}, reduces the powerful to weakness ^{☐3}, sends rich people away empty-handed ^{☐4}.

☐1 1:48
☐2 1:51
☐3 1:52
☐4 1:53

For the shepherds it comes as a great surprise. They are simply doing their usual work ^{☐1} when an angel appears to them. With the angel comes the radiating light of the glory of God ^{☐2}.

☐1 2:8
☐2 2:9

2. A special occasion – attended by angels

2. **The attendance of angels lets us know that it was a special occasion in the plans of God.** God is entering the human race in a unique way. The coming of the angels begins with an appearance of one angel. As usual when an angel appears they respond with fear ^{☐1}. It is natural for sinners to be afraid of God, so conscious are we of our sins. But although the fear of God in this way is natural God does not in fact want us to be afraid. Many times people who specially are drawn close to God are told not to fear ^{☐2}.

☐1 2:9
☐2 2:10

3. Salvation is being brought to the human race

3. **Salvation is being brought to the human race.** The shepherds are told they need not fear, but should be rejoicing. A message of joy is on offer for everyone. It is for the entire human race ^{☐1}, and so it is for them ('to you', ^{☐2}). It fulfils prophecy since the child is born in the city of David ^{☐3}. Anyone who is not rejoicing has failed to grasp the gospel message. It is about forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

☐1 2:10b
☐2 2:11
☐3 2:11b

• *A message about God's doings*

The event is a step in God's bringing salvation. Every other message is essentially a message of what we must do and so is not really a joyful message. Who can rejoice at a programme of endeavours laid upon us? But this is not a message of what we must do. Rather it is a message of what God is doing and has done.

• *A divine Messiah – divine glory has come into the world*

The angels spell out the content of the good news. God becoming man! A miraculous birth! A 'Saviour' ^{☐1} has come, One who will bring deliverance from the guilt and power of sin in their lives and from its numerous consequences. The child is 'Christ Lord' as the Greek has it ^{☐2}, in an unusual phrase. We translate it 'Christ and Lord' or 'Christ the Lord'. The idea is that Jesus is a divine Messiah. The divine glory has come into the world.

☐1 2:12
☐2 2:12

4. The offer of salvation invites a response

4. **Salvation is offered to all but invites a response.** The shepherds are invited to believe what the angel says. The sign that they have found the child will be when they find a child wrapped in simple strips of cloth and lying in the eating- trough for animals ^{☐1}. The city of Bethlehem will not have many lodging places. They must go to look for the child.

☐1 2:13

• *Angelic praise*

After the angel has spoken he is joined by a great multitude of angels praising God ^{☐1}. 'Glory to God!' they sing ^{☐2}. It is a short

☐1 2:13
☐2 2:14

phrase but it means ‘God be honoured, because we see what He is like in what He has done!’ God’s power and mercy, God’s amazingly surprising ways, are obvious in the amazing event that has taken place.

• **Peace on earth**

If in heaven God gets honour, on earth men are to get peace, because of the birth of the Christ-child. It will not be a man-centred peace or the peace of an easy life, but peace through being reconciled with God. It is peace ‘among people of who are the objects of God’s good pleasure’. The last phrase is interpreted differently by different people.

• **People whom God is pleased to bless**

(i) The old translation ‘goodwill towards men’ is not quite right, and translates inferior Greek manuscripts.

(ii) It could be taken to mean ‘people of goodwill’, that is, those who respond to what God is giving them in Jesus. But the Greek word refers to God’s pleasure, not human ‘good will’.

(iii) Rather it refers to the whole human race to whom God is pleased to give the Saviour – ‘people whom God is pleased to bless’. It has the idea that Jesus is offered to everyone, and God would be pleased if everyone received Him.

• **God appears in the child – a divine Messiah**

The angels come because they accompany the events that take place in the life of Jesus. Angels appear with radiating glory only when they are representing God’s special presence. The angels and the glory are the usual accompaniments of the appearing of God – but where is God? One almost expects a special appearing like that in Exodus 3:2–6, and elsewhere. God appears in the child. The child is the divine Messiah! It is His angels and His glory that has become visible to the shepherds.

• **Shepherds search for the baby and then tell everyone they meet!**

After sharing their message and giving their choral fanfare with the shepherds, the angels withdraw ^{☒¹} and the shepherds are left alone. They respond with faith, searching the lodging places of Bethlehem until they find the baby that has been described to them ^{☒²}. Then they start telling everyone ^{☒³}. New-found salvation cannot be kept quiet for long! The shepherds make known what has happened. Whom do they tell? Everyone they meet! The birth of Jesus requires a response. We should accept it as something amazing (2:18; with which we may compare 1:21, 63; 2:3 3). We should react with thoughtful submission, as Mary did ^{☒⁴}. Like the shepherds we go on our way praising and glorifying God ^{☒⁵}.

☒¹ 2:15

☒² 2:16

☒³ 2:17

☒⁴ 2:19

☒⁵ 2:20

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