

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: December 20, 2009

A Messenger Sent From God

by Dan Trygg

"...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." Luke 2:10-20

This is a very familiar part of the Christmas story, the appearance of the angels to the shepherds, and their consequent search for the newborn Messiah. It offers a powerful example and foreshadowing of the spread of the message about the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **Just as the actual coming of the promised King was initiated from heaven and was preceded by angelic visitations**, both to Zacharias and Mary (Lk. 1:11-21, 26-38), so here we see that the angelic armies were also called out to be the first to proclaim the glad tidings to humankind. **Just as the Savior Himself came from heaven, so the first gospel preaching came through the heavenly host. The first evangelists were angels**, heavenly messengers dispatched to carry heaven's greatest declaration. Unfortunately, this is somewhat obscured by our English translations, but in the original Greek it is abundantly clear. The English phrase, "I bring you good news" is just one word in Greek, *euangelizomai*. Wycliffe, one of the earliest translators of the Bible into English rendered it this way, "I evangelize to you a great joy..."

The word, "evangelize", is a common enough word in English. It certainly brings to mind attempts at communicating the story of Jesus in a variety of ways. In fact, **it has become almost exclusively a religious word. This was not the case in the NT times. Back then, it was used in a wide variety of settings for communicating good news of any kind.** Interestingly, this verbal form was not used much by the other gospel writers. Aside from Luke, it is found only in Matthew 11:5, which is actually a direct quote from the Greek Septuagint translation of Isaiah 61:1. It is as though the other gospel writers were almost unfamiliar with the use of this term. Matthew and Mark *were* familiar with the *noun* form, however, preferring to communicate the same idea by using a different verb, "proclaim" or "preach" (Gk., *kērussō*) in a phrase combined with the noun, "good-news", hence "*proclaim the good-news*". Even here, however, the usage of the word "gospel" is fairly rare, occurring only 4 times in Matthew, and 7 times in Mark. The noun is never used by Luke or John at all. **"Evangelize" seems to be a term that was later popularized by Paul.** He used it in Romans, the letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians and Thessalonians some 19 times in all! And he used the noun form 60 times in his letters! On 3 occasions, he even used the noun *and* the verb in the same verse, "the gospel which I gospelized to you" (I Cor. 15:1; II Cor. 11:7; Gal. 1:11). **Since Luke was his traveling companion, it is not surprising that we would see this speech pattern emerge in his writings, Luke and Acts.** While he only uses the noun form twice, he used the verbal form 25 times. Of the 130 total times that either of these words occur, they are recorded or written by Paul or Luke 106 times! Since the word was not strictly religious in the time of Jesus and the apostles, **the first readers of the NT would have been impressed with the repeated emphasis on the "good news" and the activity of Paul and others "good-news-ing" people.** It is clear that these angels and **the early Christians were genuinely excited to share the latest and greatest of all messages: Unto them a Savior has come!**

Isn't that the substance of the message, the bare kernel of what the angels and Christians declared? "A Savior has come!" The word means "savior, deliverer, or preserver". It had been used 20 times in the Septuagint Greek OT, *18 times of God Himself*. It was also a title ascribed to princes, kings and emperors. At the time of Jesus' birth, Julius Caesar and Augustus had both given this title. **For these shepherds, ...the very first hearers of the "evangel", the "good-news" ..., the angels added the extra information that He had been born "in the city of David" (a reference to Bethlehem, David's home town), and that He was "Christ, the Lord".** For these Jewish shepherds this would have added another level of meaning and importance. **"Christ" meant "anointed one". It was the title of the king of the Jews (Lk. 23:2). The Hebrew equivalent was "messiah".** In their minds, it probably would have stirred up feelings of nationalistic hope. Could this be the one to throw off the Roman yoke, and set Israel free?

Then the angel gave them a sign to look for, “You will find a baby wrapped in cloth and *laying in a manger.*” The word for “manger” could mean either a feeding trough or a stall. **Armed with this information, it would not be difficult to find this child in a small town like Bethlehem.** They would be looking for a *stable*, not a house or inn.

They had been speaking to one angel, the angel of the Lord. Remember? They had been just watching their flocks when this one angel had appeared, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. This was overwhelming *enough!* That was enough to make them “fear a great fear”. **Now, suddenly, an entire army of angels appear!** That’s right, an *army* of angels! We don’t know what they looked like, but the word used by Luke is regularly used for a group of soldiers prepared for war. Not only was there a great multitude of them, but their appearance must have been fearsome. For the shepherds to think of them as military personnel indicates that **they must have been wearing armor or weapons. They looked like a company of military troops,** *not* choir members. Instead of a battle cry, however, they were praising God. They were saying, “Glory in the highest to God, and upon earth peace among people.” **The fearsome, warlike army of angels was proclaiming peace.**

Who is a candidate for this peace? The Greek has been debated here. The word translated as “good will” (KJV) or “on whom His favor rests” (NIV) or “with whom He is pleased” (NASB) is the Greek word “*eudokias*”. It is a compound word. The prefix “*eu-*” means “good” or “well”. The stem of the word, “*dokia*” comes from “*dokeō*”, which means “I think, suppose, consider; I am disposed; I am convinced, believe or decide”. Put these two ideas together in this word and you have either that these are **people “of good estimation”** (i.e., by God’s evaluation of them), **or people “of good evaluation”** (i.e., they see and respond to God’s offer of peace by their decision-making, repentance and belief), **or people “of good disposition”** (i.e., they are people who have hearts of good will toward others). In other words, the chorus of the angels was a declaration or offer of peace with God. **Any way you look at it, this offer is based upon God’s good will or benevolent purpose toward humanity** (Eph. 1:7-11). This fits with the larger message of a Savior sent by God. God loves us. He values us enough to take measures to bridge the gap that sin had caused, and to send us an angel with a “good-news-message”. In fact, He sent a *whole army* of angels to make the point that He regards us highly, and is at work on our behalf. The part we sometimes miss is the reality contained by the larger word picture. **We are given a chance to respond to God’s offer of peace, the terms of which are communicated to us by a huge army on angelic soldiers, armed to the teeth. We would do well to “get a clue” here, and respond favorably and wisely to this offer of peace.** Part of this would include becoming people of good will toward others. God is gracious to us so that we can be saved from our selfishness to become joyful, giving and loving people. **The “great joy which shall be for all the people” spreads as we respond to the Savior, own Him as our Lord, and carry out His good disposition toward others in the relationships of our day-to-day lives.**

Note that after the angels left, the shepherds were saying to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem to see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” They heard the word, and then they went and sought Jesus out. **They heard, and then they responded. They heard, ...they searched.** They hurried off to find the child that “the Lord has made known to us.”

When they found Jesus, they made known the message of the angels, first to Mary and Joseph, then to others. They delivered the good news they had heard.

Those who heard their testimony were amazed. They wondered at this report. Mary herself was keeping these things together in her heart, pondering them over and over.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. They thanked God for the revelation He had given them. **As they had searched out what had been told them, they found the report of the angel to be true,** exactly as they had been told. **Based upon this, they chose to believe the rest of what the angel told them,** namely that this child would someday be the Savior, Christ the Lord, and that God was offering peace to people through this Child. **They were already people of good estimation,** in that God valued them enough to send the Savior, and also to send a message to them. They could not ignore that He thought highly enough of them (and the rest of humankind) to send such a *clear* message. **In response, they became people of good-evaluation.** They did not simply disregard or put off this incredible report. They searched it out in haste and diligence. This was *incredible* news! It changes *everything!* *Is it true?* They immediately resolved to do whatever it took to find out. Having checked into it, and found that the details were reliable, they made a good decision, a decision to line up with the angel’s report. They believed God. This decision transformed them inside, and **they became people of good disposition.** They were filled with joy, and couldn’t help but spread the good-news to others. They became men “of good-will”.

One last thought: **An angel will once more preach the gospel to this planet.** God will send an angel to fly over the planet one last time, inviting people to repent before the terrible judgment falls (Rev. 14:6,7).