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DECEMBER 2010.

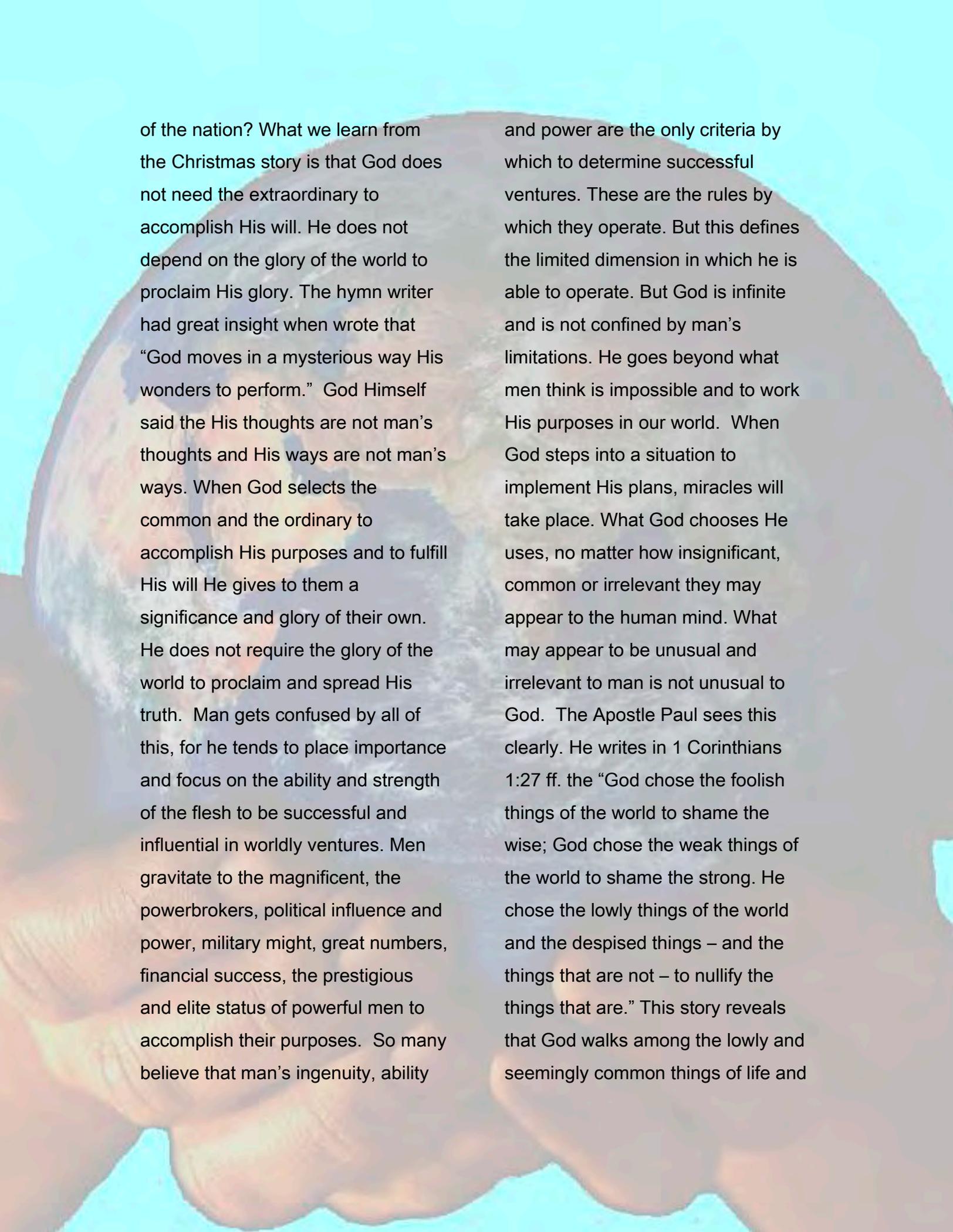
WHEN THE ANGELS LEAVE....WHAT THEN?

Scripture Reading – Luke 2:8-20

Introduction

The uniqueness of the Christmas story lies in the many different and unique ways God chose to reveal the birth of His One and Only Son. It is also striking as to what kind of people God He selected to reveal the coming of His Son to this earth. If we reflect on the people God chose, and we will discover that the way He did it is uniquely God-like. Man in his finiteness would not have walked the same pathway that God walked in the unfolding process and revelation of His Son's arrival in Bethlehem. We might ask the question as to why

God would not go to those places and those people where the news of His Son's birth would be loudly and universally proclaimed. Surely this is what He would have wanted. And furthermore why did He not prepare a birth place fit for a King? Would not the people have believed more easily that this baby was the Messiah if was born in the palace? Why did He announce this incredible news to unknown people in obscure places? Why did He entrust this precious announcement to those other than the top religious leaders



of the nation? What we learn from the Christmas story is that God does not need the extraordinary to accomplish His will. He does not depend on the glory of the world to proclaim His glory. The hymn writer had great insight when wrote that “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.” God Himself said the His thoughts are not man’s thoughts and His ways are not man’s ways. When God selects the common and the ordinary to accomplish His purposes and to fulfill His will He gives to them a significance and glory of their own. He does not require the glory of the world to proclaim and spread His truth. Man gets confused by all of this, for he tends to place importance and focus on the ability and strength of the flesh to be successful and influential in worldly ventures. Men gravitate to the magnificent, the powerbrokers, political influence and power, military might, great numbers, financial success, the prestigious and elite status of powerful men to accomplish their purposes. So many believe that man’s ingenuity, ability

and power are the only criteria by which to determine successful ventures. These are the rules by which they operate. But this defines the limited dimension in which he is able to operate. But God is infinite and is not confined by man’s limitations. He goes beyond what men think is impossible and to work His purposes in our world. When God steps into a situation to implement His plans, miracles will take place. What God chooses He uses, no matter how insignificant, common or irrelevant they may appear to the human mind. What may appear to be unusual and irrelevant to man is not unusual to God. The Apostle Paul sees this clearly. He writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27 ff. the “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are.” This story reveals that God walks among the lowly and seemingly common things of life and

selects simple humble people and uses them to accomplish His redemptive purposes.

In the passage of scripture which was read we note that God sent His heavenly messenger to ordinary people, on an ordinary night in an ordinary place. But the common and the ordinary took on the glory of God in an extraordinary way when God stepped into the situation. The Angel told these ordinary shepherds to go to Bethlehem and that was a simple ordinary town. Nothing exciting or significant took place at Bethlehem. In itself that night had nothing of glory. The Prophet Micah, however, said that the Lord would be born in Bethlehem. His words speak to this. "But you Bethlehem Ephratha though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who would be a ruler over Israel....." World history gives little information about that tiny village. It had no castles and no princes, no temple and no priests. The glory of the world was not there. Nevertheless there were things in Bethlehem that brought to mind the

glory of God. The name Bethlehem meant the "house of bread." This serves to remind us that Jesus claimed to be the Bread of Life. The older name of the village Ephratha meant "fruitful." But down through the centuries what little town has been as fruitful as the birthplace of our Savior? In addition at the gate of the town was "David's well," and not far from its limits were the Pools of Solomon. No doubt they were suggestive symbols of living water, the streams about which the Scriptures say that they make glad the City of God. (Mars A. Dale: Christmas – sermon-p. 90-91(Special Day Sermons for Evangelicals). These simple things speak of the glory of God. Yet from the standpoint of the world there was nothing exciting or sensational about the place. Nevertheless God chose this little town to be the birth place of the Son of God. He placed it on the map of redemption. The angels said it clearly "To you in the town of David this day is born of David's line A Savior who is Christ the Lord." It was there that God chose to "empty

Himself of all but love.” This event which took place in the fields where the shepherds were living and keeping watch over their flocks by night had eternal significance. Its importance can be seen as you study all of the ripple effects of what took place that night. Great truths were revealed to simple shepherds. This was a joyful yet somber moment in the history of our world, and it wasn’t taking place in the senate halls of Rome. It was happening in the fields of Palestine to simple shepherds living in the fields caring for their sheep. In our thinking it was most probably the most unlikely place to receive such incredible news with eternal and life changing meaning. What was announced that night was not meant solely for a few shepherds in the fields? This touched all of mankind and involved their eternal destiny. This great message was entrusted to simple uneducated men, who God chose to as messengers of His Son’s birth.

I believe it is important to look at the encounter of the angel with lowly

shepherds. What lies within this event is amazing. What is also important to note is what comes into focus when the angels went away? What message did they leave? What was done about it? Was the appearance of the Angel, the exciting message proclaimed and the new joy simply to be relished for a moment and then forgotten?? After the angels had left and the darkness of that eastern sky settled in once again across the fields, and the joyful song was replaced by the quiet bleating of the sheep the question could have asked WHAT NOW??? Was this where everything was to return to mundane normality? Was this great message to be left dormant, silent and buried in the fields of Palestine? What was to happen now that the angels had left? More importantly what did happen when the angels had gone? Notice in this special moment,

1. WHAT WAS DEFINED. Luke 2:10-11.

The message of the angel clarifies what this moment meant. “To you is born in David’s town.....a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” Let me amplify this announcement. First you will observe that there was nothing obscure or confusing about what the angel said. Two basic features are evident in these words they are clarity and simplicity. It was a defining moment because Jesus was revealed as the Savior of the world and was to become the central figure in human history. That is not to say that He has been accepted by all the generations of human history, nevertheless His influence on the world is incalculable. We still feel it today. He was the central figure and focus of Old Testament prophecy and is the central person in the written records of our planet. His birth split history and shook the foundations of hell. Is it not true that the world celebrates Christmas year after year? Does not this give some indication of its significance? It split time, for man has divided time in relation to His birth, because we refer to time as B.C., (before Christ)

and A.D. (after Christ). There is a sense that Jesus is the central figure in time. There is a real sense that time revolves around Him. One day He will bring an end to time as we know it. The announcement of the angel to the shepherds is a defining moment in time. It is so because the announcement is,

a. Defining is its scope.

One has pointed out that there are seven features which define this moment. Note what the angel tells the shepherds who .

i. **“Who it was who came.”** It is “Christ the Lord” who came. He is long awaited Messiah. Then we are told,

. ii. **How He came** The angel made this clear. “Today.....a Savior has been born.” We know that “He was born of a virgin.....conceived of the Holy Spirit, supernaturally....for the angel told Mary that the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.” Furthermore the angel told the shepherds

iii. **Where He would be born.** “In the town of David,” Bethlehem!

iv. **When He was born.** He was born in the town of David....” He was born at a time designated by God . The scriptures tell us that He was born in the fullness of time. And we are told

v. **Why He was born.** The angel said to them “To you is born in the city of David. “A Savior!” He had come to save us from our sins.

Then the angel also makes clear

vi. **To whom He came.** In verse 10 he tells us that this good news is for all people. And verse 11 he says that this Savior has been born to you.

Then the question arises as to

vii. **What should be our response to this great news?** Verse 10 answers this question, “Do not be afraid.....I bring you good news of great joy.”

The response to this news should be one of joy and celebration. All of this defines the moment when Jesus was born in the City of David. The announcement of the angel was defining in its scope. It was also,

b. Defining in its focus. Luke 2:10-

11.

This focus of the message of the angels is broad. His words indicate this to be true. The news of great joy is for all people and the Baby “has been born to you.” There are two truths need to be emphasized here in order catch immensity of these words. This is not impersonal information of casual interest. It is not a limited message, nor is the news for a selective few. It is not simply for a chosen few. It is first

i. **Universal in its scope.** This good news of great joy is for all people.

George Truett wrote that “Christ was born in the first century, yet He belongs to all centuries. He was born a Jew, yet He belongs to all races. He was born in Bethlehem, yet He belongs to all centuries.” The scriptures inform us that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Whosoever calls upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.” “God so loved the world and gave His One and Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The offer of salvation is

universal in its focus. But you cannot escape the truth that that it's also

ii. **Personal its focus.** A Savior is born to **YOU**. The announcement of the angel brings this offer of salvation and eternal life to the doorstep of our personal lives. The Apostle Paul recognized this simple truth and in a personal testimony in his words says that Jesus "died for me." This was what was defined by the angel when he made His announcement to the shepherds. Note secondly that this event tells us,

2. WHAT WAS DISCOVERED.

Luke 2:10-11.

Why was this moment so exciting? Why was there so much delight and celebration by the angels of heaven? For there was! Luke 2:2 records that a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel praising God. The choirs of heaven rejoiced at the coming of the Christ-Child. It seems to me that if there was something that caused the

citizens of heaven to sing and celebrate, it must be of great importance. It is clear that God had something to do with this birth. He had taken the initiative to bring salvation to the world by sending His One and only Son to be the Savior. You will note that the focus of their celebration and worship was directed towards God. They praised Him saying "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests." Now the question arises "Why so much joy?" The substance of the angel's announcement is reason for this joy. This not ice frosting as is heard in many pulpits today. The Cross casts its shadow across those fields. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you." At the same time this is

a. Incredible News. Luke 2:10-11.

What is so striking is to see how this birth caused so much celebration. Naturally births tend to be the reason for joy and celebration. In my first assignment as a young missionary, I

was appointed to take charge of the Letaba Zone. It is one of the most beautiful areas in South Africa. There are all kinds of tropical and sub-tropical fruit. The Nazarene mission station is a veritable paradise. It was built on a hill overlooking the vast bush veld plains which stretch from the foot of the hill to the great Kruger Game reserve on into Mocambique. Behind the mission station were the magnificent Drakensberg mountains.(or the mountains of the dragon). It was a paradise. Words fail to adequately describe the beauty of it all. On the mission station was a church, a primary school and a clinic run by single lady missionary nurse. She was qualified to deliver babies and she did so with great skill and love. Every time a baby was born we knew it. The African women would run around hooping in a unique way. Cheryl our daughter was born while we stationed at Letaba, but we took my wife to the mission hospital in a place called Acornhoek to give birth to Cheryl. She was delivered by my Aunt who was a Mid-wife. When we

took Cheryl back to the mission station the women got wind of our return. As the car climbed the hill we noticed a crowd of women waiting outside the house. As we drove up and entered the carport the mission station reverberated with the sound of this shrill and penetrating hooping. They were announcing with joy that another baby had arrived. It was news to celebrate. There was a baby who over two thousand years ago was born in a manger. He was to be the Savior of the world and the heavens reverberated with the song of angels announcing who He was. The birth of this baby was incredible news. But this birth gives rise to,

b. An Incomparable Joy. Luke2:10-11.

The angel said "I bring you good news of great joy." This birth is accompanied by great joy. The angels were full of joy, and that joy was ignited in the hearts of the shepherds. They returned from the seeing the Christ Child praising and glorifying God. There was reason for this. Thousands of years had come

and gone the promised Messiah had not arrived. The people waited for his coming. They were told that He was to bring deliverance to the prisoner in the prison house of sin. Then suddenly in an unexpected and unusual manner, unobtrusively quietly while the world slept, God in the form of baby stepped into our world and was born in a stable. It was not the kind of place that a promised Messiah should be born. We would conclude that because of who He is then He should have come to us in better circumstances and arrive in a more pleasant environment, but God chose to arrive in His way according to His plan. He was more concerned about the saving purpose of His arrival than the place of His arrival. And the meager circumstances and resources did not quench the joy which accompanied His coming. The angels declared that this is news of great joy - incomparable joy. But the angels made clear that the Baby brings with Him,

c. Indescribable Peace. Luke 2:16-20.

Included in their song of rejoicing is the message of peace to men on whom His favor rests. Peace in our world is an illusive quality. We talk about it. We pray for it. We arrange peace conferences which at the best of time conclude with an uneasy peace which so often proves to be a paper peace. Don Maclean wrote that "Washington has large assortment of peace monuments. We build one after each war." On a personal level H.G. Wells cried out "The time has come for me to reorganize my life, my peace. I cannot adjust my life to secure any fruitful peace. Here I am at sixty, still seeking peace. It is a hopeless dream." As famous as H.G Wells was, on what planet did he live? How many Christmases did he celebrate? Had he not heard the message of the angels? It is clear that he was not aware that "before we can enjoy the peace of God we must know the God of peace." This is the message of the angels. Jesus is the prince of peace and peace is one of the gifts

He gives to His own. It is interesting that the Lord Jesus Christ is called the Prince of Peace. He is not called the Prince of Hope, though that would be appropriate. He is not called The Prince of Love though that would fit Him. He is not called the Prince of Faith, though that would not be out of place. He is called the Prince of Peace. You can never have genuine peace apart from the abiding Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. This peace is only possible in those upon whom God's favor rests. The peace is the bridging of the separation between God and man that sin caused. It was sin that placed men at guilty distance from God. Paul rejoices in the truth when writing to the Christians at Ephesus, "But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He himself is our peace....." Ephesians 2:13-14. It is then that God's rests upon man. Once Bishop Arthur J. Moore of the Methodist church was preaching in China on the text in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I

give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." After his message, the Bishop asked a friend what the words would mean in Chinese: "Let not your heart be troubled." The friend replied: "you do not know Chinese, and I cannot tell you in English." "But," said the Bishop, tell me in English how it sounds in Chinese." Finally, the friend said, "As nearly as I can approach it, Bishop, the Chinese version says, "Rest your heart." What better expression of inward peace there is than this? "Rest your heart. Rest it in the Lord." This is what was discovered after the angels went away. Finally note,

3. WHAT WAS DEMONSTRATED. **Luke 2: 16-20.**

When the shepherds had seen Jesus, they spread the word concerning what the shepherds said to them. "They returned glorifying praising God for all the things they had heard and seen." What they had seen in Bethlehem had ignited a

flame in their hearts which was demonstrated in two ways. There was born in them and those around them,

a. An Incomprehensible Wonder.
2:20.

“All who heard about it were amazed.” There was a sense of the incredible that pervaded all of those who came in contact with the Christ Child. There was no doubt the heartbeat of excitement, joy and praise in the air that night. The hope of the ages had been revealed to these humble people. The way it was revealed to them left them without doubt that this was the Christ Child. The angel of the Lord appeared on the scene and “Today! Right now! The Savior is born in the City of David.” His coming was no longer an expectation or anticipation or a future hope but a fulfillment and a reality. This Child that we have just seen, is God with us. They believed what the angel had told them. It seems to me that their sense of wonder was not simply because of what they saw, but the fact that God

saw fit to announce this great news to them, for they were but simple humble shepherds watching over their sheep at night. No one cared about them. They were not from the elite in Israel. What is striking about this event is that angel of the Lord came to ordinary people to whom He gave an extraordinary message. Did God make a mistake? Why send His angels to ordinary people with an extraordinary message? Doesn't God know that they are not important in the secular world? Is he not aware that they have no social standing in Bethlehem? They were not involved in Jewish politics at Jerusalem. They are poor simple shepherds and all they know is sheep. It is true that they are good at that. But they have no influence in Jerusalem. They were unknown shepherds, sitting out in the fields on a dark winter's night. But God found them. They were not unimportant or obscure in the sight of God. He sent His angel to relay this extraordinary news to these ordinary people. What this says to us is that God uses ordinary people and the most unlikely people to

spread this joyful message to a sick society. The wonder of that message so gripped their hearts and so energized their spirits, and enflamed their hearts that their was born in them,

b. An Irrepressible Witness. Luke 2:15-17.

When the angels had left them they left their flocks there was

i. An obedient response to the message of the angels.

Their words indicate this to be true. "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." Then there was in the shepherds

ii. An urgent response to the message of the angels.

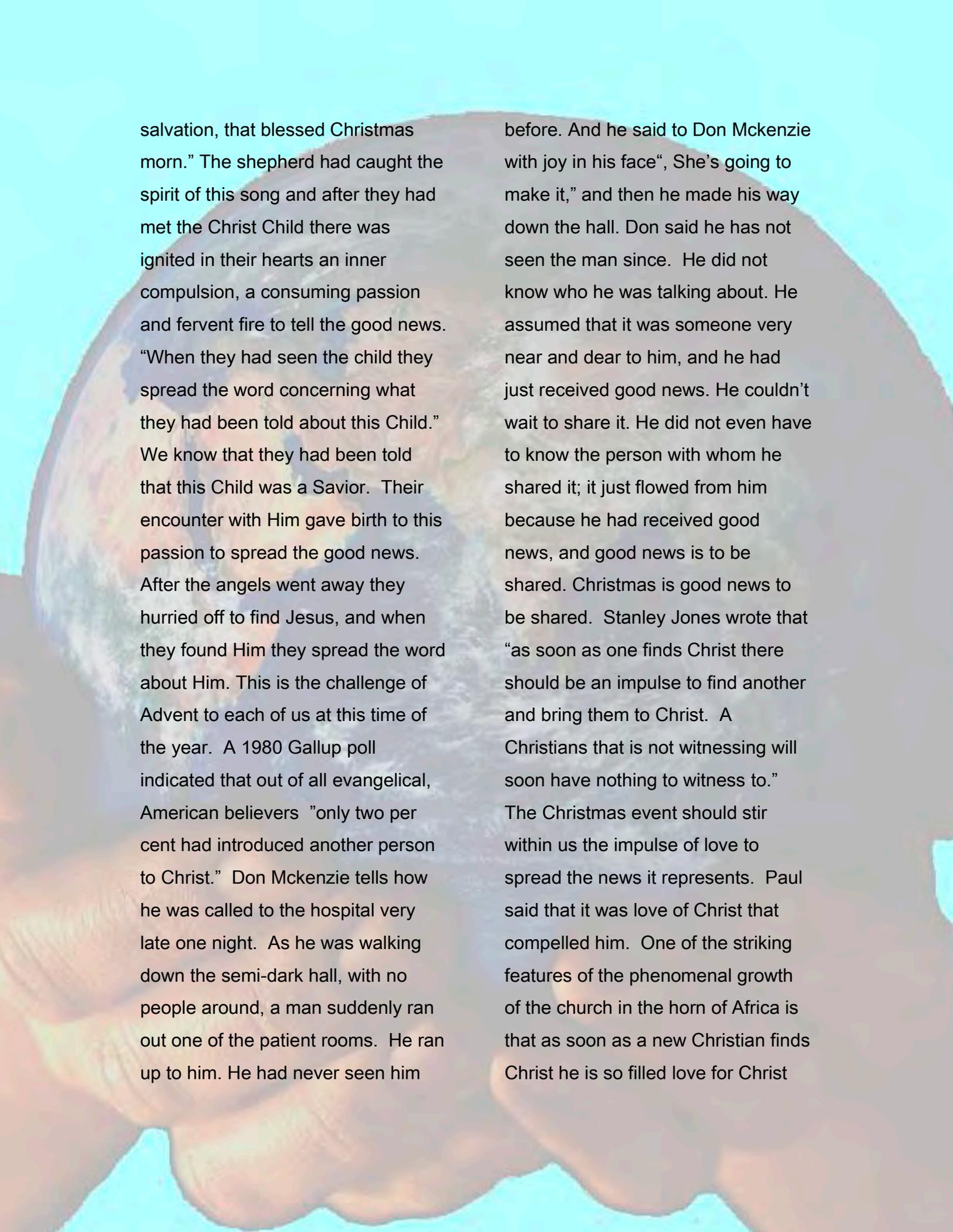
"They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in a manger." The shepherds had

iii. A specific purpose in their response to the message of the angels.

They went to see the Christ Child and "they found the Baby who was lying in a manger." From that meeting there came

iv. A spontaneous witness to the arrival of the Christ Child.

"When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what they had been told about this Child." The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they were told. The central message they had heard was that a Savior had been born in the City of David. This was amazing news which had been given to them, and they had seen Him and spread the word about Him. The celebration of the Advent season includes a commitment to spread the news about the Savior who has come to save His people from their sins. The carol urges each of us to "go tell on the mountain over the hills and everywhere; Go tell it on the mountain That Jesus Christ is born. Down in a lowly manger, the humble Christ was born, and bro't us God's



salvation, that blessed Christmas morn.” The shepherd had caught the spirit of this song and after they had met the Christ Child there was ignited in their hearts an inner compulsion, a consuming passion and fervent fire to tell the good news. “When they had seen the child they spread the word concerning what they had been told about this Child.” We know that they had been told that this Child was a Savior. Their encounter with Him gave birth to this passion to spread the good news. After the angels went away they hurried off to find Jesus, and when they found Him they spread the word about Him. This is the challenge of Advent to each of us at this time of the year. A 1980 Gallup poll indicated that out of all evangelical, American believers “only two per cent had introduced another person to Christ.” Don Mckenzie tells how he was called to the hospital very late one night. As he was walking down the semi-dark hall, with no people around, a man suddenly ran out one of the patient rooms. He ran up to him. He had never seen him

before. And he said to Don Mckenzie with joy in his face“, She’s going to make it,” and then he made his way down the hall. Don said he has not seen the man since. He did not know who he was talking about. He assumed that it was someone very near and dear to him, and he had just received good news. He couldn’t wait to share it. He did not even have to know the person with whom he shared it; it just flowed from him because he had received good news, and good news is to be shared. Christmas is good news to be shared. Stanley Jones wrote that “as soon as one finds Christ there should be an impulse to find another and bring them to Christ. A Christians that is not witnessing will soon have nothing to witness to.” The Christmas event should stir within us the impulse of love to spread the news it represents. Paul said that it was love of Christ that compelled him. One of the striking features of the phenomenal growth of the church in the horn of Africa is that as soon as a new Christian finds Christ he is so filled love for Christ



and the joy of his salvation that immediately looks for an unsaved soul and leads him to Christ. The Christmas spirit is incomplete without this spontaneous desire to spread the good news that a Savior has come.

Conclusion

The thrust of this message is in the form of question. When the angels leave what then? Let me ask the question in modern terms; “when Christmas is over what then? Will we leave its message neatly packaged

beneath the Christmas tree to be opened next year? When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds sought and met the Christ Child and spread the word concerning what had been told them about this Child. Let us make this coming year a year of each one reaching one for Christ.

I WANT TO WISH YOU A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A BLESSED NEW YEAR. MAY THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS ALWAYS BE THE LORD OF YOUR LIFE.