

Celebrate the Gift

Psalm 148

Good morning everyone and merry Christmas! Its great to be with you this morning and I want to thank your pastor and associate pastor for the opportunity to come and preach today. Although I fee like I ought to warn you about these two if you haven't caught on already. A few weeks ago we were talking about the plans we had in our two churches for today, the Sunday after Christmas. I casually mentioned that we had decided to be online only and that I had already recorded both our contemporary and traditional services for broadcast this morning. The next thing I now my name is in your bulletin as today's preacher!

So how was your Christmas? I hope and pray that it was all that you hoped and needed it to be. all kidding aside I'm thrilled to be here with you this morning.

Im going to share a passage from scripture that might seem like an odd choice on the day after Christmas. It doesn't mention anything about the birth of Jesus; it gives us none of the details of the Christmas story; no mention of a stable, the inn, nor does it mention Mary, Jospheh, the baby or angels, shepherds or wiseman.

Read Psalm 148

1 Praise the Lord.[a] Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above. 2 Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. 3 Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. 4 Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. 5 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created, 6 and he established them for ever and ever—he issued a decree that will never pass away. 7 Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, 8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, 9 you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, 10 wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, 11 kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, 12 young men and women, old men and children. 13 Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. 14 And he has raised up for his people a horn,[b] the praise of all his faithful servants, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the Lord.

But I can't help but think the reaction to the birth of Jesus was much more far-reaching than just the angels and the shepherds. I know I might be stretching this a bit, especially since the psalms were written a long time before the birth of Jesus but, again, I can't help but think that there was praising and rejoicing all over heaven and earth the moment Jesus was born into the world; after all this babe lying in the manger was none other than God in human flesh.

Luke tells us that on the night Jesus was born they were glorifying God and singing, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace. And we know that the shepherds

also got in on the act when they left the stable glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard.

I know the action described in Psalm 148 was, in fact, written for an entirely different reason than the birth of Jesus but doesn't this sound to you like an apt description for what would have been taking place all over heaven and earth the moment Jesus was born?

Praise was ringing out from the heavens; praises from the heights above. Praise from all the angels; all his heavenly hosts. Even the sun and moon; and all the shining stars were praising the Lord. Praise came from the highest heavens and from the waters above the skies. Praise came forth from the earth, and the sea creatures. Praise bubbled up from the ocean depths, and even from lightning and hail, snow and clouds, and stormy winds. And that wasn't all: mountains, hills, fruit trees and cedars, wild animals and cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth, princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children.

Wow...kind of covers everything doesn't it?

When God did the amazing, unbelievable, unprecedented act of stepping into human history becoming one of us. When Jesus was born Emmanuel (God with us) it was the most amazing act in all of human history since the very beginning of human history. I can't help but think that all of creation would have been bursting at the seams in praise and thanksgiving for this unbelievable gift of God.

So with that in mind let's jump back to the question I began with this morning:

How was your Christmas?

Well I had an ulterior motive for asking that today. When we ask that question or when someone asks it of us my guess is ninety-nine times out of a hundred what that question and the answer to that question is all about is the details of our Christmas experience. Did we see friends and family? Did we gather around the table for delicious food? did we have any or go to any parties? Did we finish our Christmas shopping on time? Did we get any gifts for Christmas and were they the right gifts from the right people? Was your Christmas full of warmth and love or was there a chill in the air, both literally or metaphorically? Were you reminded this Christmas of the loss of a loved one? Were you reminded of how lonely Christmas can be for those who are alone? Did any relationships get healed this Christmas or were they driven further a part? Were there any

squabbles this year? Were there people missing because of poor health, broken relationships, distance?

When we think about whether or not this or any Christmas was a good Christmas or not aren't those at least some of the things that come to mind and define for us whether or not we answer truthfully or say, "Christmas was fine" and move on?

Depending on how you answer those questions...depending on your experience over the last few weeks and months will determine whether or not this has been a good Christmas and maybe even whether or not you can add your praise to the shepherds, angels, and all creation for this year's celebration of the birth of Jesus.

How can I praise when things are a mess? How can I praise when I'm grieving, or sad, or lonely, or in conflict, etc.?

Friends, here's what I want to encourage us to think about this morning:

regardless of whether or not this has been a "good Christmas" for you and for me;

regardless of what is happening in the world or in your world and mine;

regardless of whether or not weird uncle Harry showed up at the family dinner

and ruined everything. **This was in fact an awesome Christmas as indeed they all**

have been ever since the first Christmas!

You see, Christmas is awesome, and praise worthy because it is not dependent on our circumstances but a reminder of the moment God fulfilled his promise: “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” I should have said promises for many go back all the way to the Hebrew Prophets: Isaiah 7:14, 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you[a] a sign: The virgin[b] will conceive and give birth to a son, and[c] will call him Immanuel.[d] and But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, [2] Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Christmas is always good and awesome and praiseworthy because it is a celebration of the moment that God stepped into human history in a way that God had never done before. its a celebration of the moment God came in the

flesh in the person of Jesus...and human history and our history would never be the same again. Christmas is always awesome and praiseworthy because its a vivid reminder of just how much God loves you and me!

Michael Card in his song Immanuel tells us clearly why Christmas is always a reason to praise God with all we are:

A sign shall be given...A virgin will conceive...A human baby
bearing...Undiminished deity...The glory of the nations...A light for all to see
That hope for all who will embrace...His warm reality
Immanuel...Our God is with us...And if God is with us...Who could stand against us
Our God is with us...Immanuel...For all those who live in the shadow of death
A glorious light has dawned...For all those who stumble in the darkness
Behold your light has come.

So, let me check in with you again...how was this Christmas for you?

I bet it was Awesome... Amazing...and Life-changing.

Let everything that breathes Praise the Lord!

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Amen!