

Luke 2:14

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[0 : 00] Please have a seat and please grab one of the Bibles near you or your own and turn with me to Luke 2. We're continuing our little Christmas series called Christmas Hits.

As we look at all these songs that appear in Luke chapter 1 and Luke chapter 2, we looked at Mary's song. We then looked at Zechariah's song. Today we're going to look at the angel song and then next week you're going to look at Simeon's song.

But before we get into this, please watch this video. I think you get the idea. So we call today an angelic flashmob.

Now a flashmob is a choreographed public gathering where people give an impromptu performance of a musical item. They do a dance or act something out for the purposes of entertainment, attention grabbing or satire.

So that was just a normal food hall and people were just having a normal lunch. And suddenly these people disguised in the audience started singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

[1 : 11] It is a case of the extraordinary breaking into the ordinary. I don't know, you're never in Princess Street Mall, are you?

And you're just down there enjoying a KFC? And suddenly people start singing a choir. It's the remarkable breaking into the routine.

The term flashmob was coined after Bill Wazzik, editor of Harper magazine, organised 130 people to gather on the ninth floor of Macy's department store to make a corporate decision on buying a rug together.

Since then it's been used all over the world. The world's biggest flashmob involved 11,500 people doing a dance in Times Square.

But I think this first century scene on this Bethlehem hillside with the shepherds could have been a monumental angelic flashmob of epic proportions of cosmic significance.

[2 : 24] Not choreographed over the internet, not choreographed by text message, but all choreographed and orchestrated by the God of the universe. To announce, commemorate and explain the giving of his son into the world.

It is more than a publicity stunt. It is the curtain of heaven being drawn back and celestial worship being translated to earth at the dawning of a bright new day in Bethlehem.

It is the infinite breaking into the finite, the eternal into the temporal, the majestic into the mundane. For these shepherds, the appearance of one angel terrified them.

As it says in verse 9, An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Absolutely spellbound by the appearance of one angel. But that is just it getting started. Because in verse 13 it says, Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel.

[3 : 43] Terrified at one, and now the sky is full. 360 degrees around with angels singing. Some of the faces on that video are a picture.

The faces of these shepherds must have been so shocked, so terrified. Legion upon legion of the heavenly host singing in unison.

They must have almost died with fear. And this is the whole point. Why do they come? Because I think this angelic doxology, this angelic praise, brings God's explanation of his son's birth.

This is more than just singing. This is more than just a publicity stunt. This is God telling us why Jesus has come. And he does it in this catchy one verse chorus.

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests. This angelic doxology brings God's explanation of his son's birth.

[4 : 58] There is more going on here than just a choir recital. There is more going on here than just a little bit of a warm-up entertainment before the shepherds go down to Bethlehem and see the baby Jesus in the shoddy stable.

At the incarnation falls the acorn that will grow into the oak of redemption seen at Calvary. In the incarnation, the acorn falls that will grow into the oak of redemption seen at Calvary.

I want to spend all our time in this one verse, Luke 2, verse 14, the angel's song. And I think we see three things. Jesus' birth brings glory to God in the highest.

Secondly, Jesus' birth brings peace on the earth. And thirdly, Jesus' birth displays the eternal love of God.

Or if it's easier to remember, glory goes up, peace comes down, love goes out. Glory up, peace down, love out.

[6 : 14] So let's see. Jesus' birth brings glory to God. Angels worship all the time. We see it throughout the Old Testament that angels worship God.

We read in Hebrews 1 that God commands his angels to worship the Lord Jesus. We read in Revelation 5 of many angels numbering thousands upon thousands and tens of thousands by ten thousands, all worshiping God forever.

Singing, praising, shouting, glorifying. And here in Luke 2, heavenly worship is translated to earth to accompany that God himself has entered history.

Here the angels break open the heavens and the first words out of their mouths are glory to God in the highest heaven. Now glory is a beautiful word.

It is a great word. It is a word to do with the weightiness and magnitude of something or someone. It is a word that describes the solidity, permanence, purity and scale of something.

[7 : 29] It is a word used about the reputation of someone for doing something great. It involves splendor and majesty and goodness.

It involves putting something on full display for everyone to see. And here the angels say glory to God. They say God's glory has come.

Glory because of who he is. And glory because of what he has done in creation. And glory because of what he is now doing to redeem that creation. And reconcile it to himself through his son.

It is absolute, perfect, justice, mercy, sovereignty, power, grace, love, mercy, majesty, wisdom, authority, creativity and awesomeness. All displayed a million percent all at the same time.

It is God on full display. And the shepherds witness it and the angels testify glory to God in the highest heaven. And God displaces glory like this.

[8 : 32] God displaces glory in what he's stooped to. He displaces glory in what he's stooped to. The incarnation is beyond human comprehension.

How creator becomes creature. How limitless deity is bound in a human body. How the focus of heaven's worship is born in obscurity.

The one through whom all things were made and for whom all things have been made. Is now entrusted to the care of teenage parents. Makes no sense.

How God who is above and beyond everything becomes someone. I love the way a Christian hip-hop artist called Shailen puts it.

I would attempt to do it in a hip-hop style but you would all leave. He writes, By faith we believe this amazing Jesus who made Uranus and Venus became a fetus.

[9 : 32] It's such a secret that few if anyone knew it. Months later he's covered in amniotic fluid. The subject of the gospel's praise of apostles armed with eye sockets, armpits and nostrils.

Who is this Jesus? God clothed in human weakness. Super sweetness and peace for the true believers. See the one who never tires knocked out sleeping. See the source of eternal joy weeping.

Which one can explain how the sun abundant with fame who made thunder and rain now has hunger pains? How does that work? How does that work that God enters his creation?

There truly is nothing stranger than God in a manger. That just doesn't work. And I think we've all become so familiar with it that we lose the scandal of it.

God becomes man. There is no contrast in all of human history or throughout the entire cosmos that can scratch the surface of the glory of the incarnation.

[10 : 35] There is no gulf or chasm sufficiently wide that even multiplied by a billion that can do justice to the divide that Jesus crossed in departing heavenly glory for human flesh.

The angels testify to this and cry glory to God in the highest. But there is more. It is not just what he stooped to in becoming humanity, but where he stooped to in dwelling with humanity.

He displays his glory in what he stooped to, but he displayed his glory in where he stooped to. The incarnation in and of itself is glorious enough.

But even further, we see that God sends his son into a dark world in the lowliest circumstances to dwell amongst his enemies and those rebelling against him. And you need someone to babysit your children.

So you go through a list of people, you interview candidates, and you find someone who is an upstanding citizen, who is responsible, who understands safety and is able to get your children and tame them to go to bed at the right time, so that when you come in after a nice night, you can go straight to bed.

[11 : 53] Well, just imagine this, that God, for his son, chooses the absolute worst applicant to look after that son. He sends Jesus into a world that is rebelling against God.

God sends his son to the people who persistently spit in his face. Like the spoiled child on Christmas Day who rips open all his presents without a single note of gratitude or the slightest thought of a thank you letter.

Humanity gets given the greatest gift, as undeserving as it is. Humanity, who enjoys God's good gifts in reckless abandon without ever thanking God for his provision, now is the recipient of the greatest gift as God comes to dwell with that same humanity.

The incarnation is mercy personified. God sends his son to offer mercy, not so people could smile at the sweet baby on the front of the Christmas card or dust off the scary-looking baby for the nativity play.

No, God sends his son to show pure, unadulterated, divine mercy to his crooked, depraved, rebellious creatures. Mercy drives the incarnation.

[13 : 14] God didn't need to do this, but he chose to do it. Mercy drives the incarnation. Wisdom is there. Love is certainly there.

And justice is put on full display. But they're all driven by the mercy of God. The overarching motivation for Jesus' birth. God giving to man everything they don't deserve and nothing of what they do deserve.

It is this baby born that the riddle of salvation is finally unriddled. How could a holy God accept sinful man? This mystery into which angels long to look.

And now that first Christmas the penny drops as the square is circled in Jesus. And in response they cry, glory to God in the highest heaven.

We knew everything about you. And we've seen you do this. And all we can do is cry. And say, God, you're wonderful. God, you're glorious.

[14 : 18] God, you have sent Jesus as the seed of triumph over all of our sin. Our sins are like Himalayan mountains stacked up separating us from a holy God.

Yet they are all leveled by the depths of God's mercy held out to us in his son. I wonder, have you ever had a real Christmas? Have you ever had a real Christmas where this truth grasped you so profoundly that it led you to cry out with the angels, glory to God in the highest?

When we understand the immensity of what God has done, when we understand the mercy of what God has done, when the magnitude of what we have been given and what it means for us is so real in our lives, that we sing with the angels, glory to God in the highest.

The angels' doxology brings God's explanation of his son's birth. However, it is not just response to glory going up, it is also peace coming down.

Because the angels will say, glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace. Peace is a rare commodity in 21st century Britain.

[15 : 37] Peace is a rare commodity in 21st century Britain.

It is the peace of being able to just bask in someone's presence. It's restorative peace that brings us back within the circle of God's affection. It is peace that restores us to a relationship with the God of the universe.

Because our sin is like ill-fated guerrilla warfare waged against the sovereign God. It is a usurping attempt to unclothe God of his deity and enthrone ourselves in his place.

But we go, God, I want to be in charge. I want to be calling the shots. I want to be the captain of the ship. I want to drive. It is our repeated, intentional self-exaltation.

It is our perpetual falling short of all that God created us to be and commanded us to do. And yet in this baby there is a chance of peace.

[17 : 00] There is the hope of peace. The birth of the son is God inviting us to lay down arms, to wave the white flag and surrender our ill-fated course and be welcomed back to him.

Know that Jesus is peace for the restless, comfort for the troubled, healing balm for the afflicted, hope for the despondent, treasure for the poor, purpose for the listless, security for the precarious and help for the struggling.

Jesus is the embodiment of all that Psalm 46 speaks of. God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear that the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and mountains quake with their surgery.

Just imagine being there for that. Mountains falling into the sea, seas everywhere. You're in the middle of a global tsunami. And yet we can say in Christ, God is our refuge and strength.

That even for this, his peace is sufficient. And because of him, we'll get through it. Jesus is the one who descends into our deepest needs and fears and orders them like that tumultuous sea on Galilee saying, peace be still.

[18 : 24] Jesus who descends into our deepest sin and orders them like that adulterous woman, I don't condemn you either. Go and live your life of, go and leave your life of sin.

Jesus who descends into our deepest hurts and orders them like the man born blind, that these things have happened so that the works of God might be displayed.

Jesus who brings peace at every level for every circumstance in all situations. Jesus who brings peace. Jesus who brings peace. Jesus who brings peace. Jesus who brings peace.

Peace with God, peace within ourselves, peace with each other.

He is to all the prince of peace, the fountain of peace, and the one from whom peace overflows into eternity. The world knows nothing of this peace.

[19 : 25] But I pray this Christmas we would know all of this peace. The joy of having peace with God for eternity. Of knowing that our sin will not condemn us and death will not envelop us.

But because of Christ, we have eternal peace that means that we will live. I wonder if you ever had a real Christmas. Where you cried out with the angels, glory to God in the highest heaven.

And on earth you've received that peace that Jesus' incarnation brings. The angels' doxologies, he brings God's explanation of his son's birth.

Glory goes up and peace comes down. But love goes out. This verse has many different translations in the Bible.

Mine says, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests. See how the angels bring their chorus home?

[20 : 34] The resting of God's favour on those who will see beyond the swaddling clothes and the hay to gaze in faith upon the Son of God given for us.

Good will shown to those who will see this not as a mythical event or convenient fairy tale, but see it as God launching his rescue mission in time and space in his Son Jesus.

Jesus' birth is the display of God's eternal love. All of Christmas revolves solely on God's sheer goodness.

It's instigated by the God determined to love unconditionally. We don't get unconditional love. I don't think you've bought many Christmas presents for your arch nemesis.

I don't think you've got your enemies coming round to share Christmas dinner. We tend to like people who like us.

[21 : 38] You know, you get the Christmas card through the post, and you open it, and what's the first thing that comes? Did I send a Christmas card to them? Because we give to people who give to us.

We like people who like us, and they're like us. However, Christmas is God displaying his unconditional love for his world. All the conditions to make this happen are met by God.

God loving the unlovely and the unlovable, and sending his Son to them as a display of his unfathomable love. There is nothing like this love. Love so one-sided, so attractive, so secure, so all-consuming.

The God who lavishly, abundantly, outrageously, exuberantly, and incomprehensively pours out love on us in his Son. That most famous of verses, For God so loved the world, that he gave his

only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

We are so familiar with this verse that we lose just how much love there is in that so-love of God. And yet it's the very point of Christmas, that God gave his Son because he loved us so much.

[22 : 53] The understatement of ever, no one loves this much. No one inclines his affection to a world that is so hostile towards him. No one does this like God for people who have turned their back on him.

God entrusts his Son to us, knowing we are ratbags, knowing we will not treat him well. And in fact, he will end up being put to death in just over three decades from the birth of his Son.

God knows the crude wooden trough would be replaced for a cruel wooden cross. God shows his love for us in this. He sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

And this is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to take the punishment and bear the wrath we deserve on account of our sin.

Christmas is an invitation to come and swim eternally in the infinity of the ocean of God's love. This love that was made so explicit at the cross that got the ball rolling in the manger.

[24 : 12] The baby in the manger is nothing but love covered in flesh. Nothing but the acorn of incarnation that grew into the oak of redeeming love at Calvary.

This one who came to tabernacle with us so desires to tabernacle in us through faith. The angel's doxology, you see, brings God's explanation of his Son's birth.

A glorious event of unrivaled mercy as God gives his Son to you. A peace-granting act to bring you eternal peace with God. And an extravagant eternal display of God's eternal love to you carried out in history through his Son.

Have you ever been thrilled by the Christmas message? In a way that was deep and profound? In a way that made you respond? There was no other response you could do but sing glory to God in the highest heaven.

And on me, peace, as a recipient of God's eternal love in Christ. I pray this would be true for us. I pray this would be what makes our Christmas so special and so memorable.

[25 : 30] You see, there was a boy called Pete and he was young. And he read a sign on the wall of his convenience store that said the circus is coming. But Pete doesn't come from a wealthy family.

And the tickets were five pounds. And he went home to his dad and he said, Dad, the circus is coming in eight days. Dad, if I wash the car and clean my room and do the washing up after every meal and help mum with the vacuuming and do a bit of gardening and weeding and mow the lawn and if I do all my homework and get good grades in my test, could I have five pounds to go to the circus?

And his dad said, Pete, if you do all that, I'll give you five pounds. Pete, so excited by the circus, does everything and more that he promised to do.

And on the Friday night of curtain up at the circus, his dad gives him five pounds. Pete stands there in the queue and the circus procession rolls into the tent and Pete is beside himself.

He is so excited. The elephants come through and the tigers are wheeled in in their cage and the ringmaster's there smacking his whip and the clowns are funny and the jugglers juggle.

[26 : 51] Pete is beside himself. He is so happy. He thinks, this is everything that I want. This is everything that I hoped the circus would be and he runs up to the ringmaster and he gives him his five pounds and said, that's the best five pounds I've ever spent.

What Pete didn't realize was that the actual show was inside the tent. That he didn't look further. He didn't look beyond the pomp and circumstance and procession and see what it was really all about. The circus people doing the circus performance. I guess we can be like that at Christmas, can't we? We can spend so much time, can't we, and invest all of our time and our money in the pomp and circumstance.

In the trappings and the gifts. We can stay outside and look at all that Christmas means to the world. But I pray this Christmas we would go in and we would see what it's really all about.

And it would kindle our hearts. And we would sing glory to God in the highest heaven. And on earth, peace to those on whom his favour rests.

[28 : 05] Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Father God, you are so good to us.

Father, we want to declare you are glorious. That Jesus is peace. And Father, we are loved more than we could ever imagine. So Father, we don't want this Christmas to be a glib remembrance of

things that we've known for years but have long since forgotten how glorious they really are. So Father, may the song of our hearts this Christmas be glory to God in the highest heaven. Peace on earth to those on whom your favour rests. Father, may we rest in your favour. May we bask in your love. and Father, may it ooze out of us and overflow from us into the lives of those that we get to share life with in the coming days. Father, do great things we pray in Jesus' glorious name, in his saving name, in his miraculous name. Amen. Amen. Amen.