



Sunday School Lesson for December 25, 2005
Released on December 21, 2005

"Good News for the World"

Printed Text: **Isaiah 61:1, 2; Luke 2:8-20**

Devotional Reading: **Isaiah 52:7-12**

Background Scripture: **Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 2:8-20**

Time: About 700-695 B.C.; 6 or 5 B.C.

Place: Jerusalem; Bethlehem

ISAIAH 61: 1-2

1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are bound*; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

LUKE 2:8-20

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of Da'vid a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Beth' le-hem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Ma'ry, and Jo'seph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Ma'ry kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

LESSON AIMS

Review passages foretelling and proclaiming the birth of Jesus Christ.

Affirm the literal birth of Jesus, Saviour of the world.

Help Christians celebrate the good news that the Saviour has come.

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 61 was certainly a passage of Scripture that was meaningful to Jesus. He stood in the synagogue and read from it (cf. Luke 4:16-19). The promise of Isaiah 61, that good tidings would be proclaimed to the meek, began to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus even before His birth.

Isaiah was the prophet God used to make the most remarkable and detailed prophecies about Christ. We should not be surprised that God revealed, hundreds of years in advance, intricate details about the coming Saviour.

It is possible that Luke, the only non-Jewish Gospel writer, may have been the one who went to the most trouble to include Jewish details in his telling of Jesus' story. Perhaps Luke had Isaiah 61 in mind as he wrote the story of the angels bringing good tidings to lowly shepherds in a field.

Isaiah and Luke together give us not only a beautiful story but indeed a revelation of the greatest truths of all. The Scriptures selected have included Old Testament passages that set forth God's plan to demonstrate His love for the world by sending a special servant.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Isaiah sometimes has been designated as "the gospel prophet" or "the fifth evangelist" (adding Isaiah to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Much of Jesus' life is given in predictive prophecy by Isaiah, from Jesus' being born of a virgin to His ministry and death. The first few verses of Isaiah 61, the passage for today, will confirm the mission of Jesus.

The event from Luke in today's text is that which takes place immediately after Jesus' birth. It is the announcement to shepherds that the Savior, the Christ, is in nearby Bethlehem as a baby in a manger. This part of God's plan for the ages had come to pass, just as it had been predicted through Isaiah and other prophets for centuries. The Commission of the Servant-Messiah

1. How can we tell that Isaiah is not the speaker in Isaiah 61:1-2?

During prophecy, Isaiah usually did not speak in the first person as he was doing in this passage. He also was not speaking of himself but the Messiah. When Isaiah spoke the words, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me", earlier in Ch. 11:2, Isaiah had prophesied about "the Spirit of the Lord" resting upon God's ultimate Servant, Christ, who will rule the world. These same words spoken in Ch. 61:1-2, were the same words Jesus quoted in Luke 4:18-19, as He read to the people in the synagogue. This confirms that the voice in Isaiah 61:1-2, is that of the Messiah who will be the ultimate Preacher and Redeemer of Israel who will rescue them. Jesus speaks of the initial fulfillment of this promise, referring it to His ministry of providing Salvation's comfort to the spiritually oppressed (again in Luke 4:18-19).

2. Why did the Spirit come upon people in the Old Testament, and what did the Spirit anoint Jesus to do? (v 61:1-2)

During Old Testament times, the Spirit came upon people in order to set them apart for special service or tasks for God such as priests, kings, and military leaders.

(Example: In 1 Samuel 10:1, the Lord chose Saul to be the leader of Israel and communicated His choice through a private anointing (with the use of oil) by Samuel, signifying a setting aside for God's service. Jesus' anointing was much different. He was specially anointed/set apart by the Spirit instead of with oil. The 3 persons of the Holy Trinity were functioning together in this verse (61:1 - Spirit...Lord God...Me.). Jesus had a commission from Him that is the fountain of power; the Father. He was to preach the gospel so that the faith of the saints might be confirmed and encouraged. He was to be a healer binding up the broken-hearted and he was to be a deliverer.

3. What did anointing mean in ancient Israel?

The act of anointing in ancient Israel signified the pouring on of oil used for healing or consecration to sacred duty; figurative for divine appointment. People who received the pouring on of oil were prophets, priests and kings. Also, anointing (with oil) was used for refreshing the body, purifying the body, curing the sick, healing wounds and preparing the dead for burial.

4. How did the Jews of Jesus' day often interpret Messiah's calling to proclaim liberty to captives?

The Jews' interpretation of the Messiah's calling to proclaim liberty to captives was that he would come and set people free from Roman rule; others hoped for deliverance from afflictions and demonic oppression. We know that this aspect of Jesus' ministry was clearly seen as He set people free from demonic possession. In Matthew 4:23-24, Jesus healed all kinds of sickness and all kinds of diseases. As His fame spread, many people afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics were healed by Him.

Spiritually it was indeed a "proclamation." "Good tidings." Think of the iron power of Rome; the selfishness of the rich; the pride of the patrician; the helplessness of the slave; the hopelessness of the philosopher. Christ came to the meek, not the mighty. It was a consolation. "To bind up the broken-hearted." To heal by the touch of his sympathy, and to save by the power of his cross. It was a deliverance. "To proclaim liberty to the captives," etc. Sin had woven its silken cords into iron bands. Men were slaves of lust and habit. The prison was opened; and the fetters which they could not shake off Christ struck from their souls.-W. M. S.-
-The Pulpit Commentary: (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.)

The Birth of the Servant-Messiah

5. How was the announcement of Messiah's birth to the shepherds a fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2? (Luke 2:8-9)

In Isaiah 61:1-2, the Lord said he would preach good tidings to the meek. The meek are those who are not proud or arrogant. Those who have a spirit of submission or deference. This announcement of the Messiah's birth (which is "good news") was not given to those who were arrogant or of great wealth or popularity. Nor was it given to the high priest or kings. The birth announcement was given first to the humble shepherds who were in the field watching over their flock and the message came by way of the angel of the Lord. The shepherds were not considered elite or of high status but were rather poor and meek. First-century Jews looked at shepherds with contempt. Shepherds were near the bottom of the social ladder - certainly not the kind of people, who could expect to receive an announcement about the birth of a king. It was to just such people, however, that God chose to announce the birth of His Son.

6. What was special about these shepherds? (Luke 2:9-11)

These shepherds were visited by an angel (a spiritual being; messenger of God) who threw them into a panic, but their fears were calmed when the angel assured them that he had joyful good news. This message of good news was for "all people (vs. 10) which included those of plain and ordinary lifestyles", it was personal: "unto you" (vs. 11) and it was specific: "this day". It was definite: "in the city of David". It was a message of good news because it was about "a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." They were the first to receive this message and were experiencing the fulfillment of God's promise.

7. What would the titles "Saviour," "Christ," and "Lord" have meant in ancient Israel? (Luke 2:11)

Saviour, Christ and Lord were the titles given by the angel as it described the Messiah. "Saviour" would have brought to mind a deliverer, such as the judges of Israel who set the people from their enemies. "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of "Messiah," the coming King from David's line who would bring an age of peace and salvation, and "Lord" would have brought to mind a king and ultimately pointed to the fact that Jesus is God incarnate.

8. Why is the mention of the heavenly host (Luke 2:13) significant?

The heavenly host is an angelic army that is vast in numbers. Only on certain rare occasions did the host of angelic servants of God show up. It is only by divine intervention one would be able to see the normally unseen world of God's heavenly army. This angelic army has the joy and privilege of being a part of this special event (by praising and worshipping God for the birth of Jesus). Other passages of Scripture that mention the heavenly host are in Dan. 7:10, 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18, and 2 Kings 6:17.

9. Were the wise men, the shepherds, and the star all together at Jesus' birth?

The common scene with three wise men and the shepherds together with Joseph and Mary before a beautiful barn filled with clean hay and a brightly shining star above it all is not entirely accurate. The wise men, whose number is not told in Matthew where their visit is recounted, did not come until the child was older, which is why Herod killed all boys under the age of two (Matt. 2:16). The star that formed a sign for the wise men to follow was also not present at the birth but occurred when the wise men came later. Most important, the Son of God was not born in a clean barn under pristine conditions but in a room for animals. Although the shepherds were not told to go visit the newborn Saviour, they were given a sign that would verify the when they had found the Savior (he will be wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger). Swaddling clothes were bands of cloth used to keep a baby warm and give it a sense of security. These cloths were believed to protect its internal organs.

10. What does the scene in Luke 2:15-20 reveal to us?

The scene in Luke 2:15-20, is a show of the shepherds' faith. When the angels had departed, the shepherds hurried off to see those things that were told to them.

The scene of the Messiah's birth was in no way majestic. It was representative of God lowering Himself to be with humankind. Mary, the humble maidservant, a woman without great wealth, was the instrument of God to bring the Messiah into the world. A bunch of shepherds, men of low station in Israel's society, were the ones to receive the good tidings on behalf of the nation. This was not the atmosphere the Jews expected as the birthplace of the Messiah King. They thought their promised Messiah would be born in royal surroundings. Isaiah's prophecy was coming to pass. And because all of the events happened just as the angel had spoken, the shepherds didn't waste anytime sharing the good news of what they heard and saw. These Shepherd returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

11. What does God's choice of the meek mean for us?

God's choice of the meek means He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept him. We must have a gentle attitude that is patiently submissive in every offense, while having no desire for revenge or retribution. We must be submissive to the will of God (Col. 3:12), we must be teachable (James 1:21) and considerate of others (Eph. 4:2). To be clothed in meekness is the most foundational Christian virtue because God can then use you to do His will as he did with the Shepherds. After the shepherds received the good news and found it to be true, they did not hesitate in sharing with others what they had seen and heard.

Conclusion

The prophecies and the birth of Jesus combine to make an unusual story. The prophecies that had accumulated through the centuries were fulfilled when Jesus became God incarnate - God in the flesh. As a new year dawns, will these things be just another telling of a familiar account, or will they make a difference in the lives of each one who has considered them again? As a new year dawns, will we resolve to make differences for Christ in the lives of others - differences that can determine where they spend eternity?

The events associated with Jesus' birth were not ordinary! They are a part of the message of Christ, and they are to be preached and taught by His followers to those who have never heard. It bears repeating: The purpose is to make a difference in the eternal destinies of those who hear.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the reason we celebrate Christmas. You looked down from Heaven and saw fit to send your Son to redeem your people who are in an oppressed world. Thank you for the Redeemer, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For Jesus is the reason for the Season. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought To Remember

In the Kingdom of heaven, wealth, power and authority are unimportant. Are your attitudes a carbon copy of the world's selfishness, pride, and lust for power, or do they reflect the humility and self-sacrifice of Jesus, your King?

Have a blessed Christmas !
From all of us, at Jesus Is All Ministries.