

## Luke 2:8-14

Advent 4, Dec. 18, 2022  
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***And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"***

Have you ever heard this song before? *"This is the song that Never ends. Yes, it goes on and on, my friends. Some people started singing it Not knowing what it was, And they'll continue singing it Forever, just because this is the song that never ends..."* If you could hum the tune of that song while I was reading it off the page, chances are you have children somewhere in my age range. That song came out in 1992 and was the closing theme song of the PBS children's show, "Lamb Chops." It's one of those never-ending songs that just keeps looping back around to the beginning over and over again and theoretically never ends. And as with most every never-ending stories or never-ending songs, children often loved that song and parents, I'm sure, were driven crazy by it.

We have a different sort of never-ending song before us in our text today, and I call it that not because it goes on and on and on endlessly. In fact, of all the songs we've studied this Advent season, this one is by far the shortest. ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased."*** That's the entire song right there, it doesn't loop back around like the never-ending song from Lamb Chops. And unlike most other never-ending stories or songs, when we consider the never-ending nature of this song, that is reason for us to rejoice. In fact, these are among the sweetest words ever sung, and every time we hear it, we ought to rejoice all over again. The theme we'll be considering this morning is:

### **"This is the Song That Never Ends"**

- I. This is the Song that promises more
- II. This is the Song that we'll continue singing

This was a highly irregular experience for these shepherds. You can imagine that up until this moment, the evening had been business as usual for them. I can picture a small campfire, several of the men curled up around it for warmth as they cycle through their shifts of keeping watch through the night hours. Likely they were hoping for and probably expecting a rather quiet, uneventful evening. For shepherds, uneventful was exactly what you wanted.

Little did they know that their evening was about to turn out far from ordinary. Sure, far from ordinary because an angel of God appeared before them, and the calm dark of the evening was then suddenly interrupted by the brightness of the angel's radiant glory and the quiet stillness broken by the song of a multitude of the heavenly host—certainly, that was out of the ordinary. But it was out of the ordinary for another reason as well. You see, the world surrounding these first-century shepherds was much like our own today.

They were not the first people to tend to a flock of sheep out in a field by night. One of the first people to do that had been born thousands of years before this. That particular shepherd lived a peaceful life of faith before the Lord, when suddenly his life ended when his own brother violently murdered him in a fit of jealousy. Of course, I'm referring to Cain and Abel. Abel—the shepherd, Cain—his older brother and the world's first murderer. Suddenly and violently, mankind had to come to grips with the ugliness of shattered peace due to sin.

From the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord's will, shattered peace became the norm for humanity. We saw it with their children Cain and Abel, and we've also seen it right down through 6,000 years of human history. Siblings torn apart by jealousy. Spouses split apart by lingering resentment. Families broken down by betrayal. Anger and arguments and hatred and bitterness and back-stabbing and wars fueled by sinful selfishness. That's become the status quo in our day in age; and that was the normal routine of things in these shepherds' day too. And that's what made this moment far from ordinary. The relative peace of the evening was suddenly broken up by this incredible announcement that would shatter the world's normal routines: ***"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."***

Have you ever been to a concert that you just didn't want to end? I think it probably happens at the end of every successful concert—the band leaves the stage, and the crowd wants more. "Encore! Encore! One more song! One more song!" And after leaving the crowd in suspense for a few minutes, the band comes bursting back out on stage to a thunderous applause, satisfying the crowd's desire for more. And eventually, maybe after another song or two, the band leaves the stage for good, and the crowd departs back to their normal lives.

Is that what this song is like? A song that leaves you wanting for more, but eventually normal will return? No, it's not. ***"This is the Song that never ends,"*** because ***This is the Song that promises more.*** We see that with the shepherds' reaction to this news. You know how the rest of this event goes, ***"The shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."*** (Luke 2:15-20)

When the shepherds returned to the fields, everything did not just go back to normal. Sure, they were still shepherds, still sleeping out with the sheep, still likely rather poor. The world around them was still very evil. And yet everything had changed. They had been assured by the angel that in spite of all worldly appearances, they had peace with God. If they were anything like us, and I'm sure they were, I'm certain they struggled mightily with the knowledge of their sin before the Lord, knowing what that ought to mean. If they were anything like you or me, I'm sure they had their doubts about whether the Lord would love them at all, how could He? No one else did. And yet now in a very special way, God had announced to these poor, sinful shepherds, that peace existed between them and God. That

a Savior had been born for *them*! God had replaced the shattered peace due to their sin with the quiet stillness of that knowledge that it had all been forgiven. Even as they returned to their normal routines, they must have realized that nothing would ever be the same again.

During Advent, we all enjoy this special lead-up to Christmas—that wonderful time with decorations, and music, and cookies, and good meals, and presents, and extra time off work or school. And then we return back to our normal lives, and if we don't guard ourselves against it, normal life can look rather dreary in comparison. Don't let that be the case this year. Remember, that Savior was born for you as well. Even as the world around us knows no peace at all, we have been given the peace that surpasses all human understanding. God has announced that *our* sins have been forgiven. God has given us that quiet calmness of knowing that even as the world around us rages and wars, we know that we have been given an escape from this world. Because this Song of the Angels **"Is the Song that Never Ends."** **It's the song that promises more.** Even as we move on from this season, we know that more blessing, more grace, more peace is to follow. And **"This is the Song that Never Ends"** because **This is the Song that we'll keep singing.**

Have you ever had to speak or sing on stage before? Maybe you were in a play or musical, maybe you had a speech before an assembly. Or perhaps you had a line to recite in a Christmas Eve service when you were a child. If you've done something like that, do you remember how you felt beforehand? Nervous, most likely. Butterflies filling your stomach as you waited with excited anticipation. No doubt, you just wanted to get it over with.

Well, I wonder how the angels felt before singing this song to the shepherds. Ever since that fateful day in the Garden of Eden, the angels of God had been longing to sing this song. Jesus tells us, ***"Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*** (Luke 15:10) Jesus gives us a glimpse into the minds of the angels. Their source of joy? It's when you or I recognize our sins, repent of them, and lay them before the Lord asking for His forgiveness. Their source of gladness? When a child of this world is baptized and becomes a Child of God. A momentous occasion for the angels is when a sinner-turned-saint in Christ Jesus is laid to eternal rest in the arms of the Savior. That is a moment punctuated with the joyful songs of the angels. And so, I imagine that this moment, announcing to the shepherds the arrival of the Key that would unlock heaven for sinners, this was a song the angels must have been so excited to sing. And they did. ***"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"***

And who were the angels so pleased to be singing this song to? A ragtag bunch of shepherds. What you have to understand about the shepherds in those days is that they were considered to be unclean. Not just unclean because they hung out with a dirty pack of animals at all hours of the day, but ceremonially unclean as well. You see, the Jewish religion of the day required a strict observance of numerous sacrifices and offerings and rituals, and the around-the-clock nature of shepherding simply meant that these guys would be unable to keep up with all the ceremonial laws. As such, even though they carried out an important job for society, they were unclean—to be kept at arm's length.

Considering this, it's just so remarkable that God would choose to first announce the Savior's birth to this particular group of people. I suppose God selected shepherds for the same reason that our Savior was born in a stable and not a palace—to let the world know that the Savior was born for all people, not just the wealthy and powerful. And therefore, we can conclude, "The Savior indeed was born for *me* too." If God would make the proclamation of peace to the destitute, to the outcast, to the unclean—then certainly I am not excluded from this proclamation, and neither are you. No, the angels' message is for you too: ***"Fear not! . . . For unto YOU is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. . . Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased,"*** which includes you and me.

This is one of those moments that just makes you wish you'd been there. Perhaps you've been asked before, "If you could have dinner with any person from Bible history, who would it be?" Or, "If you could be present for any event from Bible history, which would it be?" I certainly think this moment is a worthy choice. How awesome would it be to be present for the personal concert sung by heaven's choir, then to rush down into town and fall at the feet of your Savior. This is one of those moments that we would all love to be a part of. When the angels were singing, how great would it have been to be there singing along with them.

When I was in High School and College at Immanuel Lutheran in Eau Claire, WI, I used to sing for the school's various choirs. Some of my fondest memories are of the times when I was singing as part of the choir. And eventually the time came when I decided not to sing in the choirs anymore, as I was in Seminary and fitting all those practices and all that extra travel into my schedule became much more difficult. And boy, did I regret it when I sat and listened to my first concert after quitting the choir. I would have given anything to be up there singing along with them. It was then that I came to the realization that I'd probably never sing in a choir like that ever again, and that was a sad thought.

But I was wrong about that, wasn't I? Will I really *never* sing in a choir like that again? I will, and so will you. We will be joining together with these angels as members of the choir of heaven. We will join in singing the song that we read earlier from Revelation, ***"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"*** (Revelation 5:13) The song of the angels was really pointing forward to the day when we'll be the one singing that song. For on that day in Bethlehem everything changed, and it changed for good. When the Angel announced, ***"Unto you is born. . . a Savior, Christ the Lord,"*** when they all sang, ***"On earth peace among those with whom He is pleased,"*** that means that we've been given life instead of death. That means that there's no shame too deep for our Savior to forgive; no sin so great that the blood of Christ can't cover it. And this is no temporary fix; it's a permanent solution to our sin's guilt. And *that* means, that one day after this life is over, we will be with our Savior in heaven. Just like the shepherds, we will fall down at the feet of our Savior and see Him with our own eyes. We will be singing the song with the angels, with the shepherds, with Mary and Joseph—the song of everlasting praise to the Lamb, the babe born in Bethlehem, who was born to die that we might live, and who lives that we might never die. Glory be to God in the highest! Amen.

***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.