

# Her Treasured Experience

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Our scripture reading this morning comes from the Gospel of Luke chapter 2, chapter 2 pages 1 to 20, pages versus, not pages, 20 pages, that would be a lot, 20 verses, Luke chapter 2. In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria and all went to be registered each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth to Judea to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased. When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherd 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 they 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. This is God's holy word. We're in a

Christmas series on Sunday mornings in December looking at four episodes in the life of Mary. We've called it Jesus the Son of Mary where we look at what happens in her life to understand something more about the son that she gave birth to Jesus. And this we just read is the Christmas story itself, the very birth of Jesus. So the department stores, all the stores are playing jingle bell rock.

That's the vibe of Christmas in the city. But this is the real Christmas story, the one that we just read about. And the shepherds at the, in the second half of the story, the shepherds come to Mary, Joseph and the baby and it says there were others there. And they tell them what they had seen and what they had heard from the angels out at the night when they were tending their sheep. They heard from the angels this song we now call it in Latin, the Gloria and exchelsis deo.

Gloria got in the highest peace on earth. That's the song they heard. And they come and they tell the people and it says in verse 17, 18 that when they had told them verse 18 everybody who heard it wondered at what they had heard. So the people that are there at the birth scene, they wonder meaning they are amazed, but they don't quite understand. That's what that word there means. But then in the very next verse, verse 19, it says, but Mary treasured these things in her heart and she pondered. Now the word ponder there means to take all the pieces and put them together like a puzzle. So when Mary heard the shepherd's experience, she thought about her own experience and she remembers Elizabeth and Zechariah's experience and she's putting pieces together. And then it says when she did that she treasured these things in her heart. That's what happened to her. She treasured all that had happened. And when you look at that word treasure to treasure, it means that it's a verb there. The Greek verb means something like when you realize there is something in your heart that is safe that can't be taken away from you no matter what. So it says when she pondered everything that had happened and she heard the shepherd's testimony, she realized in her heart she had something, a treasure, something in her life that no matter what could not be taken away from her. And that's what happened. What is that thing that she treasured that couldn't be taken away? And we're told verse 14, it's right there in the midst of the song, it's peace. The angels sang it. They said, glory to God in the highest, peace on earth. That's the central idea of the incarnation. The central theme of Christmas, peace, peace on earth. She realized she had it, peace, and she treasured it. And that's exactly what is on offer in the real Christmas story. You can have it too. You can have peace today. So let's think about it. The real Christmas offers you peace. First, peace on earth, secondly, how you get it.

[ 5 : 38 ] Okay? So first, peace, this peace we're learning about here. All right, the song Gloria and ex-chelsea's dayo, it's got a vertical dimension and a horizontal dimension. You know, they said that the myriad of angels appear before the shepherds and they sing, glory to God. They look up and they say, thank you, God, for what you've done this night. That's the vertical dimension. Bless your name, God, for this plan that you've enacted. And then the horizontal dimension. And now that the baby has come, there is peace on earth. That's what they say. Meaning what? Okay, so you might think peace on earth. 2,000 years ago this happened. And if there's one thing that's on earth, it's conflict, not peace. So you know, we think about the idea of peace. And peace is the opposite of conflict. And you can have conflict in marriage. You can have conflict in the family. You can have conflict amongst friends. You can have conflict in your workplace. You can have conflict amongst your siblings. If you have a relationship, there is conflict or it's coming. And then conflict gets more and more and more. And we talk about war. And there's conflict right now. There's war in Gaza. There's war in Ukraine. And we pray for peace. And we long for peace. And you say, there's 2,000 years since the angels sang peace on earth. And I don't see a lot of peace in the world. What kind of peace is being talked about here? Then there's inner peace. Is this inner peace? Inner peace is emotional well-being. And it's the type of peace that we're all desperate for. It is the secret of life. The secret of life is that if you can find yourself in a place emotionally where you have inner peace, you will be safe. You will be secure. You can handle anything. And it's elusive. So people are selling peace, emotional peace. Right? There's podcast.

There's therapy. There's counselors. There's bookscalore. And people sell it. There's a market for it because we desperately need it. We desperately want it. Inner peace. If we could have it, we could have everything. And it's incredibly elusive. You know, you can have great circumstances in your life and no peace at all. You can feel terrible. And you can be in the worst of circumstances, stepping into the brink of hell and earth, hell itself right here on earth, and yet have peace. Peace is mysterious. It's elusive. How does it happen? And people want it so badly. Is that the peace that the angels are singing about here? We long for peace in the midst of conflict. We long for inner peace, emotional peace. Jesus Christ, it was born in the middle of history to bring both, but that's a different discussion and a very nuanced discussion.

And that is not, that's not what the angels were singing about on this night. What is it? The department stores Jingle Bell Rock, Mariah Carey, every other song, All I Want For Christmas is You. That's the vibe. But when you come to the real Christmas story, this is, this is the real Christmas story. Look at it with me to find out what the peace is. It's verse eight. The shepherds are out in the fields and it's nighttime. They're out watching over the flocks at night. They are in the dark. There is no electricity. The stars are out. The moon is out, but they are in the dark. And then all of a sudden, verse nine, it says, the glory of the Lord shone around them. It's a verb there that means to encircle in golf.

And the word shone, it means light, luminosity. And so it says they're out in the middle of the dark darkness. And there's a real reason for that. And all of a sudden, the glory of the Lord appears and it's light. It's luminosity. It engulfs them. It captures them. It surrounds them. The light pierces the darkness. And then at the end of verse nine, the very next thing we're told is that they were terrified. Now that's, that's the short way of putting it. The literal way of putting it is something more like they having been frightened were mega afraid. That's what it says. Meaning they were absolutely terrified.

Now, do you remember that in the Christmas story? That the shepherds are in the darkness. And when the glory of the Lord appears to them, they're absolutely terrified by it. It exposes them. The light of the glory of God shines into their life in the middle of the nighttime. And they, the only thing they can do is be afraid. They know, they realize what's happening to them. Now remember the angel of the Lord, the glory of the Lord came to Mary and it says she was afraid and troubled. That was her first experience. The angel of the Lord came to Zechariah and it says he was afraid and he was silenced. He couldn't speak. What is happening here? This is the same thing that happens all throughout the Old Testament. And that's when the glory of the Lord comes into a person's life. When you have an encounter with a living God, when the light comes into your life, there's terror. There's fear. That's the kind of encounter that we read about on the Christmas night. And remember in the Old Testament, Uzziah touched the ark of the presence of God and he died. And God's glory came down to Mount Sinai and

[ 11 : 13 ] God said, tell the people, do not touch the mountain. Do not get near. Cover your faces. You cannot look at the light or you will die. This is the shekinah glory of God and that's exactly what the shepherds are experiencing here. The glory of the Lord has come into their lives and they're undone by it. Genesis chapter 3, Adam had sinned against the Lord and when the glory of the Lord comes into the garden, what does he do? He shakes in his boots. You know, he was dead afraid and he hid and he was silent. He wouldn't answer because he was so afraid. And that's exactly what's taking place here. The shepherds are here at night. They're not looking for God. The light engulfs them and they are terrified.

They're shocked and Mary hears this and she's putting the pieces together and realizing this is what happens when you have an encounter with the living God. When the light comes into your life, the very first thing, this is the very first thing that Christmas is all about. The incarnation takes place. The light comes into the world because we are in the darkness. The light comes in the world and we're exposed. We're dark. Our hearts are dark. The shepherds' hearts were dark. That's why they're here standing in the night and that means the very meaning of peace on earth that Mary realizes that the angels sing about is what kind of peace. Christmas is all about one type of peace and that's that you are an enemy of the living God. You're at war with a living God. You're in the darkness and when Jesus comes, he comes to pronounce that there is a way to be at peace with God. That's the meaning of Christmas. It is the hope of reconciliation with the living God, the God you are made for. That you are made for the light of God to be engulfed by it. That's actually home.

But as soon as you draw near to it, you have to be terrified because of the darkness that is within your soul, within your heart. Now, C.S. Lewis in 1941 gave a sermon about this during the war. He talked about the weight of glory. It's now an essay and a book with that title, the weight of glory and he talks about it like this. He says, the vision of God, he says, being in the presence of God's glory, being in the presence of God's glory, the light, is the secret ache for a far-off country we've never been to. He says it's the desire for something that we have never actually experienced. It is what we really desire. We get traces of it when we experience beauty. But the thing itself, the glory of the Lord, is the scent of a flower we have yet to find. It's the echo of a tune we have yet to hear. It's news from a country we have not yet visited. It's the reality that can break the evil spell of the worldly enchantment. Every human, every single one of us, remains conscious deep down of a desire which no natural happiness will ever satisfy. What is it? The ache for the far-off country that is to stand in the light of the glory of God. And yet, when God's luminosity appears, when God comes and stands in the presence of a sinner, it's blinding. It's impenetrable.

It's inapproachable, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 6. It is, it gives us chills, you know. When it came to Moses, he had to step back. He wanted to step forward, but he had to back up. And God said, take your shoes off, because this is a holy space. We're pushed back, but we want to go forward. Now, this is the one thing we must all do today. And we're gonna move on to the second point from here. But here's what we all must do today. We must all today then understand ourselves in two ways. On the one hand, why is it that you're not satisfied in this life? Not deeply, not truly, that you have a far-off ache for something that you have yet to experience. And it is because you're made for this moment, for the light of the glory of God to shine into your life, and for you to see the glory of God, to see the curtain pulled back, and to see the myriad of angels all singing glory to God in the highest, peace to you. This is what you were made for. It's the far-off ache. We've got to understand that this is ultimately who we are, who we really are. And yet at the same time, we can attain it. We cannot approach it. We can't have it that we're standing in the night in the middle of the darkness. And one of the biggest dangers, I think, that we all face as mostly, mostly middle-class people in this room, one of the big dangers is to think that darkness, the darkness, is the person's condition that's sitting next to me. Darkness is everybody else's condition. Darkness is the condition of the people I hear about on the news, but not me. That's the danger we face. And we've got to be serious. We've got to know ourselves. We've got to understand ourselves. You might say that when you watch the news, but you say, that's darkness. I'm a decent person. I'm a good person. But if you were to stand in the light of the glory of God, you would quickly find out. You would quickly find out the darkness that's deep within. What's really going on? The light exposes us. And that's what happened here to the shepherds.

Saint Augustine said, said it well, he said, you will never find rest. You'll never find rest in your heart until you realize that you've got to rest in God, in the glory of God. Now, secondly, finally, Christmas is about peace, reconciliation between us and God then. How do you get it? Charles Wesley, he understood this really well in Hark the Herald Angel Sing. What did he say? He said, peace on earth, mercy mild, God and center reconciled, the meaning of Christmas. The Apostle Paul, he understood it in Colossians 121. He said, once you were alienated from God and you were his enemy, but now God has reconciled you to himself by Jesus Christ, the meaning of Christmas right there. Mary in verse 18, 19, realized that and that was the treasure that she had found. So if you today come to Jesus and you have peace with God, you've been reconciled with God, understand that you have a treasure that can never be taken away from you. You have the very thing you were made for and it's yours by a gift and it cannot be taken away. Never. That's what she realized. That's the treasure she experienced. Now, here's three things you need in order to get that today and to grow into that today. It's always three, right? That's how God designed it and there's three right here and here they are. First, we have to do them quickly. First, you've got to see the reasonableness of believing in the real Christmas. Now, if you were looking with me, reading with me, you'll have noticed that the first half of this passage, which is about the very birth of Jesus, the virgin birth, the birth actually only gets one sentence. So the very birth of Jesus Christ in the Bible gets a sentence and you see what Luke did instead.

[ 19 : 01 ] Chapter 2 verses 1 to 6, the sentence about the birth is in verse 7. The first six verses is nothing but things like Caesar Augustus issued a decree and Quirinius was governor in that season and this was the first census, but there were more registrations after that and everybody had to go to the town that their family lineage was from and fact, fact, fact, all these facts. You see, Luke is time stamping everything and if you were to go to chapter 3, chapter 3 says, in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being the tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ileria and Trachonitus and Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priest of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of the Lord came to John. Now, you see what's happening? Luke is time stamping everything and he's saying, I can tell you the entire political scene and that's how they did dates back then. They didn't have the dating system we now have and that means that the very first thing Luke is trying to get you to see is the reasonableness of Christmas. He's trying to say, this is history. This is not a legend. This is not a myth. The virgin birth is not a mere story. It really happened. If they would have had an iPhone this night, the shepherds, the shepherds could have filmed the whole thing. And you see the very first thing you need to see to come and experience the peace of Christ is to know that the

Christian claim is that this is history, not legend. That this really happened, that the virgin birth is real. It happened in space and time. It's not a mythos. It didn't happen as a legend. Some of us have come into the faith and received Christ if you're a Christian today or you are coming. You're in the process maybe a few of you maybe of exploring and you've come in by way of the emotions. So you've felt a need. That's been largely the aspect of your soul by which you've encountered Christianity. Some of us based on our personalities have come into Christianity primarily through the will.

So we've felt the brokenness of our desires and it's brought us to a place of guilt and we've realized how empty and broken sometimes the things we want to be and that's brought us close to Christ. But what Luke's doing here is saying you've got to come to Christianity with your whole self. That you've got to bring your emotional need for a Savior. The need for a broken will to be reshaped and reformed. Your desires for a Savior have to be there. But also your mind that this is history, this is reasonable. It really did happen. And so you've got to bring all of who you are today to really experience the peace of Christ all the way to the bottom that it affects your intellect too because it's incredibly reasonable. It's not a legend that's fundamental to the claim and that's one of the big things Luke wants us to see here. Now here's the second thing and most importantly the birth itself and what it means. In verse 12 the shepherds were told here's the way you can find the Savior of the world, the

Christ, the anointed one, the Lord. Here's how you can find him. Go and look in Bethlehem for one wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger. Now back in verse 7 she gave birth and she wrapped this baby in swaddling cloths. Swaddling cloths are very probably strips of cloth that have been ripped from work cloths.

So baby Jesus was wrapped in cloths that were torn from a rag you would use for working to wipe things away. And then it says she laid him in a manger. Manger is a word for Greek. I don't know why exactly why I always translated as manger. It's a feeding trough and so Jesus was laid wrapped in work cloth and laid in a feeding trough. You know remember the hymn born in flesh the godhead. See? Hail the incarnate deity. But it doesn't go as far as it could have gone. Laid in a feeding trough sitting on the muck and the spit of all the animals. That's where he was laid. And that's the condition of his birth.

[ 23 : 36 ] It says that there was no room for him in the inn. But that's just the word guest room in Greek meaning that it could have been an inn. It could have also just been that there was nobody in the town that had a spare room. And so first century houses were built where the animals resided on the bottom ground level and the people lived above them. And so very very probably Jesus was born on a first level ground level of a first-century home where the animals are.

And that's why he's wrapped in work cloth and put on top of the muck of the feeding trough. Why? You know that that's what the angel said go to Bethlehem and that's what you'll find. That's the condition of the savior of the world. And you've got to really look at that. You've got to really think about that this morning. That's so important. Why? Peace with God is why. Reconciliation with God is why. How do you get yourself out of the darkness? And one of the early church fathers, St. Ambrose, he said, when you look at the story here, there is no baby. There is no royal baby wrapped in Tyrian purple. The royal color. And John Chrysostom, he said, surely if Jesus had willed it, he might have come moving the heavens, making the earth to shake, shooting forth thunderbolts. But such was not the way of his going. His desire was not to destroy but to save, not to trample upon humanity. Therefore he is not only man but he's poor. And he's chosen a poor mother who had not even a cradle where she might lay her newborn child. So she laid him in a feeding trough. I've never given birth, but

I've been there for it. And I've been there for at least, not at least only four times for birth, only for it. And one thing I do know about giving birth is that nobody, I don't think, I don't think any mother giving birth wants the conditions of the birth to be this. Her baby put in a feeding trough on top of the muck and the spit of the animals, right? Nobody wants that. No parent wants that for their baby. But that's what he got. Why? Because his birth condition is the sign of our condition. He was born into the darkness. He was born into poverty. He was born into the condition as a sign of exactly what the shepherd's experience. That when the light comes into the world, the darkness is exposed and he took it on. He lived into it. It was the very condition of his life, his poverty in the midst of this night. And even more than that, his birth condition, even more, here's the meaning of Christmas. His birth condition is the sign of his death condition that is to come. Remember, Adam, when the glory of God appears to humanity, the light shines, what does the human being do? The human being is silent. The human being hides. The human being in the midst of the garden of God has to get behind a rock and say, woe is me, don't get any nearer, oh Lord, or I will die. That's the condition of Adam, the first

Adam. The second Adam comes and at the end of his life, he also goes to a garden. He entered on that fateful night into the garden of Gethsemane. And when God encountered Adam, Adam was silent and he hid. Jesus Christ went to the garden and he was the first to speak. He stood in the open. He had to tell the soldiers, come and arrest me and take me. You see, Jesus Christ entered into the garden, the very same garden where Adam hid. And he stood in the open. He was exposed. He came to stand in the darkness. He came to go into the darkness. You know, he came to give himself. The light of the world came to become totally dark.

He came to be engulfed by the darkness. That's exactly what took place in the cross. You see, his birth condition was nothing but the sign of his death condition. Peace on earth. Reconciliation with God is all because he plunged himself into the turmoil and the darkness so that you could have peace. You could be reconciled to God. It's the meaning of life. It's the meaning of everything. It's the meaning of your existence. Now, let me close with the final word. Third, very briefly. Let me say, there's a way to see why this really is treasure for you today. Why Mary, you know, what does it mean that Mary treasured this in her heart that she realized, I have got something. I've got something here. Peace on earth in this little baby, my firstborn son. Most of us, most of us are, we all, we're modernists. We live in the world, but we don't really believe day to day that if you were to pull back the curtain, there would be a multitude of angels singing, glory to God in the highest and peace on earth. We don't really believe that. But that's reality. That's the real world. That world is more real than our world. And if God was to pull back the curtain for us for just a moment, we would see the reality of Gloria and ex-chelsis Deo, the multitude of heavenly hosts singing to God. It's here. It's just behind the curtain.

[ 29 : 13 ] That's what we learn about here in verse 13 with the shepherds. Now, that's the real world. That's the most important thing. The most important thing is your relationship to God. Do you really believe that? If you were to pull back the curtain and see it, you would. If the curtain, the shepherds finally got it.

When the curtain was pulled back, they realized the most important thing in my life is my relationship to the divine, to God. That's the most important thing in your life, above all else. And that means that if you behold the baby of Bethlehem as your savior today, plunged into darkness so that you could have life, peace with God, if you've got that, you know, you can have peace anywhere. You're gonna have peace anywhere you are because you've got the peace that you need, the reconciliation you really need between you and God. Some of you are at the top of your game right now. Things are going really well. You made partner or you're about to, or you think you probably will. You're 25 and you're ambitious and one day you're gonna get it. Or you're gonna become a consultant and you're gonna be at the top of your game and you're gonna have a family and God's giving you that. You've gotten the things in life that you were ambitious about and you hoped for. If you are not reconciled to God through the baby born on this night who died for you, who punch into the dark, if you are not reconciled to God, if you do not have peace with God, then none of that matters. You can't really rest. You can't really say I have peace in my life. And some of you are not at the top of the game right now. You're at the bottom. You've never made partner and you're never going to and you know that. You've not achieved the things you wanted to. You've not had the life you were hoping to have. And for all of us at some point, the thin ice that we're standing on will finally crack and we will have terrible circumstances in our lives. In some way, shape, or form. If you have reconciliation with God, peace, you have treasure that can't be taken away from you. You have everything. You have everything you need no matter what goes on in this life. Mary realized that. She was poor. She was desperately poor. And she had something that could never be taken away in her firstborn son, peace with God. Let's pray together and ask that God would teach us that this day.

Lord, we pray Father, now that you would teach us what it means to have peace with you. That we would really comprehend our lives as existing in the light of our enmity against you and yet our hope that in Jesus we can be reconciled, justified, utterly at peace. No conflict. So I pray today for somebody here that if they don't know you that yet, if they're for the first time wrestling with that truth that you would buy the Holy Spirit, bring that home to their hearts right now. And for all of us Christians here that have professed our faith that we would rest today, not in our circumstances but in the treasure that can't be taken. Peace by the blood of Jesus. So we thank you. We thank you. We thank you for it. We thank you for the gospel and we pray that we would live through it and out of it and we pray in Christ's name. Amen.