

“Heavenly Hosts’ Herald” (Lu. 2:8-14)

1. Majesty

- a. Caesar vs Christ. Emperor vs King of Glory. “The point Luke is making is clear. The birth of this little boy is the beginning of a confrontation between the **kingdom** of God—in all its apparent weakness, insignificance and vulnerability—and the kingdoms of the world. Augustus never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. But within a century or so his successors in Rome had not only heard of him; they were taking steps to obliterate his followers. Within just over three centuries the Emperor himself became a Christian. When you see the manger on a card, or in church, don’t stop at the crib. See what it’s pointing to. It is pointing to the explosive truth that the baby lying there is already being spoken of as the true king of the world. The rest of Luke’s story, both in the gospel and, later on, in Acts, will tell how he comes into his kingdom.”¹
- b. Augustus means “worthy of adoration.” Christ means “anointed” (Messiah).
- c. Roman imperial Caesar cult was perpetuated as divinity whereas God took on humanity.
- d. With Augustus’ birth came a universal calendar yet we know that all history has been marked by Christ’s first advent.
- e. Augustus was known as “savior” and he encouraged the worship of his adopting father as god and thus himself as the son of God.
- f. Augustus ordered a census to which Luke points as God’s providential means to bring the unborn Savior of the world to Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Gal. 4:4)!
- g. The Emperor was a man who tried to be divine yet the divine Messiah who is God took on humanity. Augustus’ majesty was self-assertion while Jesus’ glory induced volitional adoration. Augustus attempted ascension while Jesus accomplished incarnation! Caesar had hubris and Christ had humility.
- h. Caesar attempted peace via force while Jesus brings peace via revelation. →

2. Mystery

- a. Pax Romana vs Peace with God
 - i. Augustus’ *Pax Romana* was not necessarily a bad thing, it was just an insufficient policy for heaven to earth.
 - ii. Whereas the earthly emperor can only enact earthly policies, the heavenly Father can come down to bring heavenly reconciliation. Epictetus, a first-century philosopher, rightly observed that: “While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy; he cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns for more than even outward peace.”
 - iii. Pax Romana actually secured societal and economic stability and that is a blessing. However, our greatest need is not societal (social justice), economical, or political – it is spiritual.
- b. Natural Birth – Supernatural Being
 - i. The heart of Xmas² is the incarnation! It is an unspeakable mystery and the greatest miracle in my estimation. Jn. 1:1-2, 14.

¹ Wright, T. (2004). *Luke for Everyone* (pp. 23–24). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

² I’m not being lazy avoiding the spelling of ‘Christmas,’ but rather choosing to keep the motif of Greek references (viz. X = chi (Greek) = first letter of Christos. It is not irreverent to use initials re: God’s name. The Tetragrammaton YHWH is actually Hebrew initials used in lieu of God’s revealed name as the Hebrews saw it as irreverent to use His most holy name. In fact, the Greek acrostic for “Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior” is transliterated I CH TH Y S. These symbolic initials (acrostic) are often seen in the symbolic holy fish as the Greek term for ‘fish’ is ICHTUS which resembles the acrostic.

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- ii. You can’t quantify the infinite One! For those who think the incarnation impossible, I’d agree – save the LORD’s doing.
 - iii. Consider this: It is natural for us to bring forth life w/o intercourse. Such would be blasphemous less than a century ago. If man can do that, God can do one better. Still, it is a glorious mystery that the eternal One was conceived by the Spirit and dwelt in the womb of Mary for nine months.
- c. Magnificent Meekness
- i. The means of God’s advent to earth reveal both His heart and His righteousness or, if you will, His compassion and character. He is both merciful and just. Therefore, His plan to provide peace must be righteous and accessible. Phil. 2:5-11
 - ii. In order for Augustus to implement his power and praise, he needed to ascend. In order for us to have forgiveness and a relationship with God, He had to descend.
 - iii. Our King Messiah had to take off His glory and put on limitations. The Creator who spoke and the universe leaped into existence, no doubt, cried in the lower parts of a stable.
 - iv. Rather than the palaces, His birth was heralded in the fields where shepherds bunked. He literally left heaven’s glory and praise to enter the poor people’s accommodations. And He would stoop lower still...
 - v. The only true atonement can come from a substitution which is acceptable. God cannot be just if He simply pardons sin! Sin must incur its just wages or justice is evaded.
 - vi. Therefore, the only means of paying the wages of sin is a just penalty for them. Now you may not like a God who is just. You may want a god of your making who simply overlooks certain offenses. Those of us who know God – love Him because He is a righteous, pure, and compassionate being. We understand that He bore our just punishment on the Cross to pay for our sins in full!
 - vii. Only because of the Cross, can we now have peace with God!
- d. Chastisement for Peace
- i. The original wording: NIV: “and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” ESV: “and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.” Lexham English Bible: “and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased.” The TNIV, RSV, ASV, etc. also phrase the Greek the same. This keeping does not allow the verse to be watered down but keeps an emphasis on the particularity of salvation and peace on those whom God’s favor rests – not general peace to unregenerate mankind.
 - ii. You may not know Isa. 52:13-53:12 as a Xmas passage but we must look to that to which the signposts point rather than the signposts.
 - iii. Wright, pointed out that when you point to an object you want your dog to fetch, he just looks at your finger. Xmas is not about a manger, shepherds, or even angelic choirs – it is about the One to whom they point. It is about the person and work that He alone is eligible and mighty to accomplish and become our Savior. →
 - iv. Isa. 53:5-6 pinpoints the singular means of our redemption viz. the innocent Messiah taking the place of we guilty sinners. He achieved peace for us by the chastisement of God!
 - v. Christmas occurred in a manger of sorts but it pointed to the Cross!

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We have considered Mary’s and Zechariah’s Christmas songs which emphasize Jesus’ character and mission. Here we consider the angels’ song which emphasizes the manner and method in which Jesus visited us. Of course these songs overlap with regard to Jesus’ person, mission, method, attitude, etc. and because God’s condescending to become flesh is magnificent and mysterious, it is only natural that supernatural beings would herald the miraculous incarnation. Although heavenly hosts gloriously proclaimed the Savior’s birth, it was but outcast shepherds who witnessed the spectacle. And though it was heaven’s Glory who came to earth, they found but a vulnerable babe in a feeding trough! It is no surprise to see a swaddled baby; but one in a feeding trough was a sign that the glorious Creator stepped into creation to bring peace to the poor and meek. If you are great in this world, you better make yourself small; for His peace rests on the least, last, and left-out (Lu. 2:14 & Jam. 4:6).