

Grace Fellowship Church

Buddy Hoffman

Series: Advent

December 18, 2011

What Does Christmas Sound Like?

Luke 1-2

If you're here this morning, and you don't have a Bible with you, slip up your hand. I want to put a Bible in your hand, and when you get that Bible, I want you to open it to Luke 1 and 2, and we're going to focus in, and we're going to drill down, but we're also going to kind of look at a little bit of an overview.

The last few weeks, we've been doing what the church has been doing for a number of generations, hundreds of years, literally. As the Advent season approaches, and you know what Advent means. It means the coming, and it has been used as a celebration of the fact that Jesus came, but it's also a reminder that He is coming again, amen? We are in this period of time where the kingdom of God has broken in, but it has not fully been realized, and we have been enrolled as ambassadors in that. The church sets this time to celebrate in remembrance and also celebrate in anticipation and cultivate these qualities of life that came to us because Jesus came and was born and went to the cross and the cave, and He is coming back with a crown, amen?

Now here's what we've look at so far focus-wise: We talked about hope. Remember that one?

Hope. We talked about: What kind of people are we? Are we people of hope? Are we characterized by *hopefulness*, or are we characterized like much of the rest of the world of just *negativity*? I'm not talking about pop psychology; I'm talking about where really is our hope. Are we just going around with the spirit of the age, that nothing is ever going to work? That kind of thing is not a temperament issue; that's a sin issue. We're to be people of hope. We talked about taking a scale of one to 100 and saying, *How are we as a family on hope? How are we as a people on hope? How are we as a church on hope?*

Then we talked about love and the most important thing, the biggest commandment, is love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might. This is what ought to be on our mind every day. When we go to bed at night, *Did I love God well? Did I love God well?* Every morning as we get up, what ought to be on our mind is, "How, God, can I love You well?"

Now the third piece of that is joy. Stallsmith preached a sermon on joy last week. Did you enjoy that? Did you get that? On joy. Did you *enjoy* that? You really aren't with me, are you? We may have to circle and land the plane one more time. My wife said it's the best sermon on joy she's ever heard. Now, yeah, that's what she said to me. Now she's been listening to me preach for a long time, but anyway.

This week is the issue of peace. I want to focus in on two verses. Then I want us to look at the entire context as a whole. If you have your Bible there, look at Luke 1:78. This is part of a song of Zacharias. Imagine you could not speak for almost an entire year. This is what he said after

having been silenced for almost an entire year. He says, "His name is going to be John," which is grace, and then he goes through this, but focus for a minute right there on verse 78. "Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us..." (Luke 1:78)

Now I'm using a New King James, and I know no one does that anymore, but *Dayspring* there just means the sunrise. The sunrise from God has visited us. The sun has broken through. "...to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:79) Now what he's describing there is that if you're ever been in a situation where it's been a hard night and you're just waiting for that sun to break through. Maybe it's been a hard season, and you're beginning to see that early rays of light begin to break, and as that early breaking of light, you find your heart just filled with joy.

This December marks the end of the American military presence in Iraq. Amen. I was actually in Iraq last week, but Thursday night I was coming up out of the airport, and it was late, and the soldiers were coming up out of the big, long escalator. As the soldiers were coming up, there were over a hundred people. It was late into the night, but over a hundred, maybe a couple of hundred people, standing there, and they were just clapping for these guys as they were coming out. There were wives who were running and grabbing their husbands and kissing them, and kids running and grabbing the legs of their father. Wow!

If you served in Iraq, stand up. Stand up. We want to give you a hand. Stand up. Stand up if you served in Iraq. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It would certainly be our prayer that that same thing will be true in Afghanistan, amen?

Here's what he says: He says, "Morning has broken 'to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death..." Look at this phrase. Focus in on it. "...to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:79) Think about that phrase. Imagine you're just sitting in darkness, you don't know which way to go, and as this spiritual sunrise takes place, you see the path, and that's the path to peace.

Look down to verse 8. It says, "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly [terrified]. Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good [news] of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.'

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest...' Look at this. "...and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:8-14) This is one that kind of always irritates me just a little bit because we always picture angels as sort of naked babies with wings. Literally, the word *host* is army! What is here is an extraterrestrial, cosmic warrior. Every time you find them appearing in the Bible, the very first thing they always say is, "Hey, chill out. Don't be so afraid."

Now do you know why they do that? Because they're scary looking! Angels are not little chubby things running around. Angels are massive cosmic warriors, and here are their words: "Peace. Peace."

Over in verse 25, you find this man named Simeon, and he has been anticipating, living in anticipation of this breaking in of the kingdom of God to Israel. Look at his reaction in verse 29. "Lord, now You are letting Your servant..." Look at this. "...depart in peace..." (Luke 2:29) There are certain words in certain cultures that one culture doesn't even really have a precise word for that because they've never seen that.

I really don't know linguistically whether this is true, but they say people who live in the remote parts of the northern regions sometimes in their language have as many as 19 or 20 different words for snow. They have *wet* snow and *dry* snow and all kinds of snow. Atlanta has one word for snow. It's *party*. It's *school's out!* It doesn't matter. There are snow flurries; call the National Guard! I kind of like that. I don't have any desire to have multiple words for snow.

My wife was raised up north...bless her. I remember the first time I took her to eat at a Waffle House. She said to me, "What is that?" I said, "Those are called grits, sweetheart." She goes, "Oh, we have that. We call it Cream of Wheat." I said, "No! That is not the same. Cream of Wheat and grits are not the same." She goes, "Yeah, you just put sugar on..." I said, "Do not put sugar on grits. I have to come back here. My reputation is at stake. You put sugar on grits; this is going to ruin everything for me. Leave it alone. I'll eat your grits." She says, "What do you put on it?" I said, "Butter." She says, "Really? Butter!" They don't have a word for grits.

Peace. We use that word *peace*, but we don't actually understand what that word means. When the Scriptures speak of the word *peace*, they are not speaking of just the absence of conflict. If you have had children, particularly if you've had multiple children, and you who have multiple children know if you have one child, that is one thing because you can just kind of hand it off. You take turns. You take turns. I'm not saying raising one child is easy. Raising any children is challenging.

You raise two children; you go to man-on-man. "You take that one. I have that one." Then you switch off every once in awhile. You get three children; you have to go to zone defense. You get four children; it's not the same at all as having three children! You people who know that, you know that sometimes you say to your children, "All I want is a little peace!" Have you done that with your kids? "All I want is just a little peace."

You're actually not even asking them to *like* each other at that point. You just don't want them poking one another. You understand? We have this word for peace, but mostly what we mean with peace is that there is not open conflict. You're not fighting. You're not attacking one another.

The word the Hebrews used for peace, that God gave Israel for peace, is the word *shalom*. It is the word they would use for hello. They would say, "*Shalom*." As a matter of fact, I have a tee shirt I got in Jerusalem that says, "*Shalom*, y'all." Mostly, we don't understand *shalom*. *Shalom* means wholeness. It means things as they are supposed to be. It is not just an absence of conflict;

it means healthiness. Even when we use the word, it means prosperity. It means more than just having enough; it means being satisfied and content in what you have.

It's more than just being together; it's the *joy* of being together. It's more than just feeling okay with yourself; it's really embracing and recognizing God has done something amazing. It really is a kingdom word. It's the word for Eden. It's the idea of Eden. It's where the earth and mankind and God are in harmony. We've lived with so much disharmony, we don't even recognize it. We don't know what it even feels like to live in harmony. This is what they're saying: "Peace!"

Here's what I want to do: I want us to do just kind of a quick overview of what's going on here in Luke because there's a *context* of Luke which is really, really interesting, which is a political corruption. There is this time of suffering. The temple has been rebuilt, but most of the people feel like God has really abandoned them. There's Herod. There's Caesar. It's just a hard time contextually. Then there is the *text* of the passage, which many of you have read the text of the passage.

We've been doing this Advent, and we're going to do our Christmas Eve service. How many of you grew up going to Christmas Eve services? How many of you *didn't* grow up going to Christmas Eve services? I did not grow up going to Christmas Eve services. My wife, she wanted us to do Christmas Eve services, and I just constantly would say, "No. People ought to just stay home and read the story, and they ought to tell it to their children, and then they ought to hang out with their family." She said, "But there are people who will go to church on Christmas Eve who will go no other time."

I remember one year we were driving home from my grandfather's house, and we drove by a church, and I don't ever like to criticize churches, but this church was not a church they would be likely to hear the gospel in. The parking lot was just jammed with people, and Jody said to me, "Nobody in that church is hearing the gospel tonight." So I was like, *Stick a knife in my heart*. I said, "Okay, next year, we're going to have a Christmas Eve service. We're going to do it in 59 minutes. We're going to come in. We're going to sing the Christmas carols. We're going to read the story. I'm going to tell the gospel. I'm going to say, 'Merry Christmas.' We're going to light the candles. We're going home."

I honestly thought nobody would show up. The place was full, and people came to faith. So next year we did two. The next year we did three. This year we're doing like the kids and then three and then one more. Last year we did the arena. Here's the reality: We desperately need the text, the story, understanding the story, but what I want to do is I want to take a few minutes, and many of you understand the context, and many of you understand the text, but I want you to kind of reach out and think about the *texture* of the story.

Luke was probably the most educated of any of the early disciples, followers of Jesus. He was a physician. He was an amazing historian. What he tells us in Luke is he decided he was going to an orderly account and he was going to interview the eyewitnesses. What you find in Luke 1 and Luke 2 is this series of really songs, five songs.

Now I have to tell you, I'm comfortable in my manhood. I like guns, I eat meat, I can camp out, I like motorcycles, but I have a confession...I actually like musicals. If that lowers me in your level of manhood, I'm in trouble because I don't just tolerate them; I actually really, really like musicals. I'm talking about all kinds of musicals. I like *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Man, I love *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Whenever I've seen *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, for days afterward I'm going around, "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, I love you. Bang Bang. Chitty Chitty Bang Bang."

I like *The Sound of Music*. "The hills are alive with the sound of music." I like it as well as *Terminator*. I'm telling you the truth. I like *Singin' in the Rain*. That's not good, you know. I love, love, love musicals. You know what my favorite musical is? *Les Mis*. If you have never gotten into *Les Mis*, you are cheating yourself. It is one of the most amazing stories. How many of you have seen *Les Mis*? I've seen *Les Mis* at least a dozen times. Yeah. I've seen *Les Mis* in London, in New York, and Brookwood High School, and the Fox. The worst one was the Fox.

I'm no professional on this at all. I just like watching it. Right before the intermission, the different scenes of what has happened, the singers walk in and they sing this part, and they end up in this thing, "Can you hear the people sing?" You remember this one? Yeah, I wish I could lead you in it. I would!

Now let me tell you what happens. I'm trying to get you into the texture here of Luke. What happens in Luke is there is this absolutely great crescendo of Old Testament prophecies. Let me take you through it just quickly there. In chapter 1, verse 22-45, is the song of Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's name literally means that God keeps His promises. That's what it means. God makes covenants. God swears. God keeps His oaths.

So in her very name of her character, she is from that priestly line, and she grew up in that priestly line, and her great melody is when... Elizabeth is that aunt every young girl dreams about having where you can sit down and pour your heart out to this aunt, and she doesn't say, "Oh, you're a blithering idiot!" She goes, "Oh, I hear you. I see you. I feel you. Yes, come and sit down, and let's drink some tea."

When Mary finds herself in this mess not of her making, the first person she goes to is she goes and she finds Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's reaction is not one of rejection. Elizabeth's reaction is, "How privileged I am that I should be the one you should tell this to. You are blessed, woman." It's where we get the whole origin of the song "Ave Maria," if you've ever heard that song. "Blessed are you among women."

The next song is Mary's song, and it's verses 46-55. Mary...this cast of Mary here. If you could think of this thing as like a big cathedral, and there's a cast of characters. Two of them are women. One of them is this ancient woman now who is pregnant, and the other is this peasant girl who is really a nobody, nobody who anybody would think of as, *Oh yeah, she's going to be on America's Next Top Model*. She's just nobody. She's a peasant. In the political spectrum of the world, she is a disposable commodity, and God has chosen her.

When you read her song, what you understand is immediately she is such, even though she's a child, she's this woman of amazing faith, and she reaches back into the Scriptures she knows so well. If you have ever read Judges and realized that Judges is this day of darkness that lasts 400 years where people forget how to even hear from God. It's epitomized by Gideon who says, "God, if You are with us, where are all the miracles?" Everybody is doing what is right in their own eyes.

In the Gospels, in those kingdom chronicles, there have been 400 years of silent years, and there's a woman in 1 Samuel, and she is a mother. Her name literally means grace, Hannah, and she goes to a corrupt temple and a messed up situation, and all she wants to do is be a mother, and God answers that prayer, and she names that child Samuel, which means God hears. This Samuel learns to hear from God, and when Mary sings out, it's really Hannah's song. There's this echoing.

Then there's Zacharias. Zacharias is a priest, but he has got kind of hard. He's crusty. They've prayed to have a child. They've never had one. He hits the spiritual lottery, and he gets his opportunity to go in and offer sacrifices to a temple where the *shekinah* of glory has never dwelt. He goes in, and the angel speaks to him and says, "Your wife is going to have a child," but even in the midst of this moment of spiritual ecstasy, he says, this bitterness, this crustiness, "I'm an old man. That can't happen. I'm an old man. That can't happen."

God says, "I'm going to put you in quiet time." Have you ever found yourself kind of in time out? God says, "Zacharias, I like you a lot, but I'm going to put you in time out." So for almost a

year, he doesn't get to even say one single word. The word *Zacharias*, that whole name *Zacharias*, most of the time you'll see it described as God remembers, but it's not like God is a forgetful old man.

When it says God remembers, literally what it means is God never forgets. God does not forget His promises. If God says He's going to do something, He's going to do it. God is a God of covenant, and if God makes a covenant, it's good as done. Zacharias' very name means the God who keeps His covenants. When he opens his mouth, here's what comes out: "God keeps His Word. God keeps His Word. *Shalom* has broken in."

So you have Mary, and you have Elizabeth, and you have Zacharias, and you have Simeon over here, Simeon who has done nothing but walk around the temple and pray for the Messiah to appear. Then when he sees Jesus, he goes, "Nothing else matters now. If I die right now, I die *full*. I die with *shalom*." Then you have this massive chorus. It's not even right to call it a chorus. They're cosmic, extraterrestrial warriors come down, and they're saying, "Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth!" Now do you understand that when a soldier says, "Stop!" it's not a suggestion? Do you understand that?

Now we often think this is a prayer. It's not a prayer. This is the angelic host. Listen, if you saw an angel, if an angel showed up with like a SEAL team, one angel, they would all have to clean their special equipment. Angels are bad boys! They're going, "Peace." If you had been there, you'd have gone, *Yep, I think so. I think it's time. Shalom.*

Peace can't be created by us. *Shalom* is a kingdom term. Peace is not made; *shalom* is a miracle. It's interesting because what Moses told Aaron to say to the people, "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His [face] upon you, and give you peace [*shalom*]." (Numbers 6:24-26) Let's bow for prayer.

I want us to take a moment or so, and I don't know where you are this morning. I don't know where you are spiritually. I don't know if you know the peace with God and the peace of God, but let me just tell you something, *shalom* comes when we run up the flag, that white flag of surrender, and we say, "God, I can't create peace. I can't make peace. I can't even be at peace, but Your kingdom is a kingdom of peace, and Your Word says this, 'For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor...Prince of Peace.'" (Isaiah 9:6)

The Prince of Peace. That means like the Prince of Wales. This is His land. This is His property. This is what He has, and what He has, if you want it, you can only get it from Him. Maybe this morning, some of you have never run up the white flag and said, "Listen, King of Glory, You who died for my *shalom*, I need You to create *shalom* in my heart," and the sunrise of *shalom* will arise in your hearts.

If you're here this morning, and you have never received Christ as your Messiah, your Prince, your Lord, your Savior, and this Christmas season you want to just say, *This season, I want that. I need that. I want Jesus Christ to be Lord of my life. I've never received Him as King of Glory in my life, and this morning, that's what I want to happen in my life, slip up your hand. I want to*

pray for you. Just slip your hand up right where you're at. *I want this King of Glory, this Prince of Peace in my life.*

Okay, I want to ask you another question. If you're here this morning and you're saying, *There's not shalom in our family, or there's not shalom in my heart; there's not shalom in my business; there's not wholeness*, I'm not going to ask you to come down here, but we do want to pray for you. Just slip your hand up right where you're at. You need prayer about this. We're going to pray together as a congregation.

Okay, here's what I want you to do: If you really are serious about that, I want you to keep your hand up. I'm going to ask everybody to look up and look around you. If you see somebody with a hand up, I want you to reach over. I want you to put your hand on their shoulder. I want you to pray for them right here. Let's pray for this lady back here. Listen, if you know how to pray, get over here. Let's pray over these people right here. Come on. Find out their name. Find out specifically what they need prayer about. Don't just pray a general prayer. Pray specifically for the *shalom* they need in their life.

We have prayer teams. Keep your hand up. We're going to pray for you. Don't go, *I don't need this*. Listen, if you need *shalom*, I know the Prince of *shalom*. I know the King, and He will give it to you. If you need wholeness, maybe some of you are sick and you need somebody to pray for you about that. Maybe your business. Maybe your marriage. Whatever it is. Right here. Who's going to pray right here? I need some prayer people right here. Who wants to hear from the King? All right. Anybody else? Okay, let's pray.