

THE FIRST 15

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

By: Jan Davis

Today is Wednesday, December 18 and this is the third week of the Advent season. We are studying the song of the Angels recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke following the birth of Jesus.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and loving God, in the early morning of a dawning December day, I seek Your presence. As I journey through the season of Advent I find my heart growing in anticipation as the celebration of the birth of Your Son Jesus draws near. In this place of stillness, I quiet my mind and prepare my heart to reflect on a humble manger in Bethlehem surrounded by shepherds and angels. I listen attentively for Your message. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:8-14

REFLECTION

I love when I am reading a Bible story and angels "show up." Angels appear many times in the Bible. From beginning to end, start to finish, front to back, Genesis to Revelation angels appear. This is a true sign of God's desire to communicate with humanity. Heavenly messengers are sent. There are 287 appearances of angels recorded in scripture. Most often an angel appears alone. Sometimes the angel is named. In the Old Testament book of Daniel and in the Gospel of Luke the angel who appeared to Zechariah and to Mary is identified as Gabriel. The archangel Michael is mentioned in the book of Daniel. Sometimes two or three angels arrive on the scene together. It is significant that the account of Jesus' birth is the only instance in scripture when *all* the angels show up.

The shepherds were living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. The humble hard-working shepherds are the recipients of divine visitation. One angel reveals to the shepherds the true identity of the newborn baby. He is a savior, the Messiah, Christ the Lord! The one angel is joined by a multitude of the heavenly host. Hundreds of thousands of angels arrive proclaiming God's glory. The wonderful news is broadcast by a heavenly chorus. The angel's song emphasizes the significance of this birth for the world.

This is what the angel's sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" The angels praise God for the birth of the Messiah and proclaim peace and good will for the world. The Hebrew word for "peace" is shalom. Shalom means peace, but more so it means harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility. Shalom represents the full understanding of the "peace" that Jesus brings. God desires to bring wholeness of life to individuals, families, relationships, societies and nations. God's peace restores balance to all things, even the created order. The phrase "good will toward men" encompasses God's gracious favor bestowed upon humanity evident in the birth of his Son our Savior. Good will toward men also implies the good will God's grace awakens in individuals which results in people extending peace and good will toward one another. God's love results in love of neighbor.

Ask: Where do I need the peace of Christ this Christmas? How can I pray for peace in my heart, my home, my family, my relationships, my city, my nation, the world? How can I participate in loving my neighbor and bringing about God's good will toward men?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Wonderful and amazing Lord God, I join my voice with the voice of the angels singing praise to You. I rejoice in the birth of Your Son Jesus my Savior. Glory to God in the highest. I pray for peace on earth this Christmas. Bring Your peace into places of turmoil, chaos, violence, hatred, misunderstanding, brokenness, uncertainty and unrest. Bring the peace that passes understanding. I pray for peace on earth and good will toward men. Show me how I can participate in what You are doing to bring peace in the lives of those around me. Amen.