

Luke 2:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Analysis

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. This angelic proclamation to the shepherds opens with the divine imperative "Fear not" (mē phobeisthe, μὴ φοβεῖσθε), a phrase repeated throughout Scripture when God breaks into human experience. The shepherds' terror at the sudden glory of the Lord (verse 9) gives way to the greatest announcement in human history. The Greek euangelizomai (εὐαγγελίζομαι, "I bring good tidings") is the verb form of euangelion (εὐαγγέλιον, "gospel" or "good news"), marking this as the first explicit gospel proclamation in the New Testament narrative.

The phrase "great joy" (charan megalēn, χαρὰν μεγάλην) emphasizes the magnitude and intensity of the joy this news produces. This is not minor happiness but overwhelming, transformative delight. The angel specifies this joy "shall be to all people" (estai panti tō laō, ἔσται παντὶ τῷ λαῷ)—the Greek laos (λαός) can mean both the Jewish people specifically and humanity generally. Luke's Gospel consistently emphasizes the universal scope of salvation, and this announcement establishes that theme from Christ's birth. The Messiah comes not merely for Israel but for all nations, fulfilling God's promise to Abraham that through his seed all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

Theologically, this verse proclaims several foundational truths:

1. God initiates salvation—He sends the angel with the announcement
2. salvation is good news, not burdensome law or impossible demands

3. the gospel produces joy, not fear, guilt, or shame
4. this joy is comprehensive ("great") and universal ("to all people").

The context is crucial—God announces the birth of the world's Savior not to priests in the temple, not to scholars studying Scripture, but to working-class shepherds in a field. This choice demonstrates that the gospel comes to the humble, the marginalized, and those who would not expect divine favor.

Historical Context

This angelic announcement occurred on a hillside near Bethlehem, approximately 5-6 BC (accounting for Herod's death in 4 BC and the census timing). Shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night suggests this occurred during lambing season (late winter/early spring) or possibly during the warmer months when flocks remained outdoors. Bethlehem, meaning "house of bread," was the ancestral home of King David and the prophesied birthplace of Messiah (Micah 5:2).

Shepherds occupied a low social status in first-century Jewish society. Rabbinical writings sometimes listed shepherding among despised trades because the work made ceremonial cleanliness difficult to maintain, and shepherds had reputations for grazing flocks on others' land. Yet God chose these despised shepherds as the first recipients of the gospel announcement, foreshadowing Jesus' consistent ministry to tax collectors, sinners, and social outcasts. The historical choice of shepherds also connects to David, Israel's shepherd-king, and to Jesus' later self-identification as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

The Roman context is significant. Augustus Caesar (27 BC-AD 14) had established the Pax Romana, and his propaganda promoted him as the savior and bringer of peace to the world. Imperial birth announcements used similar language of "good news" for the empire. The angel's proclamation deliberately subverts Roman imperial theology—the true Savior is not Caesar in Rome but a baby born in obscurity in occupied Judea. The announcement of "peace on earth" (verse 14) directly challenges Rome's claim to have achieved peace through military might, revealing that genuine peace comes only through the Prince of Peace.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. Why does God choose to announce the Messiah's birth first to lowly shepherds rather than to religious or political leaders?
2. How does the phrase "good tidings of great joy" challenge legalistic or guilt-based presentations of Christianity?
3. What does the universal scope ("to all people") reveal about God's heart and the nature of the gospel?
4. In what ways does the gospel announcement to shepherds foreshadow Jesus' entire ministry and mission?
5. How should the angel's command "Fear not" shape our understanding of approaching God and receiving His salvation?

Interlinear Text

καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ ἄγγελος Μὴ φοβεῖσθε ἵδού, γὰρ
And said unto them the angel not Fear behold for
G2532 G2036 G846 G3588 G32 G3361 G5399 G2400 G1063

εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν χαρὰν μεγάλην ἣτις ἔσται παντὶ¹
I bring you joy of great which shall be to all
G2097 G5213 G5479 G3173 G3748 G2071 G3956

τῷ λαῷ
G3588 people
G2992

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 40:9 (Good): O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

Isaiah 61:1 (Good): The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

Isaiah 52:7 (Good): How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

Matthew 28:18 (Parallel theme): And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Genesis 12:3 (Parallel theme): And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Matthew 14:27 (Good): But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

Isaiah 41:27 (Good): The first shall say to Zion, Behold, behold them: and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings.

Luke 1:30 (Parallel theme): And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

Acts 13:32 (Parallel theme): And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

Colossians 1:23 (Parallel theme): If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;