

## THE SONGS WE SING: Celebrating the Chorus of Christmas

### "THE GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO"

#### LUKE 2:8-20

### This Week's Core Competency

**Peace** – I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, others, and myself. Philippians 4:6, 7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and yof trouble knowing that we're better off once our faith is tested (Jas 1:2).*

The first candle lit during Advent, called the prophecy candle, represents the hope of Jesus' coming. The second, called the Bethlehem candle, represents the peace that Christ brings to the world and to us. The third, called the shepherds' candle, represents joy in anticipation of the birth of Jesus. The fourth, the pink one, is called the angels' candle. This candle reminds us to share the love of God in Christ with others just like the angels who first announced and celebrated the birth of Jesus and just like the shepherds who told others what they had seen and been told about him. And here's the good news that brings the great joy part, all people can find peace through him.

Peace is the remedy for broken people in a messed up world, the resolution of the tragedy that is the human condition. Peace is what we all

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*You have made my soul for your peace and your silence, and my soul is wounded with confusion, with the noise of my sins and my desires.*

*-Thomas Merton*

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need, what we all long for. Remember the TV show Hack? It premiered in 2002 on CBS and ran for just two seasons. It's the story of Mike Olshansky, a disgraced, divorced former cop seeking to rebuild his life. After he was discovered taking money from a narcotics crime scene, Mike lost both his badge and his family. He now drives a cab through the streets of Philadelphia to make ends meet, helping his fares with their personal and criminal problems in effort to gain redemption. In one episode called "Bad Choices," Mike crosses paths with three other flawed human beings. He picks up Chuck, a frantic naked man, and helps him track down the prostitute who robbed him of his clothes, money, and most importantly, his wedding ring. Chuck, the adulterer, has a desperately ill wife at home, and Anna, the hooker, has a young daughter in foster care. They find Anna whose abusive pimp has taken Chuck's belongings. Sympathetic to her plight, Mike offers to buy Anna's freedom from Raymond as well as Chuck's wedding ring. Chuck can't go home without it. But after Raymond returns his ring, Chuck refuses to get \$5000 from the cleaners he owns to pay Raymond what he wants for Anna. Instead, Chuck has Mike arrested on the bogus charge that he broke into his business looking for money. After Grizz, Mike's fallen-from-grace priest bails him out, the story winds down quickly. Mike fights Raymond to help Anna escape. Chuck finally tells the police and his wife the truth. And even though she throws him out, he wants to win her back. Mike takes Chuck's \$5000 and pays off his priest's gambling debt,

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which eliminates Grizz's need to "borrow" money from the collection plate.

Now none of this happened, of course, but it's all true. There are real people with real names in the real world like every one of the tragic characters in this story. And their stories all pale in comparison to the stories of human tragedy played out on a world wide stage. There's the tragic story of human trafficking in South East Asia, child slavery in Cambodia, India, and Thailand, aids in Africa, genocide in Uganda, deforestation and dislocation of native peoples in Brazil, famine in Angola, war in Afghanistan, saber rattling in Iran, terrorism in the Middle East, and the pollution of God's creation everywhere. And every one of these tragic stories has its cast of characters—hundreds of thousands of them. Our world needs peace. We need peace because peace is more than the absence of conflict. Peace is *shalom*—completeness, wholeness, harmony, healing, and contentment. It's reconciliation and redemption. It's salvation. True peace is the only cure for the world's ills. And it's what Christ arrived with for the men and women on whom God's favor rests.

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Luke 2:8-20

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14"Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor  
rests."

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Underline "in the fields" in v. 8.
- \* Circle "glory" in v. 9.
- \* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 10, 19.
- \* Underline "town of David" in v. 11.
- \* Circle "Savior," "Christ," and "Lord" used in v. 11 to refer to Jesus.
- \* Bracket the sign given in v. 12.
- \* Circle "heavenly host" in verse 13.
- \* Highlight v. 14.
- \* Circle "peace" in v. 14.
- \* Circle "amazed" in v. 18.
- \* Box "just as" indicating *comparison* in v. 20.

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## day 2

## EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Why send angels to shepherds whom Philip Yancey calls, "illiterate hirelings who watched the flocks of others, 'nobodies' who failed to leave their names" (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, 37).
2. This announcement to the shepherds is different from the angel's first two announcements (cf., 1:11-17; 26-38). How so?
3. The shepherds were more than afraid; they were "terrified." Explain.
4. The angel told the shepherds, "Fear not" (KJV). Why not?
5. "Town of David" seems like a roundabout way of saying "Bethlehem." Why not just say Bethlehem?
6. The baby is "Christ the Lord." What does that mean?
7. Describe the "heavenly host" that appeared praising God.
8. Does verse 14 promise peace on earth? Explain
9. How were the shepherds so sure that Joseph and Mary's baby was the one?
10. **Discussion:** Talk about the response of the shepherds and of Mary. Why would Luke preserve them?

"In [Luke] 2:8-14 we have a third annunciation scene, which follows the same pattern as the previous two [cf., 1:11-20; 26-38]: the appearance of an angel, a response of fear, the command not to fear, the announcement of a birth that brings joy. In this case, however, the announcement is not to a parent of the child to be born, for this birth is not just a family affair. Indeed, the angel stresses that he brings a message of 'great joy which shall be for all the people (2:10)' (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1:38).

The shepherds got it right in that day. The angel appeared to them in the middle of a dark night accompanied by the glory of the LORD, a unique blazing brightness that marked the presence of God. Blinded by the light no wonder they were terrified. What's more, angels were known more for executing judgment than delivering good news not to mention that it had been centuries since God had spoken directly to any of his people. But that hardly mattered since shepherds would have topped the list of unexpected recipients of such revelation anyway.

The angel told them that a Savior, Christ the Lord, had been born in "the town of David." He put it that way to connect the birth of the child with David's dynasty. This child was the son of David and heir to the throne of David. Then the heavenly host, not of stars but of angels, invited them to join in the

chorus and give praise to God. "Glory be to God in heaven, and on earth, peace be to people on whom his favor rests." The words of the heavenly chorus suggest that peace is made available to all people through the Christ child but not all people will obtain it. Only those who receive him like the shepherds will enjoy God's favor.

Then, as abruptly as they appeared, the angels returned to heaven and the shepherds set out to find the child. The moment they set eyes on him, what they saw confirmed that he was the one. There the child was lying in the manger just as the angel had said. It was all true; everything that the angel had told them was true. The things they had heard and seen were just as they had been told. So they spread the good news, a Savior had been born in the city of David who was Christ the Lord, messiah and God. And while the shepherds were spreading the word, Mary spent hours going over all that had happened since Gabriel first visited her trying to make sense of it all. As far as the shepherds were concerned, the glorifying and praising God continued throughout the night and probably into the days and nights that followed.

*The Message of the Passage*  
*Praise God and spread the good news our Savior,*  
*Christ the Lord, has been born in Bethlehem.*

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day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**
  
- **Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.**
  
- **Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:**
  - o **Belonging**
  - o **Becoming**
  - o *going Beyond*
  
- **Journal your thoughts on the passage.**
  
  
- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)  
Celebrate Advent. Decide that you're going to follow the instructions for celebrating Advent with your family in your home group "family" instead.

**“The Gloria in Excelsis Deo”**

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

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# notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 8 *shepherds* "In first-century Palestine shepherds did not have the reputation of being overly circumspect with regard to the property of others. They were often held in contempt and considered as nothing more than roving vagabonds and thieves. Whether Luke had this idea in mind is not certain, but if he did, then the lowly shepherds anticipate the blessings many other such persons of low estate will receive from Jesus during his ministry. (If Luke viewed the shepherds as thieves, then ironically we have both Jesus' birth and death in the company of criminals [see Luke 23:32-43])" (Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, NIBC, 36). "These were most unlikely recipients of such a revelation, for shepherds were despised as a class because they were unable to observe the customary laws of ceremonial purification. They were considered unclean. They had not been schooled in the law and therefore were considered ignorant. Such therefore would be unprejudiced witnesses to the birth of Christ" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 60).

v. 8 *fields* "December 25 as the celebrated date of Jesus' birth arose around the time of Constantine (ca. a.d. 306-337), though it is mentioned in material from Hippolytus (a.d. 165-235). Some think that the reason for celebration on this date was that it coincided with the pagan Roman festival of Saturnalia, and Christians could celebrate their own festival at this time without fear of persecution. On the basis of the statement that the shepherds were *living out in the field, keeping guard over their flock at night* it is often suggested that Jesus' birth took place in early spring, since it was only at lambing time that shepherds stood guard over their flocks in the field. This is not absolutely certain, however" (the NET Bible, **sn** 24 on Luke 2:8). In fact, the evidence altogether makes the traditional date more likely (see Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 25-27).

v. 9 *glory* This unique blazing brightness is an indication of God's presence. "This was the glory that had appeared to Abraham while he dwelt in Ur (Acts 7:2), the glory that appeared in the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34-35), and the glory that appeared in the temple (1 Kings 8:11). This was the glory that Ezekiel saw depart from the temple (Ezek. 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23). For more than 500 years the nation Israel had been without that visible sign of God's presence among His people, and now the glory for which Israel had waited was revealed to the shepherds in the field, not to the priest in the temple" (Pentecost, 61).

v. 10 *terrified* Lit., "they feared a great fear" an idiomatic way of intensifying the main idea, fear.

v. 11 *town of David* "The title Messiah, which appears here for the first time, should be interpreted in light of what has already been said to Mary and by Zechariah about salvation for the Jewish people through the reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom. The reference to the birth 'in David's city' supports this connection" (Tannehill, 1:38).

v. 11 *Savior, Christ, Lord* Savior "reflects the call of Jesus to deliver his people, as Mary's and Zechariah's hymns declared (cf. 1:46-55, 67-79). 'Christ' (from the Greek word for 'Anointed One') is indicative of his role as the promised Messiah" (Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 84, 85). "'Lord' sometimes translated the divine name Yahweh ('The One Who Is'; see Exod. 3:14) and probably is to be understood in 2:11 in terms of the incarnation; that is to say, the Lord is present in Jesus. This idea is found in early Christianity as is evidenced by the confession 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:9; see Fitzmyer, pp. 200-204)" (Evans, 37; see also his comments on "Savior" and "Christ," 36, 37).

v. 14 *glory to God* Or "Give honor to God."

v. 14 *in the highest* Or "in heaven where he dwells." Note the parallelism in v. 14: glory/peace; to God/to men; in the highest/on earth. "Here the 'highest' refers to the highest heavens (cf. 19:38), not to the highest degree" (Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC, 108).

v. 14 *peace* "When Christ was born, some form of external peace (the 'pax Romana') did prevail. But, as was declared by Epictetus, the pagan thinker of the first century, '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 more than even for outward peace'. Through the coming of Christ, however, as the angels sing, true peace will come on earth . . . It is the work of Christ to being peace into all human relations—in man's relation to God, to himself (his own feelings, desire, and the like), to his life's circumstances (calamities and trials), and to his fellow-men" (Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, NICNT, 112, 13). As with the Hebrew term *shalom*, "More than cessation of strife is meant, and the word is used to indicate the full sum of the blessings associated with the coming of the Messiah (Is. 9:5f.; Mi. 5:4) . . . *eirene* [peace] is thus tantamount to *soteria* [salvation]" (I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC, 112).

v. 14 *favor* "The picture of being a person of God's favor was a Jewish way of saying that someone was numbered among God's chosen people, much like the 'God-fearers' of 1:50-53. This remark makes it clear that salvation and its fullness are not automatic for everyone. Only those who respond to God's grace and follow the path lit by the rising sun will experience the peace into which that path leads (1:78-79)" (Bock, 85).



## What is Advent?

A time to Celebrate Christ's Birth and Look Forward to His Return.

Advent is the four week period leading up to Christmas. The word *advent* means arrival. When we celebrate Advent we focus on Jesus birth in the past and his return in the future. Traditionally, Advent is a very serious holiday; people pray and fast to make sure they are ready to meet Jesus when he comes. Each week of Advent becomes more joyful as Christ's birthday gets closer. Today, many Christians follow the tradition of lighting an Advent candle each week as a way to focus on Jesus' first and second coming.

### How to Celebrate Advent with My Family

#### Make your own Advent wreath or purchase one in The Connection Bookstore

The Advent Wreath is a circle of evergreen sprigs with four candles around the circle and one candle in the middle. The candles around the circle are 3 purple and 1 pink. The one in the middle is white.

#### Pick a time to Light the Candle with your family

Once a week, Sunday is the traditional day, sit down with your family to light the candle for the week. Read the scripture, sing the song, and talk with your family about the meaning of the candle for the week. Pray with your family that God will help you slow down and prepare your hearts to celebrate Jesus.

### Week Four Dec 20-25

#### Angel's Candle - Pink

Today you will light four candles, all except the white candle. As you light this week's candle, think with your family of ways you can share Christ's love as Christmas approaches. This is the candle of LOVE.

#### Scripture to Read - Luke 2:8-10, 13-14

#### Song to Sing - Hark the Herald Angels Sing

#### Week Four Reading Guide

Pick a time each day to read the Scripture together

*Sunday Dec 20:* Ps 98:1-6; Jn 1:1-3, 14

*Monday Dec 21:* Jn 7:37, 38; 14:6

*Tuesday Dec 22:* Mt 28:19, 20

*Wednesday Dec 23:* Jn 8:12

*Thursday Dec 24:* Jn 9:4, 5; Mt 5:14-16

*Friday Dec 25:* Ps 100; Ro 6:23

#### Christmas Day-Christ Candle

On Christmas Eve or Christmas Morning, light the Christ Candle with your family to celebrate the Coming of Christ.

#### Christ Candle-White

Today you will light all five candles. The Christ Candle reminds us that the world does have a Savior. Pray that friends and family will recognize their need for a Savior. Pray that you will be able to tell them that about his love and salvation.

#### Scripture to Read - Luke 2:1-20

#### Song to Sing - O Come All Ye Faithful



### Challenge

*Kids preschool through sixth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for participating in the spiritual discipline of Bible study.*

*My Family Read Through the Week Two Reading Guide for Advent:*

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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**Keith Smith** (B.A. in Speech Communication, Texas Tech University and M.A. in Religious Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Family and Children's Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. Keith is a featured communicator for Song of Solomon for Students and speaks at children/student camps across the country. He has developed a number of relational parenting seminars designed to motivate parents to empower their parenting by emotionally connecting with their kids. Keith lives with his wife, Denise, and their two children, Jordan and Alex.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).