

DELIVERANCE FROM FEAR

#4 Fear of the Glory of God

Read Luke 2:8-20

A paradox

- In Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*, the chorus sings— 'A paradox, a paradox, A most ingenious paradox'
- *Paradoxos* = contrary to (*para*) opinion or glory (*doxa*)
- In the Christmas story we do have 'a most ingenious paradox'...

1. Paradox #1 God chooses the lowly (8)

Shepherds were an unlikely group for a visitation from God

- Living in the fields (2:8)
- It was night time
- Probably summer (in spite of snowy carols and Christmas cards!)
- Bottom of the social ladder
- Nameless (to us)
- See 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

2. Paradox #2 Glorious terror (9)

- The glory of God was displayed
- Literally: 'They feared a great fear'
- The word 'glory' literally means 'heavy' (2 Cor 4:17)
- Priests could not stand under it (2 Chronicles 5:14)
- It also has connotations of 'holy' eg Isaiah felt unclean (Isaiah 6:1-7)
- God's glory is terrifying
- Christmas is only good news because it is a message of salvation
- Without salvation through Jesus, God's glory would destroy us! See 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

3. Paradox #3 Don't be afraid of fear (9, 10)

Three reasons not to fear—

- Good news: although sinful we can be forgiven
- Great joy: forgiveness brings great joy
- For everyone: no one is excluded

4. Paradox #4 A baby is Saviour and Lord (10, 11)

Three astonishing titles are given to the infant Jesus—

- Saviour: saves us from our sin
- Christ: anointed by God
- Lord: supreme master
- Which is greatest?

5. Paradox #5/The surprising God (12)

- An incongruous sign for a saving, anointed Lord
- A baby in a manger who is not even dressed properly?
- This is how God does things!

6. Paradox #6/The army of angels (13-14)

Another incongruity: an army of heavenly beings with a message of peace!*

- Peace to men. John Milton's *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* suggests that the whole world was at peace when Christ was born—

*No war, or battle's sound Was heard the world around:
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hookèd chariot stood Unstain'd with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.
But peaceful was the night Wherein the Prince of Light His reign of peace
upon the earth began:
The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kist
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean—
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmèd wave.*

- This is a message of God's good will to men
- Or, to men of good will (The differing renderings depend on whether the Greek text reads *eudokia* or *eudokias*.)
- Peace begins in our hearts (Romans 5:1-5)

7. They found Jesus (15)

There is an urgency here—

- 'Let us go' – they acted with firmness and decision
- 'With haste' – there was a sense of urgency
- 'They found' – the outcome was positive
- Will you seek Jesus with the same sense of urgency and purpose? He is not found by casual inquiry – only by sincere, heart-felt seeking.

8. They praised Jesus (20)

- There is joy in finding Jesus!
- Our lives are filled with praise and glory to God
- The people of Samaria experienced great joy (Acts 8:8)
- The Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing (Act 8:39)
- All believers experience indescribable joy (1 Pet 1:8)

Challenge

- What if the glory of God were to fall upon us now?
- Where would we hide?
- The answer is JESUS
- He is the Saviour who came to deliver us from fear of God's glory
- Will you seek him earnestly and find him today?

SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Remember: You don't have to answer all the questions. Choose those that seem most relevant to you at this time.

Read Luke 2:8-20

Biblical

1. What do you think it would be like to have the glory of the Lord shining around *you*? (9)
2. What is it about the glory of God that is frightening? (Isaiah 6:1-7 might be helpful here.)
3. Why did the angel bring the good news to shepherds? (1 Corinthians 1:26-30 might be helpful.)
4. What can you find out about Middle Eastern stables in the first century? (12)
5. Compare what verse 13 actually says with what the Christmas cards usually show. Which aspects of the popular images are biblical?
6. Compare 13 with 15-16. How easy do you think it was for the shepherds to find the baby? Give reasons for your answer.

Personal and practical

7. Note the response of the shepherds (15). What can we learn from it?
8. Note what the shepherds did after they found Jesus (17, 20). What was your response when you first met Jesus?
9. On a scale of one (little) to ten (much) how would you rate your effectiveness in sharing the good news about Jesus? What changes could you make to lift your rating?
10. Look at Mary's response (19). What does it mean to you?

Memorize Luke 2:19

About Dr Barry Chant

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He was the initiator and former president of Tabor College, Australia.

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