

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 15 (Advent Attribute #3)
Scripture: Luke 2:8-20
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.
Date: December 17th, 2017

PP 1,2

A Powerfully Surprising God

Luke 2:8-20 (ESV)

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Introduction The God we are worshipping today is stunningly old-fashioned. It is astounding *how* old-fashioned and un-hip He is. He is so old and so traditional that He hasn't changed at all in the last fifty years! In fact, He hasn't ever changed. And we are so unflinchingly old-fashioned that we dare to celebrate Christmas with all its central and traditional theological ideas that it might offend some diversity fans. We feel no need to lace Christmas with Hanukkah, Winter Solstice (or what some native-Americans call Soyal), Bodhi Day (in Buddhism—the day in 596 BC when the Buddha sat beneath a Bodhi tree -- a type of fig tree -- and is believed to have achieved enlightenment), Id al-Adha (Islam). But this time of year, we swell with excitement not about Santa Claus, his reindeer or the Grinch, but about Bethlehem, the manger, the star, the magi and our passage today!

PP 3,4,5

The third *Advent Attribute* of God is “**power**”. Our God is supremely powerful—we already said something about His *omnipotence*, being ALL-powerful. Today simply, in anticipation of His great work, is POWER demonstrated on “Christmas eve.” And sometimes the demonstration of God's power is so overwhelming that it is a complete surprise. Witness the record of

PP 6,7,8

the shepherds that Luke gives us. Third-shift laborers, drowsily “out in the field.” Wham! Out of nowhere we read

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear (vs. 9). The King James translated it

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. The Greek, in which Luke wrote, has it plainly

καὶ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐπέστη αὐτοῖς καὶ δόξα κυρίου περιέλαμψεν αὐτούς,
καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν.

KAI AGGELOS KURIUOY EPÉSTÉ AUTOIS KAI DOXA KURIUOY PERIÉLAMPSEN AUTOUS.

I'm almost embarrassed to study this because studying it without indulging a great sense of awe, is to insult the text. Shepherds—the simplest, most ordinary, most unassuming and obscure people. Nighttime—quiet, sleepy, nothing extraordinary expected. The times—nothing unusual. And WHAM! Out of nowhere an “angelos kuriou” appears, “came upon them” as the KJV puts it. And also, Luke says, “doxa kuriou”, the **glory of the Lord** shone around them. Blazing light, in the middle of the night. The shepherds’ eyes must have squinted shut; they must have grabbed each other to keep from falling over! Here, the glory of the Lord is extraordinary. In heaven it is routine and non-stop. And I like the KJV next: **they were sore afraid.**

Our God is sometimes startlingly surprising.

PP 10,11

1. He surprised Israel in His power at the Red Sea. **the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided** (Exodus 14:21b). And does the parting of a sea and the overnight de-moisturization of its seabed take some power?
2. **Then Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha** (2nd Kings 6:17). He surprised the servant of Elisha with making visible an army of “soldiers” with “chariots” surrounding a city in Syria. Little says “power” like a camouflaged mobile army all of a sudden becoming uncamouflaged!
3. Jesus’ power surprised the disciples when in the boat, and Jesus was asleep, and a storm on the Sea of Galilee is about to swamp the boat so they wake Jesus up, crying out **Don’t you care!!!???** And Mark tells us (4:38,39) Jesus woke up and said σιῶπα, πεφίμωσο SIOPA, PEPHIMOSO Silence. Be muzzled! (literally, “Be being silent. Have been muzzled.”) And the storm DID. Is that power? Did it surprise the guys in the boat? You bet it did. Mark even tells us what they said to each other: ““Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:31b).
4. Peter and James and John were startled on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17) to hear a powerful voice say, **This is my beloved Son, with**

whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. (Matt. 17:5-8).

5. All kinds of people were greatly surprised on the Day of Pentecost when they could hear speech in their own languages (Acts 2), as the Holy Spirit of God overwhelmed the apostles with His power.
6. A whole huge bunch of new Christians were startled and frightened (**And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things**) when Ananias and Sapphira fell over dead for “lying to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5). The Lord’s power was plain, and it was surprising to the earliest Christians.

And so our point today is that our God is a powerfully surprising God! He shows up when HE wants to, and He is never not powerful. But His power is not always brute force.

- He is powerful to warn Joseph in a dream, Go down to Egypt. He somehow touched the hearts of the magi, powerfully, that would compel them to get up on those camels and go after that star!
- Mary, post-partum, Luke tells us (2:19) that **Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.**
- And those magi, felt the power of God when they were surprised to hear a message to change their itinerary for the trip home.

The story of Christmas is a story about God, the one God, the unchanging and powerful God. The story doesn’t change and it is not diminished any by whatever other stories people like to tell each other in the month of November.

Recently two articles, previously unknown, by C.S. Lewis have been found. One, which is called *A Christmas Sermon for Pagans*, will be republished in January. Here is a quote—

PP 12 13 14

It looks to me, neighbours, as though we shall have to set about becoming true Pagans if only as a preliminary to becoming Christians. ... For (in a sense) all that Christianity adds to Paganism is the cure. It confirms the old belief that in this universe we are up against Living Power: that there is a real Right and that we have failed to obey it: that existence is beautiful and terrifying. It adds a wonder of which Paganism had not distinctly heard—that the Mighty One has come down to help us, to remove our guilt, to reconcile us.¹

The God you worship this Christmas is powerful, and His power shows up at unexpected times, some times. To quote another C.S. Lewis line, “HE IS NOT A TAME LION.” We love worshipping Him and serving Him. Because He is an awesome God. The shepherds had their socks blown off! At first they were **sore**

¹ C.S. Lewis, c. 1946, *A Christmas Sermon for Pagans*, referenced in an article by Stephanie L. Derrick in *Christianity Today* (Dec. 15, 2017).

afraid. Then, as we have it in the last verse of our reading today (vs.20) ***And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.***

Let's sing a few lines...

Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing,
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo
Gloria, in excelsis Deo

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

COMMUNICABLE

- BEING
- PURPOSE
- MENTAL
- MORAL
- SUMMARY

INCOMMUNICABLE

To study God's attributes is to study his character, to answer questions like, Who is God? and What is God like? A typical classification of God's attributes divides them into those that are incommunicable (those that he does not share or "communicate" to anyone or anything else) and communicable (those that he shares with other beings). Like most theological classifications, this one is imperfect but still helpful as we seek to understand what is so far beyond ourselves.

God's communicable attributes can be further categorized into: attributes of God's being, mental attributes, moral attributes, attributes of purpose and "summary" attributes (attributes that, in a more particular way, modify each of the others).

It is important to consider that God is not simply the sum of his attributes. His attributes are not separate from one another, but each one modifies or qualifies each of the others.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:
Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem
The Attributes of God by A.W. Pink



- TRANSCENDENCE** — GOD TRANSCENDS ALL CREATION AND IS UNKNOWABLE APART FROM HIS SELF-INITIATED REVELATION.
- IMMANENCE** — GOD IS ACTIVE IN THIS WORLD AND IN OUR DAILY LIVES. GOD CARES ABOUT EVERY ASPECT OF OUR EXISTENCE AND INVITES US TO WELCOME HIS GUIDANCE, GRACE, AND LOVE.
- ASEITY** — GOD IS SELF-EXISTENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENT AND HAS NO NEED OF HUMAN BEINGS OR THE REST OF CREATION.
- OMNIPRESENCE** — GOD HAS NO SIZE OR SHAPE AND IS PRESENT IN ALL PLACES WITH HIS ENTIRE BEING.
- UNITY** — GOD'S WHOLE BEING INCLUDES ALL OF HIS ATTRIBUTES AT ALL TIMES. THESE ATTRIBUTES ARE NEVER IN OPPOSITION.
- ETERNALITY** — GOD HAS ALWAYS EXISTED, HAVING NO BEGINNING AND NO END, AND EXPERIENCING NO SUCCESSION OF MOMENTS.
- IMMUTABILITY** — GOD CANNOT CHANGE IN HIS BEING, PERFECTIONS, PURPOSES, AND PROMISES.
- GLORY** — THE CREATED BRIGHTNESS THAT SURROUNDS GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF.
- BEAUTY** — GOD IS THE POSSESSOR AND THE SUM OF ALL DESIRABLE QUALITIES.
- BLESSEDNESS** — GOD DELIGHTS FULLY IN HIMSELF AND IN ALL THAT REFLECTS HIS CHARACTER.
- PERFECTION** — GOD FULLY POSSESSES ALL EXCELLENT QUALITIES AND LACKS NO QUALITIES THAT WOULD BE DESIRABLE FOR HIM.
- JEALOUSY** — GOD ALWAYS SEEKS TO PROTECT HIS OWN HONOR.
- GOODNESS** — GOD IS THE FINAL STANDARD OF ALL GOOD, AND ALL HE IS AND DOES IS WORTHY OF APPROVAL.
- PEACE** — GOD, IN HIS BEING AND ACTIONS, IS SEPARATE FROM ALL CONFUSION AND DISORDER.
- HOLINESS** — GOD IS SEPARATED FROM SIN AND HE IS COMMITTED TO SEEKING HIS OWN HONOR.
- LOVE** — GOD ETERNALLY GIVES OF HIMSELF TO OTHERS.
- MERCY** — GOD IS GOOD TO THOSE IN MISERY AND DISTRESS AND HE IS GOOD TO THOSE WHO DESERVE PUNISHMENT.
- RIGHTEOUSNESS** — GOD IS THE FINAL STANDARD OF WHAT IS RIGHT AND HE ALWAYS ACTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT IS RIGHT. (THIS IS ALSO KNOWN AS GOD'S JUSTICE)
- WRATH** — GOD INTENSELY HATES ALL SIN.
- TRUTHFULNESS** — GOD IS THE TRUE GOD WHOSE KNOWLEDGE AND WORDS ARE BOTH TRUE AND THE FINAL STANDARD OF TRUTH.
- KNOWLEDGE** — GOD FULLY KNOWS HIMSELF AND ALL ACTUAL AND POSSIBLE THINGS. (THIS IS ALSO KNOWN AS GOD'S OMNISCIENCE)
- WISDOM** — GOD ALWAYS CHOOSES THE BEST GOALS AND THE BEST MEANS TO THOSE GOALS.
- WILL** — GOD APPROVES AND DETERMINES TO BRING ABOUT EVERY ACTION NECESSARY FOR THE EXISTENCE AND ACTIVITY OF ALL THAT EXISTS.
- FREEDOM** — GOD DOES WHATEVER HE PLEASES.
- OMNIPOTENCE** — GOD IS ABLE TO DO ALL HIS HOLY WILL. GOD EXERCISES COMPLETE POWER OVER HIS CREATION AND RULES AS SOVEREIGN.
- INVISIBILITY** — GOD'S TOTAL ESSENCE, ALL OF HIS BEING, WILL NEVER BE VISIBLE TO US.
- SPIRITUALITY** — GOD IS A BEING WHO IS NOT MADE UP OF MATTER AND WHO CANNOT BE PERCEIVED BY OUR BODILY SENSES.