

# Christmas Vinyls

## *Song of the Angels*

December 24, 2022 – Jo, Steve, and Beth

**Q:** As we wait for the coming of Jesus, what invitation is God extending through the angel's song?

**A:** He is inviting us to adore him (look here, look up, look around).

**Key Verses:** Luke 2:8-20

**Move 1:** God is inviting us to look here - behold. (Hook - Jo)

**Move 2:** God is inviting us to look up - glory. (Look - Steve)

**Move 3:** God is inviting us to look around - peace. (Took - Beth)

**Formational Question:** What invitation is God extending to us this Christmas?

**Sticky Statement:** This Christmas, God is inviting us to look here, look up, and look around.

**Structure:** Begin with scripture, then continue with content that draws the congregation into the story. Idea is to let people experience God's invitation.

- Jo begins with Luke 2:8-12.
- Steve continues with Luke 2:13-14.
- Beth reads Luke 2:14-16 And then ends with Isaiah 9:6-7.

### **Introduction/Welcome (Beth)**

One of our favorite Christmas songs this time of year is "Silent Night." Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright. It leads us to think of Christmas as serene and peaceful. And maybe it's the picture we would prefer. But when Divinity steps out of eternity and into the timeline of history, there's bound to be some noise, Emily P. Freeman reminds us. While it's true that the life that grows in the darkness may be silent before it bursts forth, rare is a silent moment once the life begins the passage from the womb into the room. The arrival of Christ was destined to be loud and wild and unpredictably messy.

I wonder what else we have silenced that is meant to be heard? In what ways are we demanding our heads have all the answers, leaving little room for our bodies to make some noise? It makes sense why we've done it. When we know everything, we don't have to feel anything. And so it makes sense we might try to avoid our hearts in exchange for our heads. So instead of listening to the story with your heads tonight, try listening with your heart, even with your body.

Consider this question. At the news of the birth of Christ, what part of yourself has a song that needs singing, a story that needs telling, or a feeling that needs expressing?

### ***Hark the Herald Angels Sing***

**Look Here: Jo**

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. – Luke 2:8-12

I remember a commercial for Geico from the early 2000’s. A man is making a collect call on a pay phone to his parents from a hospital lobby. When the operator asks for his first name, he replies with ‘Bob’. When she asks for his last name, his response is, “wehadababyitsaboy.” When the call is sent through to his parents, his father denies the charge, but informs his wife when she asks who called that it was Bob, they had a baby, it’s a boy. This commercial always stayed with me because of the silliness in which it is presented.

A baby is born after 9+ months of waiting, and the attention given to this long-awaited moment is a declined collect call.

In this age of social media, it is safe to assume that most of us have seen a baby announcement or two. New parents with faces lined in exhaustion and adoration. A squishy faced sweet baby. The caption that everyone is doing well, and the weight and height of the newborn listed followed by a thread of well wishes in the comments.

All of this with the unsaid direction to **look here** because this little wonder for whom we have waited for almost a year has arrived.

In our passage, it has been 400 years since anything has been revealed by God to His people. 400 years of waiting for a messiah when the angel appears with the longest awaited baby announcement in history. He appears saying, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news.”

I’m going to move past the ‘fear not’ and go right to **behold**.

I have found myself enamored with this word in the last couple of years. Every time this word is found in more recent translations of the Bible, it is an exclamation for us to stop what we are doing and **look here**.

So, let’s hear at Luke 2:10-11 one more time from that understanding. “And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold (**stop what you are doing and look here**), I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.” For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

After all that time, the One the world was waiting for had arrived and the angels were the ones honored with announcing His presence. And to make sure not a moment of this announcement was missed, the angel first got the shepherds’ attention. **Look here**, this next bit is important.

Now that’s a baby announcement.

### ***Angels We Have Heard on High***

#### **Look Up: Steve**

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“**Glory** to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” – Luke 2:13-14

When Luke was writing these verses, if you looked around the glory you saw was the glory of the empire. The roads and aqueducts, coliseums and temples, the mighty Roman legions and the emperor himself. Today this is the glory we rehearse when we sing "God save our gracious king, long live our noble king. Send him victorious, happy and glorious". You may not sing quite the same song but maybe tomorrow when you are recovering from dinner google the second verse of the star-spangled banner.

This is not the glory the angels are singing about. They aren't singing of earthly glory, but of glory to God.

If "Behold" says look here, then "Glory" says look up.

We look up to the heavens that the psalmist tells us "Declare the glory of God".

Glory is a big word, an expansive word, one that goes beyond our dictionaries. It's a preacher's word, glory. It's a word that inhabits the pillar of fire and of cloud that led Israel through the wilderness, that is full of thunder and lightning as it passes by Moses hidden in a cleft on the mountain of God. It's the beauty that is displayed in the architectural splendor of the temple, and the majesty of the angels surrounding the throne, worshipping God. Glory.

But something is changing, all this glory is background for what is happening in Bethlehem, as Jesus is born. We don't lose, dismiss, or minimize any of the splendor of these expressions of glory. But with his birth Jesus becomes, as it were, our dictionary who leads us to reimagine glory.

In John 17 right before his arrest Jesus prays these words. "Father, the hour has come (referring to his upcoming death); glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you"

Glory and death. The angel's song is the overture, the introduction to Jesus' life of obscurity, rejection, sacrifice, and obedient death.

There is a scene from Paradise Lost by John Milton that I think captures this perfectly. Now I say that sounding like an English major well versed in Milton. I am not, in fact as a mathematician I took as little English as possible. However, one of my best friends in college, Ian, was more cultured than me and he gave me the book to read. If you aren't familiar with it the jacket says it's a retelling of the biblical story of mankind's fall from grace. What it does not tell you is that it's an epic poem in old English. Not an easy read for me, but there is one scene that I will never forget.

The setting is heaven, with all the angels gathered around. Man has sinned, he's fallen and is under the penalty of death. Then God the Father asks a question of heaven. Adjust the language slightly.

Say, heavenly powers. Which of ye will be mortal, to redeem man's mortal crime? The just to save the unjust. Where shall we find such love? Does such charity dwell in all heaven?

God is asking, will anyone come to man's aid? Milton then writes.

He asked, but all the heavenly choir stood mute,  
And silence was in heaven:  
On man's behalf patron or intercessor none appeared;

And now, without redemption, all mankind  
Must have been lost, judged to death and hell  
Had not the son of God, in whom the fullness dwells of love divine,  
His dearest mediation thus renewed:

All of heaven remained silent until Jesus speaks. This is the line I don't think I will ever forget.

Behold me then, me for him,  
life for life I offer;  
on me let thine anger fall;  
account me man:  
I for his sake will leave Thy side,  
and this glory next to thee

God then lays out for all heaven how Jesus will be a man among men on earth, made flesh of virgin seed.  
Having done this, we read.

No sooner had the Almighty ceased, but all the multitude of angels, with a shout loud as from numbers  
without number, sweet, as from blessed voices uttering joy, heaven rung with jubilee, and loud hosannas filled  
the eternal realm.

The angels burst forth in song. Glory to God in the highest

But here's the amazing part, this reimagined glory is not inaccessible. Unlike the glory of earth, or even the  
glory of the Old Testament, we in Jesus can receive it, and enter into it:

Eugene Peterson says it like this. We can't comprehend glory in bits and pieces; we need the story from  
beginning to ending, from birth to death and beyond. It is a word that gathers to a greatness all the bits and  
pieces of our lives into the wholeness and completion of Jesus's life. It is a resurrection word.

Let's sing together, Light of the World.

### ***Light of the World***

#### **Look Around: Beth**

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth **peace** among those with whom he is pleased!" – Luke 2:13-14

- This is the place in the story, the nitty, gritty, dark and dirty place where heaven meets earth. The place where the song of the angels joins what originates in the glory of heaven with the prayers of the lowly shepherds that are taking place outside of a very ordinary town on earth.
- If "behold" says look here, and "glory" says look up, then "peace" encourages us to look around.

- “However earthbound we feel, however humdrum and mundane our work is, our prayers give us a place in a choir that expresses all the melodies and harmonies that heaven comprises.” (Peterson) This is a sacred space.
- Heaven is all about the glory of God, but on earth, the focus is peace. The idea of Hebrew shalom. Not an earthly peace that’s simply an absence of conflict, or a pause that occurs while everyone stops to reload.
- Shalom is heavenly peace, a peace that flows from the inside out. Shalom is what happens in our lives when we live knowing that everything is right with God. When we believe and act based on a relationship with someone who we deeply know and who deeply knows us.
- In Shalom, there is not regret, or shame, or guilt. It comes, instead, when all fear of judgment has been cast out by God’s perfect love. It is a heavenly peace come to earth.
- How do we experience this kind of peace (shalom)? This peace that the angels sing about. It is for those with whom he is pleased. But this is not a performance kind of pleasing; there is nothing we have to do or can do to measure up. It’s for those on whom God’s favor rests.
- Favor is a synonym for grace. We don’t deserve it; it’s based on God’s unmerited favor. You get the favor; you get the peace.
- Filled with this peace, and the promise of peace for all who believe, the shepherds heed the angels’ words and go to see this good news for themselves.

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.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. – Luke 2:15-16

And here in these scriptures, in the fullness of time, the angels break the silence to announce the birth of our Savior, the prince of peace. The one who is true God and true man, the Son of God after his divinity and the Son of Mary after his humanity.

And so we are, gathered together to celebrate this heavenly noise. To behold the message of the good news, to ponder the glory of God and to embrace God’s heavenly peace sent to earth.

So, as you reflect on the story of Christmas, and the song of the angels, what is your heart saying?

At the news of the birth of Christ, is there part of you that has a song that needs singing, a story that needs telling, or a feeling that needs expressing? (pause)

Will you join me in reading Isaiah 9:6-7.

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it

with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore. – Isaiah 9:6-7

Come let us adore him.

***O Come All Ye Faithful***

**Candle lighting Ceremony (Steve talks while Beth illustrates)**

***Silent Night***

**Dismissal (Steve)**