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Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor,  
on Christmas Day. 1973.

Lesson. Micah 5.

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, good will toward men. Luke 2. vv. 13 & 14.

Two observations should be the preface to the discourse. First by the grace of God let us continue our meditation in these verses, and if you turn to your diaries you will observe that the same text was announced here last Christmas. This does not deter me from seeking to draw up a further supply of the vital water of life from these amazing truths on this Advent morning, because if ever we needed the fulfilling of the sacred terminology of the great Gloria sung by the heavenly host we do now. How does it sound in your ears as to personal, relative, national, international affairs to say; "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."? It may sound remote: it is not. So God has commissioned us to deliver His message to you at this season from the sacred, divine, inspired, unalterable Word; the only Word the substance of which can bring hope, joy, peace to any sinner. There is nothing outside of it.

I want to link up with Lord's Day and give a brief word on one important term and one point of the narrative of the angelic appearance to the shepherds. This has shone directly since Lord's Day into my soul. It relates to this; "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them." You are ready to say this is the most amazing, wondrous, beautiful, happy expectation one could ever know. Is that your concept of the glory of the Lord around you? Would you not say it would transcend all terrestrial things, and bring great happiness, peace and intense joy to your spirit? Then why this reaction in the spirits and persons of the shepherds? why? "They were sore afraid." I could leave it with you and not say more for your spiritual meditation to day to try to assess it, but I must fulfil my

pledge to Christ and deliver to you what I have seen from Him.

Remember what glory is. Glory is that which is resplendent. God in His Being, majesty and beauty is resplendent. That is one thing, Glory is also an effulgence that is transmitted, irradiated. If the whole world could experience the effulgence of the glory of Jehovah there would be two effects. One would be great joy; the other, terrible alarm. It would produce great joy in those who know the effulgence of His glory in Jesus Christ, in the birth of the Saviour, because there is an irradiation of the person with the glory of God, especially in grace and truth, mercy and love. But the wicked will know the effulgence of glory, and it will be terrible because it will be His justice and majesty.

I will communicate to you a secret. You must apply to your own cases to find the answer: it is no good reading authors to find an answer. Why were they sore afraid? From the teaching of the Scriptures, the Old Testament and the New, the appearance of the Lord always produced a tremendous sense of awe and prostration to those who experienced it. We read in the Revelation that St John fell at His feet as dead. Jacob at Bethel said; "How dreadful is this place!" and Habakkuk; "O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid." Isaiah said; "Woe is me! for I am undone." Daniel was prostrated to the earth, and his comeliness was turned in him to corruption, and he retained no strength. I suggest to you therefore that it is an awesome, - the most awesome experience to know the presence of God, His majesty and glory. We shall then know ourselves, as infinity teaches us our finity; as immutability <sup>ex</sup> proposes to us our mutability; as majesty shows us what worthless worms are we; as infinite holiness our vileness. Would to God we knew more! To know the presence of God is dreadful, terrible, glorious.

Why were they sore afraid? Prior to this in history before the birth of Christ, what manifestations had there been on this planet, that is, in a plenary way: not as to individuals, generally? Only one. Sinai; the law. To individuals, yes: generally speaking the manifestation of the glory of Jehovah was only known in the law. It was terrible, and they were sore afraid. That manifestation of the glory of God was so

terrible; there was thunder and lightning; the manifestation of God in justice, holiness and majesty, so that Moses said; "I exceedingly fear and quake." So it was no wonder they were sore afraid.

I have said there was one general manifestation of the glory of God, but this in the birth of the Saviour was different and it was the fulness of that which had been known by a favoured few even before His birth. What was this manifestation of glory? "The glory of the Lord shone round about them." It was the Shekinah glory. Spell it out: Shekinah glory. What is it? The Shekinah glory was the glory of the Lord that shone from above the Ark of the Covenant. It shone from above the mercy seat between the cherubims. The Ark contained the tables of the law; so mercy is here. God was propitiated; He was approachable. It was a glory that meant He was their God; their supreme Protector. The same glory shone before Israel leading them to the land of promise. It separated between them and the Egyptians. It is the same now. To me the whole concept of the Ark of the Covenant, the mercy seat, is that a sinner may approach. The law is fulfilled; it is the Shekinah glory. God is propitiated.

Now the point to make is, the shining forth therefore of this glory of the Lord was the Shekinah glory of God in all His perfections in Jehovah Jesus in the redemption of His chosen people in grace, truth, love, mercy, clemency. So He said; "Fear not." There is nothing to fear here. Fear at Sinai there is: there is none here; you can approach. This is the way to God. The vilest sinner out of hell can come here. A penitent soul has nothing to fear. This is the Shekinah glory, full of grace and truth, and through this door we shall enter heaven. I feel in my soul a little of the power and efficacy of that glory. God says; "Fear not; you can come to Me here." Do you see the wonder of it? It is not the glory of God in the law but at Mount Zion; His glory in the Saviour. "Fear not. Come unto Me, to My feet, to My bleeding side." See your Saviour in the manger: take Him in your arms; receive Him into your heart. Here is an open way to God, to bliss, to joy unspeakable and full of glory. Fear not.

We can now take our spiritual examination. Has the glory of the Lord,

His Shekinah glory shone round about us? There has been love, beauty, majesty, salvation, heaven, bliss, peace. That is the message. I have fulfilled my promise to Christ and delivered it to you in the Name of the Lord. So let us take by His grace a further step to heaven. I feel in my soul we are getting nearer the City: soon we shall see His glory. It will be face to face; no veil; nothing to obstruct our Sun. So with joy the Lord give you to anticipate this Day that is so much nearer you. This glory does not repel you: it draws you. It does not close the door: it opens the door. It does not condemn you: it pardons you. It does not destroy you: it saves you. Do you know the Shekinah glory? Do you get a taste of it now? Many people speak of destitution. It is better to be honest than to presume, but looking over the year you cannot say you have been left in destitution. I have seldom entered this holy place without realising the Lord's presence. He has conducted us through torrents of temptations, sins and fears, and when we have come to His feet we have found Him; I do not know how to bear people who fear God say they are terribly destitute. With these riches Christ has to bestow what is there to keep comfort back? Think of what Christ has to bestow. The Lord enrich, ennoble you, fill you, as the Shekinah glory shines round you. Here is the way to God.

There are three main divisions here concerning His birth. First, the earthly scene or conditions: then the great and glorious fact, the birth of the Saviour; and third, the activity of the heavens. Delightful this is to me, the activity of the heavens at His birth. First, the earthly scene, and it must be in summary. At this time in history the emperor Augustus was the Caesar who ruled the Roman Empire. He had attained to a pinnacle of fame, and to show his dictatorial power over a large part of the world he sent forth a decree that all the world should be taxed. This touched the little land at the East end of the Mediterranean, the Holy Land. It touched Joseph and Mary. There was no neglecting of the decree; they must obey, so they went from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem because he was of the house and lineage of David. That edict, touching Joseph and Mary, they went to Bethlehem to register. "And so it was,

that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered" - in Bethlehem. You say; "How important is this?" This is the point I want to make: this is the reason I read the Lesson in Micah. At least six hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ Micah wrote; "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah," What that means is that the Scriptures must be fulfilled. It brings forward that wonderful hymn;

"God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform."

"Divine decrees remain unmoved." All those centuries before the prophet had written those words, and Caesar Augustus was the puppet. Who are God's servants? "All are thy servants." He thought he was showing his wonderful power, but it was God fulfilling His all-wise decrees. See these two moving to Bethlehem just as Micah had prophesied centuries before. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah,"

Take heart; take courage. He sits on no precarious Throne. The Lord knows how to fulfil all His divine purposes, all He has promised in the Scriptures and in your hearts and He will do it, and it will astound and astonish you. So they moved to Bethlehem and Christ was born as God had said. As you know, "she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn,- the hostel; So in an enclosure for cattle she brought forth the precious Babe, and she was very wise. It was probably the custom, but she "wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." You know of the binding tight round the body. I hear the apostle saying; "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." It was a symbol of the law that bound Him; she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes. "made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." What happens? "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father," I have felt recently I could say it. My Father; our Father. What abundant proof He has given us that He

is our Father. Here is peace, liberty, joy, access. "And laid him in a manger." That is the earthly scene,- so lowly, and it was fulfilled by God in the place named by Him in the prophets.

"To hail His birth they left the skies,  
We lodged Him with the beasts."

So this does highlight one thing. One of the pre-eminent graces of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit of Christ is the sweet grace of humility and love. If you have the Spirit of Christ you have humility and love. Wonderful! He will raise you to His Throne.

This is the glorious fact of the birth of our Saviour. "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins." I mentioned on Lord's Day the great and grand proof of this is the enjoyment of His special presence in our souls and minds, and I thank Him for coming this morning to Zoar Chapel, Dicker; for sending His Spirit so we know He was born, and born for us. The grand proof therefore, is to have Him in your heart. Is there a little of His love, His presence? It eclipses all terrestrial things. I am going to claim Him. My Beloved is mine, and I am His.

Then, the heavenly activity. All heaven seemed to break bounds, swoop down and hover over the plains of Bethlehem,- an unprecedented event. They sang the great Gloria. Has there ever been the like? I suggest to you this is one of the delights of our souls to meditate on these wondrous events and the activities of heaven relating to them. First, His incarnation. Here is the activity of heaven; not only the holy angels but also all the glorified saints, O the joy in heaven as He was born! The other event, His glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven. When the Throne of grace was set up and Jesus was enthroned, think of the activity in heaven! "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." May I translate? Glory to God in the highest is the foundation of all things. What was it brought glory to God in the highest but His only Son incarnate in the work of our redemption? Who was capable of bringing glory to God but our Redeemer? How did He? By restoring honour to the law, expiating our sins; by the

work of atonement, the completion of the work of redemption as He wrought the robe of righteousness. He gave glory to God by the perfection of His obedience, of all the work of redemption, by the voluntary death He died, by the sacrifice He offered, and there is this propitiation of divine justice. God is propitious to us. It is by Him, through Him there is peace on earth; His peace. He procured peace with God, peace in your spirit, peace with one another. You are a child of God. There is a heavenly tranquility, a realisation of sins forgiven; oneness, access, pardon, the glorious inheritance of heaven. Peace on earth through the Man Christ Jesus, in-the Man Christ Jesus, "On earth peace, good will toward men." Amen.