

The Birth Announcement of God's Son (Part 2)

Luke 2:8-20

December 22, 2013

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Well, in preparation for our celebration this week of our Lord's Birth, I want us to turn this morning to Luke 2, Luke 2. You are aware, of course, that the first few verses of this chapter, verses 1 to 7, is one of Scripture's most familiar passages. It is the historical record of the actual birth of Jesus Christ. As I noted to you last week, it's interesting that Jesus' actual birth, I mean the process of His birth, His coming out of the womb of His mother, went unnoticed and virtually unannounced until the text we come to this morning.

You see it was never God's plan for Jesus' birth to remain unnoticed. It may have happened in quiet solitude, but God intended for everyone to know what had happened. God planned the greatest birth announcement in history for the birth of His Son. Last Sunday, we began to study that divine birth announcement that's recorded for us in Luke 2 beginning in verse 8 and runs down through verse 20. Let me read it for us. You follow along, and again, let me encourage you to read it with me as though you had never heard it before. Let the words sink into your heart and soul. Don't allow the familiarity to breed contempt.

In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a

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hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

In these verses, Luke records for us the amazing record of the birth announcement of God's Son, and he presents to us several details about that announcement. Last Sunday, we began by looking at the unlikely audience. Who God chose, or more grammatically correct, whom God chose. Notice in verse 8, "in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields ... keeping watch over their flock by night." That night, just a couple of miles away from the town of Bethlehem, these shepherds were guarding their flock. They were the ones that God chose to tell about the birth of His Son.

And they were, frankly, a most unusual and unlikely choice for God to present this announcement to, because as we learned last week, the shepherds in the first century, and especially as you get into the post-Christian era, the post-apostolic era, this becomes even more apparent in Jewish writings that shepherds were despised and were looked down upon. And that was true for a number of reasons.

It was true because of the nature of their work, those who were shepherds tended to be a lower class of people. In the first century, they were just a notch above day laborers and therefore looked down upon by many. They were wandering nomads. Seldom did they have homes and roots that were set down. Instead, they wandered with their sheep to find the best pasture throughout the year in different places across Judea.

Because of their lifestyle, they were often suspected of being thieves. As they traveled around, they often became the brunt of accusations that they were stealing from the people whose land they wandered. In fact, they were considered to be so dishonest that the rabbis said they were not allowed to serve as judges, and not even as witnesses in a court of law. And when it came to their religious practice, they were often under the rabbinic ban from attending synagogues or the temple, because of the nature of their lifestyles.

The *Midrash*, an ancient Jewish commentary on the Old Testament says this, "No position in the world is so despised as that of the shepherd." And yet, in spite of all of that, it was the shepherds

to whom God chose to announce the birth of His Son. And to announce it in dramatic fashion. Notice verse 9, “And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them and the glory of the Lord shown around them; and they were terribly frightened.”

We don’t know what part of the night it was. It might have been early evening, while they were all still awake. It might have been later when only one of them would have been awake guarding, and the others would have been taking their turn sleeping, waiting for their watch yet to come. But regardless, suddenly there was an angel that stood before them, verifiably an angel, a divine messenger.

And along with the appearance of that angel, notice “the glory of the Lord shown around them...” There was also a visible display of the presence of God. In the Old Testament, this word “glory” often refers to the Shekinah, as it’s called in Hebrew. That blazing cloud of light that represented the visible presence of God. The Shekinah had last been seen 600 years earlier in the time of Ezekiel, but now on that cold winter night the Shekinah appears again to the shepherds in a field outside the town of Bethlehem. It surrounded the angel, that blazing cloud of light, surrounded the angel, surrounded the shepherds. No wonder verse 9 says, “they were terribly frightened.” They were a most unlikely audience.

Now that brings us to verses 10 to 14 that we began to examine last time, and that is the grand announcement. The grand announcement, what God said. Here is recorded for us what God communicated through the angels that night. Verse 10, “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people.’” The angel said, listen, I come with good news, and that good news is going to produce true joy in the hearts of everyone who actually receives it. But the announcement of good news is for all the people, verse 10 says. God is announcing good news to the entire world.

As we saw last week, and later in chapter 2 Simeon reminds us that this Child will be a light to the peoples – all the peoples on this planet. So, what is the good news that God is now announcing to the entire world and that will produce true joy for those who actually receive it? The good news is in verse 11, “... for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

I wish you had never heard those words before. I wish you were hearing them for the first time. I wish you were sort of listening over the shoulder of the shepherds to hear the angel say these

words, “for today in the city of David there has been for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Here’s the heart of the gospel. Notice it sets forth for us the details about the birth of Jesus.

The time: today.

The location: in the city of David, that is in David’s home town, the city of Bethlehem.

That’s important because the Old Testament had prophesied much about the coming Messiah, and one of the things that had been prophesied was by Micah, in Micah 5:2, that Bethlehem would be where He would be born. Micah writes “... as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too* little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be [a] ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.” He existed before there was anything else.

You see, the angel was announcing to the shepherds that night that Micah’s prophecy had now been fulfilled. The good news is now embodied in time and space, and in a person. You know, it’s difficult for us who live so far removed, both in time and space, from where these events unfolded to really be gripped by the historical reality of them. Listen. Understand this. Jesus of Nazareth was a real person, born in a real place at a real point in time on the time line of human history. He actually existed. You can go visit where He walked, and where He taught, and where He was born, and where He died. You can debate the reality of His claims, but the fact of His existence and the fact of His claims: that’s a matter of history.

Now notice what the angel tells the shepherds about this Person. He says in verse 11, “... there has been born....” In other words, this is a real, human newborn. Jesus’ conception was a miraculous conception. He was conceived without a man in a virgin. His birth was miraculous only in one sense, and that is His mother was still a virgin when he was born. But the process of His birth was a normal birth, just like your birth and my birth. He was a real, human, infant. “... There has been born ...” The angel says, “... there has been born for you ...,” for your benefit for your advantage. He’s been sent on your behalf.

John Calvin, who understood the sovereignty of God in salvation, in writing about this verse says this: “The pronoun “to you” is very emphatic, for it would have given no great delight to hear that the author of salvation was born unless each person believed that “for himself” he was born.” Listen. There has been born “for you,” and he adds, there has been born “for you a Savior,” [a Rescuer, a Deliverer.] Here’s the heart of His mission. Many in Israel were hoping for deliverance. They were hoping for a political deliverer who would free them from Roman

oppression. But that wasn't the kind of deliverance or rescue God had in mind. This newborn Child has come to accomplish man's spiritual rescue. He came from God on a divine rescue mission.

But what does Jesus save, or rescue, us from? We talk a lot about salvation, being saved, the Savior. But the question is: From what? Most people don't feel like they need to be rescued from anything. Why would He come to be a Rescuer? What is He rescuing us from? Well, there are a number of ways to answer that question biblically. Let me give you three very brief examples of what He came to rescue us from.

First of all, He came to rescue us from slavery to Satan. You see, Jesus was very clear in His ministry in John 8. He said every person on this planet, every person in this room is under the control of one father or another. Either God is your Father, and you are under His authority, serving Him; or Satan is your father, Jesus said, and you are under his authority, serving him. People like to think, who aren't in Christ, I enjoy freedom. Listen, you're not free. Jesus said everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

We are born into this world under the authority, the domination, of Satan himself. And we live enslaved to him. And Jesus came to rescue us from that slavery. Colossians 1:13 puts it this way, "He rescued us from the domain," [the Greek word is literally "authority;" "He rescued us from the "authority"] "of darkness," [a reference to Satan. He came to set us free from our slavery to Satan, our birth father.]

But there's something else He came to rescue us from. He also came to rescue us from the wrath of God. Most people don't like to think about this. They don't like to think about God as being angry. They like to think about God as love. But the Scripture is very clear. God Himself says in the Psalms, "I am angry with the wicked every day." Never a day passes that God isn't angered by man's rebellion against Him. He gives man good things upon good things, and man takes those and uses them and perverts them for his own ends, without acknowledging God's rule in his life. And God says, that makes Me righteously angry every day, and that anger is growing.

Paul, in Romans 4, talks about man accumulating God's wrath, storing up God's wrath for the day of judgment. And that wrath will eventually express itself at the judgment, God's anger against our sin. Jesus came, are you clear on this? Jesus came to rescue us from God! That's

why in Romans 5: 9 Paul writes, for those who are in Christ, "... we shall be rescued from the wrath of God through ... [Jesus,] rescued from God's just wrath against our sins.

There's one other facet of this rescue Jesus came to bring – not only slavery to Satan, the wrath of God, but several months before Jesus' birth, we read it this morning from Matthew 1. The angel spoke to Joseph and added another facet of what this child would save us from. In Matthew 1:21, "Call His name Jesus." Of course, Jesus is "Jeshua," the Hebrew form is "Jeshua." It's Joshua, and it means "Yahweh saves," God rescues. Call Him, "God rescues." Why? Because He will rescue His people from their sins, from the guilt of sin, from the penalty of sin.

You see, Jesus didn't come to rescue us from a lack of a personal fulfillment. He didn't come to rescue us from a bad marriage or problems in our home. He didn't come to rescue us from difficult trials, although some of those may come as by-products of the salvation that He brings. But they aren't the primary purpose Jesus came. You see, our real problem is sin. Each of us is guilty of having broken God's law, the law that's in the Scripture, the law that's written in our hearts. And when we do our consciences accuse us. We know we're guilty. So, we're guilty. And here's the problem. God, as He tells us in His Word, is a God of unbending, unwavering justice. He is always just. He can do nothing that's unjust.

What that means practically is that He cannot allow a single sin to go unpunished. Not one sin that you have ever committed will go unpunished. We deserve punishment. But here's the good news, it's that Jesus came into the world to rescue His people from their sins, to rescue us not from subjective feelings of guilt. We have those. Your conscience bothers you, as mine does me. It convicts us. It says, "I feel guilty." But Jesus didn't come to rescue us from the feelings of guilt. He came to rescue us from real, objective guilt before the bar of God's justice. Guilt that, at the judgment, would cause God to render a verdict of guilty and a sentence of eternal death. That's what He came to rescue us from. You can see why it's good news.

This spiritual rescue was first promised to us the very day Adam and Eve fell. You remember in Genesis 3:15. We call it the proto-evangelicum, the first announcement of the gospel. When God said to Adam and Eve, there's going to come one born of the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He will ultimately and finally deal with sin, the sin you've committed today. But there was only one author in the Old Testament who told us how the coming Redeemer would save His people from their sins, and that is Isaiah. Isaiah told us that

the Messiah would rescue people from their sins by suffering and dying in their place. Listen to Isaiah. This is Isaiah 53, familiar verses. Isaiah 53: 5 - 6. Speaking of the Messiah:

... He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being [*the Hebrew word translated well-being there is the word shalom. The chastening for our peace with God*] fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to strike Him.

Later in that same chapter, Isaiah 53, it says, it pleased the Lord to crush Him. Listen, the Romans didn't crush Jesus; God did. Why? So that, Isaiah says, He might render His soul a guilt offering. Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice, like an Old Testament guilt offering, to pay the guild of your sin, if you're in Christ or will believe in Him.

Now notice in Luke 2:11 that the angel tells us the identity of this newborn that's going to rescue us from our sin, from God's wrath. He is "Christ, the Lord." Now that is a most unusual expression. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Literally, the Greek text says this, "who is Christ Lord." Both words are titles that this Child rightfully bears. And both of these titles have their roots in the Old Testament. Let's look at them for a moment.

First of all, Christ. The word Christ refers to the special deliverer that the Old Testament prophesied. Christ is not Jesus' last name. It is a title. It literally means "the Anointed One." In Hebrew it's "Hamashia." "Ha" is the definite article. "Mashia," the "Anointed One." Hamashia. When we anglicize it, it becomes, "Messiah." "The Messiah." But when you take "Hamashia," the Hebrew word, and you translate it into Greek, "the Anointed One" in Greek is "Christos." When you take the word "Christos" and bring it into English it becomes "Christ."

So, understand then, Hamashia, the Messiah, Christos, and Christ all mean the same thing. They all mean "the Anointed One." What the angel was announcing to those awe-struck shepherds that night was that the baby who had been born that day in Bethlehem was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises about the coming Messiah. He was the specially Anointed One by God. Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, Hamashia, Christos, the Christ. The One God anointed specially to be His King. He will rule and reign over all things forever. The One specially anointed by God to be His priest. He is the one who would be the perfect priest, our mediator between us and God, who could bring us together, reconcile us by the offering of

Himself. He was the one specially anointed by God to be the Prophet, as Moses called Him in Deuteronomy 18, the One who could tell us everything we needed to know about God because He was God. He was the specially Anointed One, the Christ.

Notice in verse 11 the angel adds “who is Christ, the Lord.” The Greek word is “kurios.” You’re familiar with that word, simply means a master or a sovereign. The word “kurios” occurs often in the Septuagint.

The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. It was done a hundred to two hundred years before Christ. It’s the Bible that, for the most part, Jesus and the apostles used in the New Testament, the Septuagint. The Greek word “kurios” in the Septuagint occurs often and by far its most common usage was to translate God’s personal name, YAHWEH. YAHWEH, of course, when God says it in Exodus 3, it’s “I AM.” When we say it, YAHWEH, it’s “HE IS.” This was a title of Deity.

So, when the angel said this baby is Messiah, the specially anointed One, “kurios,” he was saying “He’s God.” We shouldn’t be surprised by that. You remember back in 1:32 when Gabriel showed up and announced the birth to Mary, he says this to her, the child that you’re going to have “will be called the Son of the Most High.” That’s a reference to God, the Son of God.

So, understand then, that this newborn is a full human. He is a Savior. He is the Messiah, the long-promised One. And He is nothing less than God Himself. This is so important for you to understand. You see, believing Jesus’ deity is crucial to your spiritual rescue. If you don’t believe in His equality with God, you cannot enjoy the spiritual rescue He came to bring. He said it with His own mouth. He said in John 8:24, if you do not “believe that I AM,” borrowing the name of God from the Old Testament, if you do not “believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.” What an amazing announcement. What an incredible newborn.

Now notice the angel finishes his announcement by giving the shepherds directions about how to find this Child. Verse 12, “This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” The sign both proved to them, when they found the child in this way, that, in fact, what the angel told them is true, but it also helped direct them to the right child because there may have been a number of young infants in Bethlehem that night. And all of them would have been wrapped in cloths. This was the common first-century practice in Palestine, to wrap strips of cloths around the children’s extremities, to give them that sense of security like they’d experienced in the womb.

But certainly, there was only one newborn in Bethlehem that night that was lying in a manger. Now, we hear the Christmas story, and we use the word “manger,” and it sort of gets this glow about it. There was no glow in this manger. The word “manger” is “feed trough.” You’ll find the baby, who is God, lying in a feed trough.

A very early tradition, dating to the early second century, describes Jesus’ place of birth as a cave that was usually used as a stable. Justin Martyr, a great church father, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, wrote in the second century that Jesus was born in a cave. Origen speaks of the cave where Jesus was born, and that that cave was still pointed out in his day. Almost certainly it was the cave that you can still visit today under the Church of the Nativity. The tradition goes back that far. It’s about 39 feet long by 10 feet wide.

St. Jerome, the early church father, lived for a time, for most of his life actually, in the adjacent cave, and that’s where he translated the Latin Vulgate. And he said that the manger was still visible in his day. He described the manger as a groove in the rock surrounded on both sides by plain walls of clay. It was located, he said, in a small side cave off of the larger cave. This unique Child would be found in a most unique place.

Now with that, the angel’s announcement is finished, and something dramatic happens. Verse 13, “And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host....” Literally the text says “a multitude of the army of heaven.” Hundreds, if not thousands, of angels suddenly appeared. This grates on our modern and post-modern ears, but the Scripture very clearly says that this planet is at this very moment surrounded by angels and demons.

And here, God, as He did in the Old Testament, opens the eyes of the shepherds to actually see an army of angels surrounding them. Instead of just one witness to the birth of His Son, God brings an army of witnesses. But this is an army, not coming to make war, but coming rather to announce peace. Notice verse 13, “And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the “army of heaven” praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Now notice what Luke doesn’t say. Luke doesn’t say that the angels sang. That’s of course very common in a lot of our Christmas carols and so forth. It is possible that they sang. We know that they sang at the creation of the world. Apparently, the angels were created shortly before the universe was created. We’re told that they sang for joy at the creation. It’s possible that they were singing here. We do know this: there is certainly rhythm and parallelism in what they said.

So much so that you'll notice our translators set verse 14 off in our Bibles as poetry. So, it's possible that they sang this.

What is very clear is that these angels were not paid to show up and do this gig. They were truly captivated by what was happening there that night. Don't forget, these angels had seen and worshiped the eternal Son of God in heaven for thousands of years, since they were created. They had watched the eternal Son create this universe. They had perhaps watched, certainly heard about, the fall in Genesis 3. They had witnessed again and again man's sin. They had heard the prophecies of the coming Redeemer.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1 that the angels long to understand and to look into the things concerning man's salvation. Perhaps these angels understood Isaiah 53. Perhaps they knew that the Father would punish His Own Son as man's substitute, to purchase redemption.

But this you can be sure of, the angels were overwhelmed with the great love of God that would move Him to allow His Eternal Son to come into this world as one of the creatures He made; as a tiny human infant, and to do so in such amazing poverty and humility. William Hendriksen writes, "whether literally sung or not, the words of Luke 2:14 are, above all else, an outpouring of adoration. These angels never before had been so thrilled. No wonder, therefore, that from the bottom of their hearts they shout "Glory to God in the highest!"

Now notice verse 14 has two parts. It is a hymn of praise directed toward God, and it is a blessing directed toward men. Notice, first of all, the hymn of praise toward God. Verse 14 says, "Glory to God in the highest." "In the highest" doesn't mean to the highest degree. It's a simple contrast to "on the earth." In other words, "glory to God in heaven." The angels were expressing both their desire that this happen and the reality that it was happening, that in heaven at that moment God was receiving, and will always receive, glory. Why? For sending Christ the Lord into the world as a man in order to accomplish man's spiritual rescue.

Ultimately, your salvation is not primarily about you; it is about the glory of God. Of the angel's hymn John Calvin wrote, "Let us remember then the final cause why God reconciled us to Himself through His only begotten Son. It was that He might glorify His name by revealing the riches of His grace and His boundless mercy." This is what Paul said in Ephesians 1 when rehearsing our salvation. Three times he says, "to the praise of His glory."

But there's also from the angel's lips, a blessing toward man. Notice verse 14 again, "peace on earth." Don't you love those words? "Peace on earth." You remember the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 that the Messiah who would come would be the Prince of Peace, the Prince who would bring real peace. In the first century they were living in an external peace. Caesar Augustus, you remember, was the first and the greatest Roman emperor. He had ended a century of civil wars in battling for the throne of Rome. And he had ushered in a period of uncommon and unparalleled peace, prosperity, and greatness for Rome, what historians called the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace. But Augustus's peace, while it was wonderful, wasn't real peace.

A first century philosopher by the name of Epictetus wrote these words: "While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace." But the peace Jesus brings is exactly that, not first peace of heart, but peace first and foremost with God which brings peace of heart. That's why in Romans 5:1 Paul says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God..." This is what Jesus brings. But notice the angels said true peace with God is only, notice verse 14, among men "with whom He is pleased." What does that cryptic expression mean?

Literally, the Greek text says this, "peace among men of good pleasure," or "good favor." It means peace among men who are the objects of God's good pleasure or God's good favor. Leon Morris, writing on this passage, says the angels are saying that God will bring peace for men on whom His favor rests. There is an emphasis on God, not man. It is those whom God chooses, rather than those who choose God, of whom the angels speak.

John MacArthur puts it this way in his commentary: "In each case where the word "good will" occurs in the New Testament, it refers to God's sovereign good pleasure." So, a better rendering here might be "peace toward men on whom God's sovereign pleasure rests." God's peace is not a reward for those who have good will, but a gracious gift to those who are the objects of His good will. In other words, the second half of verse 14 is a lesson in sovereign grace.

It reminds us of how God describes Himself, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." What better illustration could there be of God's sovereign grace than the shepherds, the ones hearing this announcement? They were sinful. They were despised. They were dishonest. They were untrustworthy. There's no indication in the text that they were looking for the Messiah. And yet it was to them God sovereignly displayed His grace in the announcement of the birth of Christ. They are perfect examples of those on whom God's sovereign grace has come to rest.

Now notice in verse 15, Luke tells us that, although the angels had appeared suddenly, they left gradually, “When the angels had gone away from them....” The construction here has the idea of their slowly sort of filing out. The shepherds watched as this army of angels gradually ascended into heaven. What an amazing announcement! We weren’t there to witness this announcement personally, but understand this, we have received the same unprecedented revelation about this Child, not in an angelic announcement, but through a book breathed out by God Himself announcing to us the spiritual rescue in His Son.

So, we’ve seen the unlikely witnesses, and we’ve seen the grand announcement. I want you to notice thirdly the right reaction – how to respond, how to respond. You see, the shepherd’s response to the good news that they received is a wonderful model for us. This is how you ought to respond to the Savior’s birth. First of all, as they did, you should believe the good news. Notice verse 15, “When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” The emphasis here is on their response to the message they heard.

Notice, first of all, they were convinced that the revelation was from God, “This thing which the Lord has made known to us.” They believed the source of the message was God. And they were absolutely certain of the truthfulness of the message. Notice, let’s hurry to Bethlehem and “see this thing that has happened.” They believed the content of the message. And they were in a hurry to obey. Now the angel didn’t command them to go into Bethlehem directly, but the command is implied in giving them directions about how to find the Child. And they were eager to do what God had said.

By the way, that’s always a sign of true faith. Where a person truly believes in Christ, there is always an eagerness to obey what God has said. Verse 16, “So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.” After they had worked out the details of how to care for their sheep, they leave the sheep in a hurry for the city. We aren’t told how long they had to search. We aren’t told exactly how they found the Child, but their search was rewarded. They found Him.

But understand the point of their response is that they believed the good news. If you want to be spiritually rescued from God’s wrath against your sin, then you must believe the good news of the Savior’s birth as well. You must believe the revelation is from God. You must believe the content of that good news, that there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The shepherds' search for Jesus illustrates what true saving faith looks like, because when you truly believe the good news of the gospel you come to Jesus. Not physically like they did, but spiritually. That's why Jesus so often invites people to believe in Him by saying "come to me." You remember Matthew 11:28, "Come unto me, all [you] who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." This is an invitation to believe just like the shepherds believed. You understand why Luke recorded this? Not only so that we could know the historical truth of what happened surrounding Jesus' birth, but in Luke 2 God is presenting you with the same announcement He presented to the shepherds, so that you can respond by believing the good news.

The second way that we must respond is, once you have believed the good news, and that's true of many of us here, you must share the good news. Verse 17, "When they had seen this," when they had seen Mary and Joseph and Jesus in the manger, "they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child." By the way, it's interesting, isn't it, that what they gave witness to wasn't even what they saw with their eyes; it was to the revelation they had received. To "make known" means to "reveal," to "declare," to "explain."

They told others the good news they had been told. Who did they tell? Well, the text implies that, probably as they searched and certainly after they searched and found the Child, they ran into a number of people in the town of Bethlehem and they told them.

Notice verse 18, "And all who heard it wondered" [they were amazed, astonished] "at the things which were told them by the shepherds." And of course, the shepherds also told Mary and Joseph. In fact, wouldn't it have been a great delight to have been there that night to have witnessed all of these things and to have heard the interchange as Mary and Joseph explained to the shepherds what they had heard; what Gabriel said to them, what they had experienced. And then to hear from the shepherds what God had just done in revealing to them the good news. Notice Mary's reaction in verse 19, "But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart." "Treasure" has the idea of "she held them in her memory." She remembered them well.

I think Luke especially mentions this because most scholars agree that it was from Mary's first-hand account that Luke got his information and is sharing with us the details of what happened. But she didn't just remember them. Notice, it says, she pondered them in her heart. It's an interesting Greek word. It's a word which literally means she "threw them together" in her mind. In other words, she's trying to reconcile them. She's trying to understand how they relate

to each other. Mary is mediating on the truth of who her Son is, and what He will accomplish. She wanted to understand.

And Mary's example is a great encouragement to us. Because if, like Mary, you have already believed the truth of the gospel, you should continue to think about and meditate on who Christ is and what He's accomplished in the gospel. You remember when you first came to Christ? You remember that sense of euphoria that you felt. Listen, that may fade. That may subside. But what replaces it is a growing and deepening desire to know more about Jesus Christ, to understand more about what He has done for you. You will long to have a fuller, more profound understanding about the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is always true for every believer.

If you're in Christ, that's true of you. If you don't have that, then you need to seriously question the reality of your faith. But the point here is the shepherds repeated the good news, to Mary and Joseph, to everyone who would listen. There's a powerful lesson here for us. You see, once you have truly experienced God's sovereign grace you can't help yourself, you want others to know. Again, Christian, you remember right after you were converted how eager you were for others to hear the good news? You should still be eager as you understand more about what He's done. And any lack of zeal on your part really betrays sinful ingratitude. We should share the good news with others.

There's a third way that we have to respond to the good news, and that is to glorify and praise God for the good news. Notice verse 20, "The shepherds went back," [to their sheep] "glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them." You see, wherever God displays His sovereign grace in salvation there will be praise. If you truly know and love Jesus, your life will be marked by an attitude of praise and worship. You won't have any trouble prying apart your lips to express your praise in song. You will love to sing praise to God. And your prayers will be filled with praise as well. In the words of Hebrews, you will "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

Now there's one thing that I alluded to last week that I haven't told you this morning about these shepherds. The sheep they kept probably weren't ordinary sheep. The Jewish *Mishnah* tells us that the sheep that were kept in and around Bethlehem throughout the year were the sheep that were destined to be sacrifices at the temple. So, a few days later, these shepherds likely took a few of their lambs the less-than-five-miles' journey to Jerusalem, and there those lambs were slaughtered as sacrifices. And while they were at the temple, they undoubtedly continued to tell

their story about the birth of “the Savior who is Christ the Lord” to anyone who would listen. Perhaps they told the story to Anna, an old woman named Anna that we meet later in Luke 2, or perhaps to an old man named Simeon that we also meet in Luke 2.

But understand this: that cold winter night these shepherds who probably kept the sheep headed to sacrifice, through an act of sovereign grace, heard the gospel, believed the gospel and were allowed to witness the birth of the perfect lamb of God. And their response to the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord, is exactly how your response should be this week as you celebrate with your family and friends. You must respond first by believing the good news. Believing the gospel.

And if you’ve already come to believe the gospel, share the gospel with others. Open your mouth and tell others about the wonderful news. And as you gather on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with your family and friends, praise and glorify God for the good news. There has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for recording for us what you did on that cold December night outside the town of Bethlehem. Father, we thank you, and we pray that You would use Your Word in all of our lives.

Father, I pray for those here this morning. Undoubtedly there are those here this morning who don’t know You through Your Son, who still are under your anger and will one day hear your sentence of “guilty” and “eternal death.” Father, I pray that today would be the day when they would respond in submitting themselves to You and to Your Son, when they would see that there has been born for them a Rescuer who is Christ the Lord.

Father, for those of us who are in Christ, I pray that as we celebrate this week with our family and friends, that you would help us to come back to the center.

Father, may we be quick to share the good news with others. And as we celebrate the birth of your Son, may our hearts and our mouths and our homes be filled with praise and adoration of You because of what You have done for us in Christ. For today in the city of David there has been born for us a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. May we truly adore Him. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.