

Responding to God's Message

The Christmas story isn't just a heartwarming tale we dust off once a year—it's a powerful demonstration of how God works through human response. When we examine the first Christmas through the lens of faith and reception, we discover transformative principles that can revolutionize our walk with God today.

The Greatest True Story Ever Told

We live in a world saturated with fiction, fantasy, and make-believe. People spend countless hours consuming fabricated stories through screens and speakers. Yet the greatest story ever told isn't fiction—it's gloriously, wonderfully true. And this truth doesn't just entertain; it liberates.

The reality that God wrapped all His power in flesh and blood through Jesus Christ is staggering. Scripture tells us that in Christ dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. All the power of creation was contained in Him. But here's the remarkable part: Jesus didn't come just to set us free from sin. He came to make us like Him—to transform ordinary believers into vessels carrying the same divine power that raised Him from the dead.

This means that the same Spirit who spoke the universe into existence now lives inside everyone who has placed their faith in Jesus. We carry this treasure in earthen vessels, making us walking demonstrations of God's power on earth.

What Jesus Began

The book of Acts opens with a fascinating phrase: "all that Jesus *began* to do and teach." This means everything recorded in the Gospels—from His miraculous birth through His ministry, death, and resurrection—was just the beginning. Jesus set things in motion. He initiated a plan that would continue through His followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit. The word "salvation" in Scripture encompasses far more than escaping hell. It includes healing, deliverance from every evil thing, and complete preservation in every area of life. Christ redeemed us from the curse so we could be blessed coming in and blessed going out—blessed 24/7. This isn't wishful thinking; it's the explicit promise of God's Word.

Two Responses to the Same Message

The Christmas narrative presents us with a striking contrast in how people respond to God's messengers. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias with news that his elderly wife Elizabeth would bear a son, Zacharias responded with doubt: "How shall I know this?" His question revealed unbelief, and it didn't go well. The angel essentially said,

"Do you understand who you're talking to? I stand in the presence of God!" Zacharias was struck mute until the promise came to pass—perhaps to prevent his words of doubt from interfering with God's plan.

Contrast this with Mary's response to an even more impossible announcement. When told she would conceive as a virgin and bear the Son of God, Mary asked only one question: "How can this be?" But her question wasn't rooted in doubt—it was seeking understanding. After receiving the answer, she made one of the most powerful declarations of faith in Scripture: "Let it be to me according to your word."

Mary didn't pick and choose which parts of the message she liked. She didn't worry about how this would disrupt her plans or what people would think. She simply received the entire message and gave God permission to bring it to pass in her life. That's what faith does—it gives God the green light to work.

The Danger of Walking by Sight

When the angels appeared to the shepherds announcing the Savior's birth, they gave them a sign: they would find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger—an animal's feeding trough. Many people would have stumbled right there. A king born in a stable? The Creator of the universe in a pig's feed trough? Behind a fully-booked inn with no room?

If we judge God's work by appearances, we'll miss Him every time. Walking by sight rather than faith causes countless people to miss what God is doing. They need everything to look a certain way, fit their preconceived notions, or align with their previous experiences before they'll believe.

But the shepherds didn't hesitate. They said, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing." And Scripture records that they came "with haste." Faith moves quickly. Faith doesn't procrastinate or make excuses. Faith doesn't need a sign before going to see the sign.

Don't Be Slow of Heart

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to some disciples who didn't recognize Him. His rebuke is instructive: "O foolish ones, slow of heart to believe." Being slow to believe makes us foolish in God's eyes. We cannot afford to be sluggish when it comes to following God.

The writer of Hebrews warns against hardening our hearts when we hear God's voice. When God speaks—through His Word, through preaching, through the Holy Spirit's prompting—we must respond with softness and receptivity, not with stiffness and resistance.

The Call to Rejoice

Throughout the nativity accounts, one theme appears repeatedly: rejoicing. The angel told Mary to rejoice. He told Zacharias there would be joy and gladness. The angels announced "good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."

God is not a God of fear—He's a God of rejoicing. Fear, worry, and anxiety are opposed to faith. We cannot be in faith and be fearful simultaneously. Christians should be full of hallelujah, full of praise, overflowing with thanksgiving. If we go through an entire day without rejoicing, something is wrong with our faith focus.

Today Is the Day

One of the most common ways people miss God's timing is by waiting for some future moment. But Scripture declares: "Now is the acceptable time. Today is the day of salvation." Today is the day of healing, deliverance, freedom, and blessing.

God has already told us His timing—it's now. We don't need to wait for some sovereign moment when He decides to act. He's already acted through Christ. The question is: how will we respond to His message?

Let It Be According to Your Word

The Christmas story ultimately challenges us to examine our own response to God's Word. Are we like Zacharias, questioning and doubting? Or are we like Mary, receiving and believing? Are we making excuses like those who had no room in the inn? Or are we like the shepherds, moving with haste toward what God has revealed?

Faith says, "Let it be to me according to your word." It's a declaration of surrender, trust, and expectation. It gives God permission to work. It removes the obstacles of doubt, fear, and unbelief.

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, let's not just admire the story—let's embody the faith that made it possible. Let's be quick to believe, swift to obey, and eager to receive everything God has for us. The same power that brought Jesus into the world now lives in us, ready to bring God's promises to pass in our lives.

The question is: Will we let it be according to His word?

Explicitly Mentioned References:

1. **Luke 1** (Nativity account)
2. **Acts 1:1-2** - Luke's former account of what Jesus began to do and teach
3. **Galatians 3:13** - Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law
4. **Luke 1:26-38** - Angel Gabriel appears to Mary
5. **Luke 1:5-20** - Zacharias and Elizabeth's story
6. **Hebrews 1:14** (referenced as verse 29, likely a misstatement) - Angels as ministering spirits
7. **Psalms 103:20** - Angels who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word
8. **Luke 2:8-16** - Angels appear to shepherds
9. **Luke 24:25** - "O foolish ones, slow of heart to believe"
10. **Hebrews 3:7-8** - "Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts"
11. **Hebrews 3** (general reference) - "Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief"

Alluded to or Paraphrased:

12. **John 8:32** - "The truth will set you free"
13. **Colossians 2:9** - "Fullness of the Godhead bodily"
14. **Romans 8:11** - "The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you"
15. **2 Corinthians 4:7** - "We have this treasure in earthen vessels"
16. **Mark 11:24** - "Whatsoever things you desire when you pray, believe that you receive them"
17. **Mark 6** - Jesus rejected in his hometown (Nazareth)
18. **Deuteronomy 28** (implied) - Blessings and curses
19. **Exodus 14** - Parting of the Red Sea
20. **Joshua 6** - Battle of Jericho

21. **2 Corinthians 5:7** - "We walk by faith, not by sight"

22. **2 Corinthians 6:2** - "Now is the acceptable time; today is the day of salvation"

Relevant Verses for Main Themes:

Theme: Faith and Believing God's Word

- **Hebrews 11:6** - Without faith it is impossible to please God
- **Romans 10:17** - Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God
- **James 1:6-8** - Ask in faith, nothing doubting

Theme: Fear vs. Faith

- **2 Timothy 1:7** - God has not given us a spirit of fear
- **Isaiah 41:10** - Fear not, for I am with you

Theme: God's Favor and Grace

- **Ephesians 2:8-9** - By grace you have been saved through faith
- **Romans 5:2** - Access by faith into this grace

Theme: Speaking God's Word

- **Proverbs 18:21** - Death and life are in the power of the tongue
- **Mark 11:23** - Whoever says to this mountain...and does not doubt

Theme: Rejoicing

- **Philippians 4:4** - Rejoice in the Lord always
- **1 Thessalonians 5:16** - Rejoice always

Quotes

1. Jesus didn't come only so you could live in heaven. He came so the God of heaven could come to earth and live in you.
2. God dwelt in flesh and blood in the person of Jesus so you can have Him dwell in you.
3. God does His work through human lives, so His power may be seen.

4. Before Mary conceived Jesus in her womb, she first conceived the God's message in her heart.
5. When Mary believed the word the angel spoke, she received it, and she responded, "Let it be to me according to Your word."
6. Doubting God is an insult to His nature and His character.
7. To question God's word is to question God Himself.
8. Unbelief is not neutral—it is evil. Failing to trust God is evil.
9. When you know it's God, you move with urgency. Faith does not delay.
10. God's timing is today! Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day of healing. Today is the day of deliverance.
11. Don't let your vision be clouded by the past. Too often, people limit God based on how things used to be. Release your preconceived ideas and allow God to do a new thing in your life.
12. The foolish are slow of heart to believe.
13. Time is running out, and we cannot afford to be sluggish in following God.
14. When the Spirit begins to move in your life, move with Him.
15. With God, nothing is impossible. One word from Him can change your life forever. When God speaks to you, you can build your life on that word, place your faith in it, and overcome anything.

Summary

This powerful message takes us back to the very heart of Christmas - not just as a historical event, but as a living demonstration of how God works through faith and receptivity. We explore the remarkable contrast between two responses to angelic messages: Mary's

immediate acceptance with 'let it be to me according to your word' versus Zacharias's doubt-filled questioning. What emerges is a profound truth about how our response to God's word determines what He can accomplish in our lives. The shepherds rushing with haste to see the newborn King, despite the humble setting of a stable, teaches us that faith doesn't wait for perfect conditions or impressive circumstances. It moves quickly, believes immediately, and embraces what God is doing right now. We're challenged to examine whether we're picking and choosing which parts of God's message we'll accept, or whether we're saying yes to the whole thing. The message reminds us that unbelief isn't just a minor issue - it's actually offensive to God's character, yet His mercy continues to work with us. Most importantly, we're called to understand that God's timing is now, today is the day of salvation and blessing, and we cannot afford to be slow of heart when the Spirit is moving in our lives.