

“Christmas is Jesus,” Luke 2:15-20

12.24.23

Well, tomorrow is Christmas. It’s exciting time...particularly for the children, because, after all...they are looking SO FORWARD to opening their presents...GIFTS. Do you know why we open presents/gifts? Because of Jesus. He is the gift from God to us.

John 3:16

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Isaiah 9:6

⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon^[d] his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus is the gift of God to all who will receive Him...to all who will open the gift. Unfortunately, for some, they have left the gift of Jesus, sitting unwrapped, if you will. And that’s more than just a shame...it’s eternal doom. To choose not to receive the gift of Christmas, is to reject the greatest gift ever given. Because, after all, Jesus came to seek and save that which is lost. He came to save sinners. He came to save us from ourselves...because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

So, God gave us a gift to remedy our sin problem. And this morning, as we look at our text, we’re going to see how one comes to faith in Christ, by looking at the reaction of the shepherds of Bethlehem. But first, I need to set the scene for where we are in our study of the Christmas account from Luke 2. You will remember that Mary has been told by the angel Gabriel that, even though she was a virgin, she was going to give birth to the Son of God that she would conceive by way of the Holy Spirit. She tells Joseph, but initially he didn’t believe it, but an angel convinced him and as God ordained to fulfill Biblical prophecy, they would make a trip to Bethlehem to pay more taxes to Rome and Jesus would be born in very squalid conditions in what was nothing more than a cave just outside of a roadside inn.

Indeed, Jesus would be born and angels would announce His arrival. The arrival of the Messiah. A proclamation made to shepherds, of all people. No, not to the religious elite, not to the rich and famous, not to the aristocrats of the day...no...the proclamation would be made to lowly shepherds. Shepherds who were longing for the Messiah in **expectant eagerness**. Remember how, all of a sudden, the night sky exploded with angels... Remember this depiction:



Like a pinprick punched into the sky...the angels came from heaven, too numerous to count and they told the shepherds to go to Bethlehem and find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger, (an animal feeding trough). What a strange thing! The King of Kings born and placed in an animal feeding trough? And this brings us to our text. Pick up in verse 15...

Luke 2:15-20

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Now, in my mind, the key to the entire Christmas story is what the angel said back up in verse 11:

Luke 2:11

¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

"For unto you... a Savior is born." That's to you...dear one...that's to me! And Scripture is clear. There is no way we can be saved apart from Jesus. See it...

Acts 4:12

¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men^[c] by which we must be saved."

A child was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger, but it wasn't just any child. It was God robed in human flesh, Emmanuel, God with us...the fulfillment of over 300 Old Testament prophecies guaranteeing how He would come, where He would come, when He would come, how He would die and how He would rise from the dead. For the shepherds, they had been told where to go to find Him. Would they? Would they believe? And dear people here today, that's the question you must answer. Will you believe? Watch verse 15...

Luke 2:15

¹⁵When 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.”

Now, it's important to understand that the shepherds didn't form a committee to study the suggestion of the angels. They didn't say, "Let's pray about for a week and then we might go?" No! They immediately obeyed and you know what? That required great faith. And here's the lesson: for you and I to be saved, we have to believe what the Scripture tells us about Jesus...we have to believe: there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved.

But, here's the problem...the shepherds have been told something ridiculous...the long-awaited Messiah is to be found LYING IN AN ANIMAL FEEDING TROUGH.



Wait a minute! They're supposed to be going to see the Messiah, the long-awaited King of Kings who is going to be lying in a manger! Come on...surely, He will be found in a nice house...in a nice, comfy cradle, a feeding trough? For the shepherds, they would have to exhibit great and tremendous faith to go looking for a baby in a feeding trough...

Hey church, remember, when God speaks, it's often illogical to everyone else, but us, the one to whom God is speaking. You see, to live the Christian life often requires great faith. It requires trusting beyond ourselves and our circumstances and sometimes to simply rest in what we know God has told us unmistakably to do...by way of His Word...or in prayer...or in the case of the shepherds, by way of angel's. The lesson is: we're to place 100% confidence in God, not ourselves.

So, let me ask you: Are you exhibiting that kind of faith today? You know, as I read the pages of Scripture, I've found something to be poignantly and powerfully true: Faith is often a prerequisite to God revealing His direction and will for our lives. In other words, for you and for me to know and understand God's will for our lives, it requires faith and trust in Him and believing in what He's told us to do, even though that's probably going to seem very strange to everyone else.

Think of Abraham leaving his homeland, not knowing where he was going. Think of how He was told to sacrifice his own son...the son of promise, Isaac. See the depiction...



That didn't make sense. But he showed great faith and was willing to go through with it, but God intervened and provided a ram instead. Think of Moses...



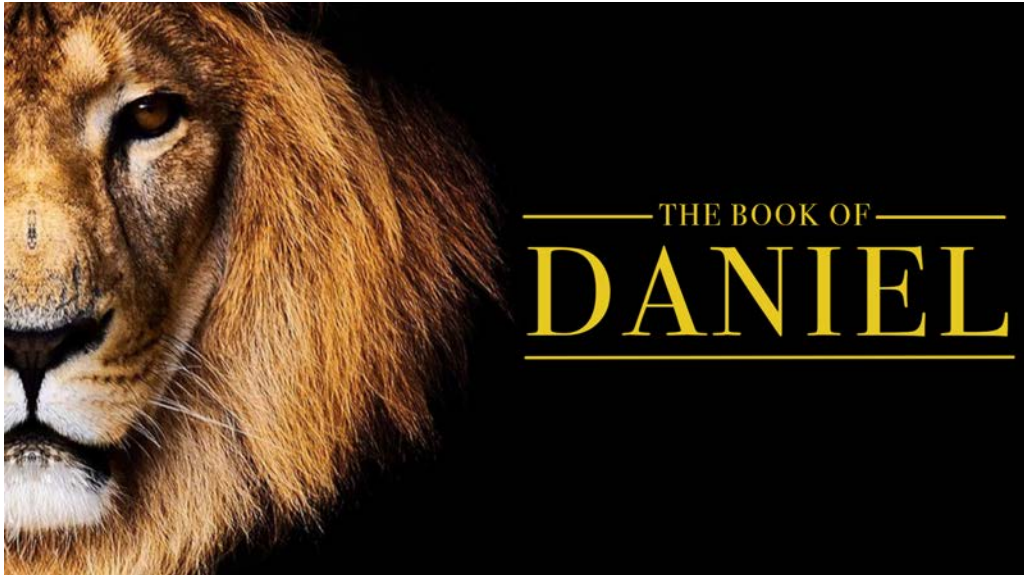
being told by God to go to Pharaoh, even though Moses was a wanted man. The last time he was in Egypt, he had committed murder. He could have been killed on the spot, but he obeyed. Think of Esther, the Jewish girl who would become queen...



she would risk her life by coming, uninvited, to stand before the King, to ask that her people might be saved from slaughter. Think of Daniel in the Lion's Den.



Daniel chose to have faith well before the lion's den...He chose faith when he was told to bow to no one, except the pagan king. Daniel went back to his room and hit his knees in prayer to God with the windows open for the world to see. Faith...faith even though the odds are stacked against you and what you're being told seems crazy. (BTW our next series is Daniel...)



We'll be starting that next Sunday. I'm very excited about it!

Church: What does the world see in you and me? Do they see faith or cowardice? Do they see trust...or do they see us crumble in the midst of difficulty? What do they see? May they see faith. Well, what happened next?

Luke 2:16

¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

They went with haste. They didn't delay. They did what they were told to do. And shouldn't we do the same? We have God's word that tells us what to do. Shouldn't we obey it? Listen, you don't have to guess whether or not you should forgive somebody, the Word of God says, "forgive and you shall be forgiven." You don't have to guess if you're supposed to remain pure in a dating relationship...the Word of God says that His will for you is holiness. You don't have to guess if you're supposed to trust God with your money. His word says, "Give and it will be given unto you, pressed down, shaken and overflowing." So, listen: don't delay in what God is telling you to do! Do it now!

You know, I've thought a lot about those shepherds. How crazy they had to look coming into Bethlehem, asking about where they can find a baby that's been born and placed in a feeding trough. People must have thought they had lost their minds...been out in the sun a little too long. ☺

Church, I'll tell you something, if you pursue Jesus...if you truly seek to find Him...there will be (not might be) people will look at you like your crazy. They'll look at you like you have four heads. They might even call you strange or weird, and that's because compared to the world, you are. They might say, "Oh...they're one of those 'religious ones,' one of those 'Jesus freaks.'"

And you can kindly answer those folks, "Yeah, call me whatever you want...I believe Jesus is the Son of God and He came to this earth to pay my sin-debt. I believe His Word and I have chosen to follow Him, come what may." And they'll still probably look at you like you're crazy. Probably the same way the folks in Bethlehem looked at those smelly, bottom of the barrel, shepherds, but those shepherds obeyed God anyway.

Luke 2:17

¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

They “made known the saying...” What “saying?” The Good News that the Savior, the Messiah had finally come! For these shepherds, there’s no way they could possibly bottle up and keep this good news to themselves! This is the news they and their people have been waiting for...for centuries!

Can I ask you a question? How can we NOT share the Good News that the Messiah has come today? The fact that He died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead...conquering death, hell and the grave. The shepherds didn’t hold back; and yet, most of us do. We get used to being saved and for many, we’ve lost the thrill of being saved. Truth is...we’ve kind of gotten over being saved. It’s sad, but by and large, the longer a person is a Christian, the less excited they are about it. They get more excited about money, promotions, houses, cars, vacations, sports, food, kids, grandkids, stuff. We just don’t burn HOT anymore. Lord, help us to be excited about Jesus again! As we open presents tomorrow...might we be excited about why we’re opening presents. JESUS!

Luke 2:19

19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

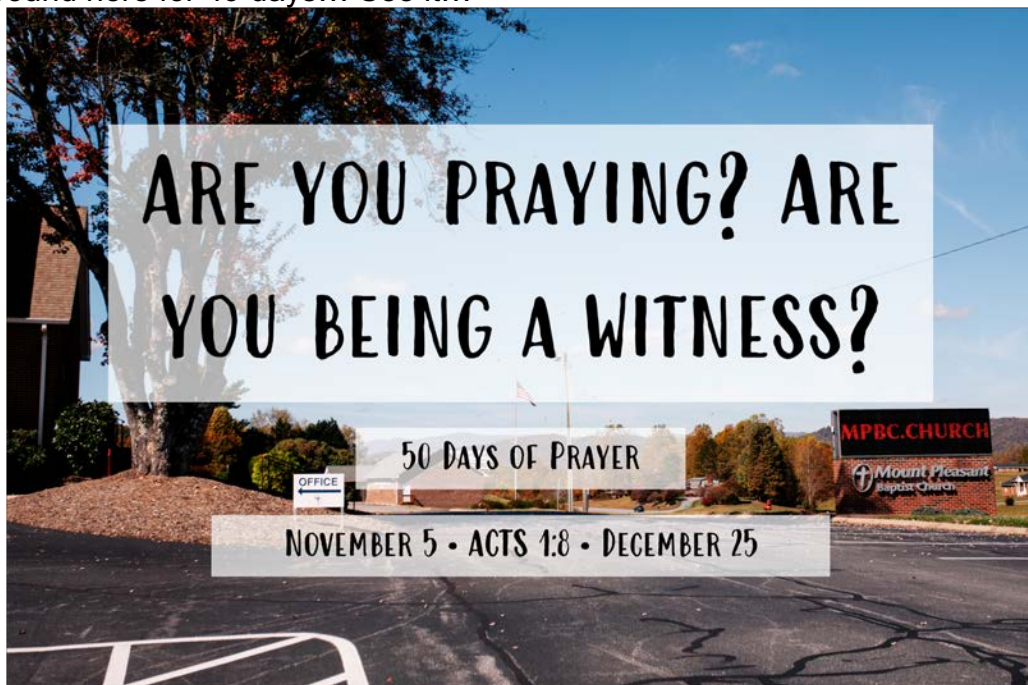
Don’t you know Mary’s mind had to have been totally blown by all that she had witnessed to this point. The provision of God that she would be found pregnant, without the aid of a man, that God would provide a husband like Joseph who would love her and trust God, even when it seemed preposterous. That God would send shepherds to confirm, that indeed...the baby born to her was the Messiah, the Son of God. Yes, she pondered all these things in her heart. Have you pondered lately all that the Lord has done for you? Treasure those things. Don’t take them for granted.

Well, watch how people reacted to the shepherds’ message:

Luke 2:18

18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

For the shepherds, they told everyone, far and wide. “And all who heard it wondered.” The word “wondered” in the Greek means: “to marvel, to be amazed.” We know the shepherds were amazed...and this amazement carried over to the people they told. Church, we’ve been asking something around here for 49 days... See it...



For 49 days, as a church, we’ve been seeking to pray and we’ve EVEN fasted...to see people saved.

I pray that we won't stop praying after tomorrow...but will keep praying and keep fasting from time to time...until they're saved. We can't stop working, just like the shepherds.

Luke 2:20

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

What did they do? They went back to work. They had sheep to tend. And church, the same is true for us... Just because we've experienced the presence of God in some way...doesn't mean that life stops...no...once we've witnessed God's blessings...salvation or otherwise...we've got to get back to work. Life goes on! For the shepherds, they went back to the fields and their sheep and their menial, humdrum lives as shepherds. Back to the ordinary.

So, what's the lesson? The lesson is this: the Good News of Jesus Christ is absolutely life-changing...meaning...your eternal destiny rides on whether or not you surrender to Jesus...but, listen, in this life...your current circumstances might not necessarily change. For the shepherds they went back to sheep and for you...your lot in life...might not change either...your socio-economic status, your looks...your difficulties, your struggles...to some degree...they all may remain. But as we've said so many times...THIS IS NOT HEAVEN. Following Jesus doesn't mean that everything in your life is going to go perfectly. It most likely won't. But you have Him to help you and guide you and be with you. I'll take that!

The shepherds returned to work. But don't you think they went with a skip in their step! Don't you think it would be easier to tend the sheep after that? I mean, they had longed for the Messiah, having **expectant eagerness**...all of their lives, and now that expectant eagerness had been met with reality: He's here! And church, I believe they lived the rest of their lives knowing it's all going to be okay. And isn't that the way we're supposed to live as well...in constant gratefulness that no matter what happens...come what may...it's all going to be okay. All because of the gift of Christmas: Jesus.

You were given candles as you came in this morning, and we're going to light them in a moment and we're going to sing the wonderful old Christmas hymn: "Silent Night." You'll begin to notice that the room is starting to darken.

And I want you to think about the room getting darker in this way: that is the soul of someone who doesn't know Jesus. It's dark without Jesus. But He came...the light of the world, He came to bring salvation to the human soul...for all of those who would call on His name. I pray you've done that. You can still come see me after the service if you haven't.

But here's the thing...and this is why we do the candles. **As we light the candles**, OUT THERE, outside these walls...are souls who need to be saved. We've been praying for 49 days for people to be saved. Don't stop. Keep reaching out to them. It's our job...to spread the light of Jesus. And we're doing that now! (Please be careful and help your children.)