



**Christmas 2021**  
**Lessons in Worship**  
**Luke 2:1-40**

Summary: Christmas isn't over, it's only just begun and it provokes us to worship in at least six ways.

Yesterday was Christmas. For most people that means Christmas is over. You did it, or you survived it – depending on your perspective, and now you need to figure out when you're going to clean everything up and put it all away. But this morning, while your living room may still be a mess and there's still some leftover pie on the counter, I want to remind us - there's actually a lot more to Christmas than yesterday's celebration, gift-giving, and meal.

Christian, I want to remind you that Christmas is *not* the end, *it's just the beginning*. We celebrate the fact that Christ came AND the impact His coming has on our lives. So, this morning, with Christmas fresh on our mind, and a new year looming on the horizon, I want to revisit the Christmas story and notice six ways Christmas provokes us to worship, six ways we might continue to celebrate in 2022 because Christmas is not the end, it's just the beginning.

So let's read this familiar passage of Scripture, revisit the Christmas story, and notice all the ways that people worshipped God that first Christmas.

**Luke 2:1** And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

**#1 We worship God by living for God, especially in difficult times.** Don't assume that worship is all about music. It's much, much more than that. If anything, music is an expression of worship, a way to let out what is already inside. Jesus would later say that God is seeking those who worship in spirit and truth – in other words, people who worship as a reaction to who they know God is and what they have seen Him do. Worship is a reaction to being convinced that God is God and He is real.

So, here we see Joseph and Mary worship God by choosing to follow Him, by faith, *even when life is hard.*

I want you to notice how unnecessary this census must have felt to them. Pregnancy is hard on a woman and a marriage under the best circumstances. On top of that though Mary and Joseph accepted the burden of dealing with questions, murmurs, and gossip concerning her 'miraculous' pregnancy before their actual marriage. It felt, at times, like God was asking a LOT of them.

And now they have to deal with the dictates of an unpopular government telling them what to do. Bethlehem was 90 miles from Nazareth – that's at least a four-day journey with a very pregnant woman who at this point in the pregnancy probably just wants to sleep! And then, after all the effort they put into getting to Bethlehem, there isn't a room for them and they have to stay outside.

You could certainly sympathize with Mary if she is thinking: are you serious? Is *this* really the way the Messiah is supposed to come? Is this really what we signed up for?

I point all of this out, because you need to know: sometimes serving God isn't quite what we thought it would be. Sometimes it involves difficulty, and *that doesn't mean you have done anything wrong.*

In fact, there are times when, like Joseph and Mary, *surrendering yourself to be used by God will make the other things that you have to do seem more difficult.* In those moments it helps to remember that you are doing this for, and *with* God. That He knows what is happening. That He is in control. And He will never call you to more than you can bear – every complication, every frustration, every twist and turn of the plot is actually an opportunity to press further back on Him and say, Father, I will walk with You, *even in this.*

When you allow God to direct your life, even though it is difficult, you are choosing Him and His ways over your personal comfort and *that is worship.*

**Luke 2:8** Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 "Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Many of us are familiar with this part of the story – we know angels appeared to lowly shepherds. You see them in every manger scene. We know that they were keeping watch over their flock by night when angels suddenly appeared, but I want to draw your attention to how Luke characterizes the action of the angels – it’s there in vs 13 - [there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God](#). This is similar to what we think of when we call singing songs ‘worship.’

And so, **#2 We worship God by Praising Him**. Specifically, the angels praise God by declaring “Glory to God in the highest” – Glory is *doxo* in Greek, and it where we get the word doxology – a statement of the glory of God.

By singing “Glory to God in the highest” the angels are basically restating the first commandment, that we should give all our esteem, all of our glory, to God - above and beyond all others.

The problem is that we give glory to things and people instead of God and we look to these people or things to meet our needs – instead of making God the most valuable part of our life, we give that honor to something or someone else. We each have a little imaginary shelf in our lives filled with the people and things that are important to us and instead of putting God on top of it, and giving Him the greatest glory, the greatest worth, we put Him on one of the lower shelves and start stacking other things around Him. He’s valuable, yes, and we sure appreciate having Him, but He’s not the most important and He’s not the only one we worship.

The angels on the other hand, are convinced that He is worthy of all glory, and they come to worship God by speaking of His great works in front of the shepherds who are blown away by the encounter and decide to go check things out for themselves.

[Luke 2:15](#) So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Most of the time God works in our lives in small, ordinary ways. Most of us will not see and hear angels, but when God does speak, when He does lead, we still need to follow. Whether God nudges us gently or thunders from Heaven, we need to walk by faith if we want to actually see what He’s doing.

[16](#) And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. [17](#) Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. [18](#) And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. [19](#) But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. [20](#) Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

The shepherds make the trek into town and find things just as they had been told they would. They tell Mary and Joseph and a bunch of others what has happened, and Mary

starts chewing on it all. Then the shepherds take off back to their flocks, and now – notice - they too are [glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen](#). It turns out authentic worship is more contagious than Omicron. Which leads us to number three:

**#3 We worship God by sharing our testimony** – that is, by telling others what we have seen and experienced of God. And that’s not just the testimony of our salvation; it’s the testimony of our walk with God too.

We often share our miseries with one another, we share how difficult life is, and it is rough at times, but we also need to bless God to one another, declaring how good He is to us. We need to take time to remember what we have [seen and heard](#) from God so that we are able to praise and glorify Him. Sometimes *we have the worst case of spiritual amnesia*.

It is easy to forget what we have experienced and how mightily God has moved in your life. Things that once seemed so incredible can fade into a mental black hole after just a few short weeks, months, or years. Our minds are trained by our environment and our culture to think quickly, reacting to what’s in front of us – rarely do we take the time to stop and remember what we have [seen and heard](#) of God. And even more rarely do we share that with others like these shepherds did.

As a result, we regularly look *forward* wondering, what is the next *big* thing God is going to do in my life? Now, there’s nothing wrong with looking forward to what God is going to do, but I think it’s a worthwhile challenge for us to try to spend an equal amount of time praising God for what He *has already done* as we do begging Him for what we want or need next.

We also need to spend time glorifying Him by telling anyone who will listen about all that He has done because such testimony glorifies God and encourages others. If you have down time this week, use some of it to reflect and remember how God has brought you through the past year or two. What have you learned? How you have grown? And then, find ways to share your experiences and observations – to worship God by sharing your testimony.

[Luke 2:21](#) And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

[22](#) Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord [23](#) (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD” ), [24](#) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Joseph and Mary also worshipped God by being obedient to the Old Testament Law which applied to them as Jewish believers before the New Covenant which governs our lives as Christians today.

**Luke 2:25** And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,  
According to Your word;  
30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation  
31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,  
32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of Your people Israel."

**#4 Simeon worships God by speaking well of Him.** Notice in vs 28 he took [Jesus] up in his arms and blessed God.

To 'bless' means literally, to speak well of. We worship God by reflecting on what He has done and repeating it back to Him in praise, but also by declaring His goodness to others. This is similar to sharing our testimony – both have God as their focus – but this blessing *is not simply about what He has done for me*, it's about Who He IS – His character and nature. Specifically, Simeon praises God for keeping His word to him *even though he had waited so long to see it*.

Now, I think there's a word there for someone listening this morning.

We live in a microwave culture, a Tik-Tok culture, you have about 3 seconds to get my attention and keep it. But God is working on an eternal schedule – just because you don't get what you were hoping for or expecting immediately doesn't mean you were wrong, or that you're doing things wrong, or that you need to take matters into your own hands.

*Sometimes it just means you need to wait and watch*, like Simeon. The day will come for you to worship, declaring God's faithfulness and trustworthiness and the greatness of what He is doing in your life and in this world through the child that Simeon did eventually hold in his arms.

33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.  
34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon gives a short prophecy that foreshadows difficulties that are to come. The Messiah will be a blessing to many, but He will also be seen as a threat to others who are content living life on their own terms and they will go to great lengths to oppose Him.

36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

So, notice, this widow Anna worshipped God at the temple with **# 5 fasting** and **#6 prayer**.

Fasting is an aspect of worship we don't like to talk about much. It is difficult, but it is difficult because it involves self-denial. We would much rather worship God with our lips by singing songs that we like, or sharing our testimony over a cup of coffee than by sacrificing something we enjoy.

But there are several different kinds of fasts found in Scripture. You can do a partial fast or a total fast. You can fast for a day, a week, or longer. There are personal fasts and corporate fasts with a group. You can fast from food or from activities such as physical intimacy in marriage, though only with the consent of both partners and only for a short time of focused prayer – you can learn more in 1 Corinthians 7. There are many forms of fasting.

But one thing you need to know: fasting is not some 'Break in case of emergency' form of worship – that when nothing else works, then we'll try to fast, and that will get God's attention and show Him how serious we are.

It doesn't work like that – you are not in a game of spiritual 'chicken' with God trying to see who will give in first. Fasting isn't guaranteed to make God move – if you view it that way you aren't worshipping in spirit and truth, you are trying to manipulate God, to draw Him into a contract. That's not how this works – instead, fasting often goes along with prayer and, as we know, the purpose of prayer is not to get God to do our will, but to help us discover and get in line with His.

Look again at

37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Prayer can be long, but it doesn't have to be. The most important thing is that you take the time to think through who you are and who you are addressing – that God is real, and that He really hears your prayers as you come to Him in the name of His Son. Prayer is an act of worship because it's an expression of faith, a way of admitting you're not alone in the universe. That you have a Heavenly Father, who does not promise to keep you from all the hard stuff in life but does promise that you don't have to go through it alone.

Starting in January we'll be offering a class on Spiritual Disciplines at 9AM. If you're interested in learning more about fasting and prayer and other expressions of worship that will help you grow spiritually, it's a great place to start. The class is ten weeks long and will include some reading for you to do on your own, some instruction in class, and some time for questions and discussion. You can sign up for it at the welcome table or through The City Gates Church App.

Let's close our time together by looking at these last few verses:

39 So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

This morning we have seen many different examples of worship and how we can respond to what God has done. Mary and Joseph worshipped with humble obedience even when life was difficult. Angels worshipped God, praising Him for the great work He has done for us. Shepherds worshipped by sharing their testimony and showed us the importance of responding to what we have experienced. Simeon had to wait much longer than the shepherds to see what God doing, but the day did come and he blessed God by speaking well of Him to Him and to others. And finally, Anna worshipped God with fasting and prayers using the special conditions of her life as a way to worship God even more through regular prayer and fasting.

Your challenge this week is to reflect on what God has done in your life during 2021, in the trials and the triumphs, the joys and the pains, the milestones and the monotony. Where has God been? What has He done? Where has He blessed you? And then, to think about where and how you need Him in 2022, and with all that in mind, worship God in a way that you haven't recently.

You might try praying, fasting, telling someone else about what God has done, or you might worship through a life obedience in some new way. The point is, to spend time with God and give Him the worship He deserves because Christmas is not over my Christian friends, it has only just begun.

Let's pray.

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*  
- Rom 15:13



## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### **Christmas 2021 Lessons in Worship Luke 2:1-40**

Summary: Christmas isn't over, it's only just begun and it provokes us to worship in at least six ways.

- What comes to mind first when you hear the word worship? What do you associate it with most often?
  - Why?
  - Is that the most accurate definition? If not, why not?
- Which of these six forms of worship are you most likely to choose in your own life?
  - Living for God, even in difficult times
  - Praising God
  - Sharing your testimony
  - Speaking well of God
  - Fasting
  - Prayer
- Which are you most likely to avoid, and why?
- Have you ever felt like choosing to live for God or obey Him in one area was hard enough already, and then experienced a complication that seemed to make things even worse, like Joseph and Mary enduring the census?
  - What did you think and feel?
  - How did things turn out?
  - Could you see God's bigger plan after the fact or are you still waiting?
- What could you teach or share with others about these forms of worship? Any tips, tricks, resources, or lessons learned?
- What other forms of worship come to your mind?
- The angels announced the coming of Christ to the shepherds. Who would you like the opportunity to tell about Jesus? Pray for God to grant the opportunity.
- Jesus came unexpectedly to everyone – even Simeon did not know the precise time of His arrival. What does that say to you about the importance of living ordinary lives of daily faithfulness in the tasks God has given us?