

“Good News of Great Joy”

(Luke 2:8-21)

Introduction

➤ I have often been asked, by non-Christians and even by some professing Christians, “Why do you make such a big deal about Jesus Christ?” My answer is often, “Because He is a really big deal!” While this answer is a bit snarky, it is absolutely true. For Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God (Jn.1:1-3, 14). He, as the Son of God, is not only the Creator and Sustainer of all creation, but also the reason for why everything was created – *“that in everything He might be preeminent”* (Col.1:16; Heb.1:2). Even the Holy Spirit, who came after Christ’s ascension and dwells in every true Christian, has come to *“glorify”* Jesus Christ (Jn.16:14).

God (the Father) has given Jesus *“all authority in heaven and on earth”* (Matt.28:18; Jn.3:35), all authority to judge (Jn.5:22, 27) and all authority to save (Jn.5:26; 17:2). His name *“is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil.2:9-11). He is seated at the right hand of God in heaven (1Pet.3:22) as *“the King of kings and Lord of Lords”* (Rev.19:16).

Jesus is not only the most important and most famous person in all of human history, He is also the most polarizing person in all of human history. Jesus’ impact on humanity is undeniable as our very calendar is divided into the years before and after His birth, noted as B.C. (“before Christ”) and A.D. (Anno Domini, meaning “in the year of the Lord”), respectively. No other event, army, nation, or person has changed human history to the degree that Jesus has. Some two thousand years ago Jesus walked the earth, and today He remains as influential and controversial as ever.

While Jesus was miraculously conceived, His birth was marked by great humility and relative obscurity. His earthly parents, Joseph and Mary, were poor and unknown. He never held public office, never wrote a book, a never amassed any wealth. He spent most of His time with common people – with fisherman, tax collectors, even harlots and sinners. He spoke in parables and remained an enigma to most people. He often told people not to tell anyone who He was. His ministry lasted only three short years! And yet, the crowds gathered by the thousands to hear Him speak and witness His miracles.

But Jesus was despised and rejected by many. He was called a drunkard, an illegitimate son born out of wedlock, a demon-possessed man, and even called a devil. He was called the ‘lord of filth,’ the ‘lord of dung,’ and was accused of blasphemy. He was accused of breaking the Sabbath and was charged with starting a conspiracy to destroy the temple. He was betrayed by one of His closest followers. He stood trial six times and was condemned as a heinous criminal. The most religious people hated Him the most. He died the most “cursed” death of crucifixion on a cross. When He was taken down from the cross He had to be placed into a borrowed tomb, while most of His followers abandoned Him.

And yet today Jesus of Nazareth stands as the centerpiece of all of human history. From the original handful who first followed Him multiplied millions down through the centuries have sworn allegiance to His name, and have forsaken the world in order to follow Him anywhere, anytime, anyplace and to pay any price. Missionaries have gone around the world to spread His name. Continents have been claimed for Him. Hospitals and universities have been founded in His name. Martyrs have died in the fire for Him. He is the object of artists; the grand subjects of poets and composers; He is the highest theme of authors.

For Jesus is the risen and glorified Lord of heaven and earth. He is the one and only Son of God and the one and only Savior from God (Jn.14:6; Acts 4:12; 1Jn.5:11-12)! Obviously, His birth is a “pretty big deal.” Even though Jesus was born in obscurity and poverty, His arrival was the occasion for great rejoicing – *“good news of great joy”* (Lk.2:10)!

➤ Unique to Luke's Gospel, we find the story of angelic announcement of Jesus' birth.

Luke 2:8-21 ~ "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.' ¹³And 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 among those with whom he is pleased!' 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. ²¹And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

➤ This passage describes the angel's announcement of Jesus' birth. It can be divided into three separate scenes – the first two coming from heaven, and the third coming from earth.

A. The Heavenly Proclamation (vs.8-12)

➤ First, we see the heavenly proclamation. While, as we saw last week, God foretold *that* the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (see Mic.5:2; Matt.2:5), almost nobody knew *when* He would be born. At this point in the Gospel narratives, only a relative few people even knew that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah. In fact, Mary and Joseph found out privately and individually by angelic announcement (Mary, Lk.1:26-38; Joseph, Matt.1:18-25).

By God's design, Jesus' birth was gloriously inconspicuous! While no one will miss Christ's Second Coming (Matt.24:31; 1Cor.15:52), most people missed His First Coming. His Second Coming will be seen and heard by all, but His birth was marked by obscurity and humility. In His First Coming, Jesus Christ came as "suffering servant" (Is.53:2-3), in His Second Coming, the Son of God will come as "conquering warrior" (Rev.19:11-16).

➤ It is fitting, of course, that the announcement of the birth (incarnation) of God's Son come from the mouth of an angel. And yet, it can be surprising to find out the recipients of this heavenly proclamation. This illustrates, again, God's sovereign plan that the Son (the Savior) would be born in the most glorious but humble circumstances.

➤ These verses, Luke 2:8-12, can be divided into four distinct sections.

1. The setting

➤ The fact that this happened "*in the same region*" (vs.8) indicates that it happened not in, but close to Bethlehem (see Lk.2:4, 15). This verse also indicates that the angelic announcement happened at "*night*" (vs.8; which does not necessarily show that Jesus was born at midnight). It is likely Jesus was born at night, in relative obscurity as most everyone would have been asleep.

The fact that the angel declared this message to "*shepherds*" (vs.8), at night, is very interesting. The first to hear of the fact that the Christ was born was not the religious leaders, those in political authority, or those of wealth and renown. The shepherds were "*keeping watch over*" (*phylassō phylakē epi*) their sheep at night to protect them from predators and thieves. It is possible that these sheep were raised and protected to be used as sacrifices in the temple.

- There is a prevalent misconception that these shepherds were always irreligious (immoral) or even criminals. Such thinking leads people to conclude that the announcement of Jesus' birth came first not to religious people but to worldly sinners and not religious people (this erroneous thought is then often used to bash Christianity as "religious").

The shepherding imagery is all throughout Scripture, and most of the time portrays shepherds in a favorable light. God is described as a Shepherd (Ps.100:3; Is.53:6-7); Jesus referred to Himself as "*the good shepherd*" (Jn.10:11, 14); Jesus is described as "*the great shepherd*" (Heb.13:20) and "*the chief shepherd*" (1Pet.5:4); Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David were all shepherds. Furthermore, in both the Old and New Testaments, God's appointed prophets and teachers and leaders are known as "shepherds" (e.g., Eph.4:11).

These "*shepherds*" (vs.8; *poimēn*) were most likely not wicked and irreligious but simple, uneducated, men who were not socially influential and may have been social outcasts. The point is that the initial announcement of Christ's birth came not to the self-righteous (self-sufficient), socially popular, or financially wealthy – not the "high and mighty" – but to the lowly and humble (see Lk.1:38, 52; 4:17-18; 5:32; 18:9-14).

Ps 51:17 ~ "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Isa 57:15 ~ "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"

Isa 66:2 ~ "All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

James 4:6 ~ "... Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" (see 1Pet.5:5-6)

2. The angel

- It was in the midst of the rather tranquil night, that the shepherds had a unique and terrifying encounter with an angel of God: "*And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear*" (vs.9). This was certainly not a normal occurrence. Just seeing an angel was a terrifying experience.

Luke 1:11-12 ~ "And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And Zechariah was troubled [*tarassō*] when he saw him, and fear [*phobos*] fell upon him."

Luke 24:1-6 ~ "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ²And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. ⁵And as they were frightened [*emphobos*] and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here, but has risen ...'"

Matt 28:2-5 ~ "And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴And for fear [*phobos*] of him the guards trembled [*seiō*] and became like dead men [*nekros*]."

- In the Bible, there are different kinds of angels – with differing ranks, responsibilities, and forms. The most basic understanding of an angel, however, is that they are God’s messengers (“*angel*”; *angelos*). While we do not know the angel’s name or rank (like we do of Gabriel [Lk.1:19, 26] and Michael [Jd.9; Rev.12:7]), we do know that this was no fallen angel. For, among other reason, “*the glory of the Lord shone around him*” (vs.9). The “*glory of the Lord*” (*doxa kyrios*) represents the radiance of God’s divine nature and character. That is, that which radiates from God’s presence. As light and heat radiate off of the sun (the sun’s glory), so God’s glory is that which emanates from God.

Luke 9:28-30 ~ “Now about eight days after these sayings [Jesus] took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.” (see Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13)

Matt 17:1-2 ~ “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.”

Ex 34:29-30 ~ “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.” (see Ex.33:18-23; 24:31-51; 2Cor.3:7)

- There is a huge difference between the transfiguration of Jesus and the shining face of Moses. Moses’ face shone because God’s divine glory reflected on Him, where Jesus’ divine glory came from within Himself. Moses’ face was like the moon reflecting the sun, Jesus’ transfiguration was like the shining of the sun (see Rev.21:22-23; 22:5).

✓ Illust: Spurgeon suggested that “The face of Moses was to God what the moon is to the sun” (sermon: “The Shining Face of Moses”; 1890).

- This would have been especially noticeable, disturbing, against the backdrop of the night sky. Not surprisingly, then, we read that the shepherds “*were filled with great fear*” (vs.9; *phobeomai megas*).

3. The announcement

- Before declaring the heavenly announcement, the angel tried to calm the terrified shepherds and assure them that his presence was not a sign of God’s impending judgment: “*And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not’*” (vs.10; cf. Gen.19). This was a typical response from an angel when he came with a favorable message from God (see Lk.1:13, 30; Matt.28:10). The angel then prefaced his announcement with this “*behold, I bring you good news of great joy*” (vs.10). The “*good news*” (*euangelizō*) is quite literally “*the Gospel*” (see Lk.3:18; 4:18; 7:22; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1).

Rom 1:15-16 ~ “So I am eager to preach the gospel [*euangelizō*] to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel [*euangelion*], for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

- The Gospel is “*good news*” that produces “*great joy*” (*megas chara*) because now – by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – there is forgiveness and salvation for sinners. This announcement had never been made before. Never before had God took on human flesh. Never before had the Son of God become a man. Never before had the Savior of all mankind been born on earth. This is definitely good news and would, without question, bring them great joy. The “*good news*” is that God has sent His Son to be our Savior; the “*great joy*” comes as we receive, by faith, Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior!
- We must never lose our “*great joy*” for the “*good news*”! We must never tire of affirming and proclaiming the Gospel – even to ourselves. For, in time, the exhilaration and appreciation for God’s saving grace can fade, or be eclipsed by lesser (worldly) things. We can all too easily be lulled into

thinking that our sin is not that big of a deal, and therefore neither is God's forgiveness. Some professing Christians have even become "disappointed" or "angry" with God because, in their minds, He has not done enough for them. They want salvation plus a good job; salvation plus a happy marriage; salvation plus a suffering-free, sorrow-free, life.

A person who is even slightly dissatisfied with, or disinterested in, God's saving grace has completely misunderstood the essence of the Good News – and completely misunderstood the true depravity of their sin! The Christian knows that he/she was justly condemned to eternal hell by the holy God (for their sins and rebellion against God), and that God graciously and mercifully saved them (forgiving all of their sins) by sending His own Son to die on the cross for their sins.

When truly contemplating the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ – the sinless Son of God being bludgeoned and tortured, wearing a crown of thorns, being mocked and blasphemed, nailed to and bleeding out on a cross, cursed by God for our sin – no one, in their right mind, will say: "Ya, but I was expecting more from God."

✓ Illust: "My faith has found a resting place, Not in device nor creed; I trust the Ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead. I need no other argument, I need no other plea; It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me" (Hymn: *My Faith has found a Resting Place*, Eliza E. Hewitt; 1891).

- The Gospel has always been, and will always be, "*good news of great joy*" (vs.10). The angelic announcement was simply staggering: the long-awaited Savior had finally arrived! This news is "*for all the people*" not that everyone will be saved, but God's salvation is for everyone indiscriminately (not "without exception" but "without distinction"). That is, everyone can be saved – no matter their gender, their ethnicity, their age, their intellect, their social standing, their bank account.

Gal 3:26-29 ~ "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (see Rom.1:16; Rev.7:9-10)

- After attempting to relieve the fears of the shepherds, the angel gave them the message he was sent to deliver: "*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*" (vs.11). The long-awaited Messiah had finally arrived! It happened exactly as God had promised, and it happened exactly as God has foretold. The Messiah was born in Bethlehem, "*in the city of David*" (vs.11; see Lk.1:32, 69; 2:4; Matt.2:5; Jn.7:42; Mic.5:2).

Notice the language the angel used to describe Jesus. First, He is "*Savior*" (*sōtēr*; vs.11; Lk.1:47; Jn.4:42; Acts 5:31; Tit.3:4-6). The angel told Joseph to name Him "*Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*" (Matt.1:21). Jesus is the Savior, apart from whom there is no salvation (Jn.14:6; Acts 4:12). The Bible is clear on the fact that everyone is a sinner in need salvation, God's forgiveness (see Rom.3:10-12, 23; Rom.5:12; Eph.2:1-3; Jms.2:10; 1Jn.1:8).

✓ Illust: "The true gospel message is that Jesus Christ came into the world to rescue people from sin and guilt – not psychological, artificial guilt feelings, but true, God-imposed guilt that damns to hell"

(John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Luke 1-5*; 2:11-12).

Second, He is "*Christ*" (*Christos*). This refers to Jesus as the Messiah, "the anointed one" of God. It is deeply rooted in the Old Testament (see 2Sam.7:5-16; Ps.110:1-4; Is.9:6-7; cf. Matt.16:16; Jn.1:41) and appears over 500 times in the New Testament. It reveals Jesus as the chosen one of God – the Messiah of whom the prophets declared would come to save His people and reign forever and King of kings and Lord of lords.

Third, Jesus is "*the Lord*" (*kyrios*). This word, in reference to God (generally) and the Son of God (specifically), is a term of great respect and reverence. To call Jesus "Lord" is to call Him your master, your owner, your God. In fact, *kyrios* occurs over 9,000 times in the Septuagint (or LXX; the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in 3 B.C.), 6,000 of which replace the Hebrew proper name for God, Yahweh.

- The Lord and Savior Jesus Christ alone can save. As God's (incarnate) Son, He alone did die (and could have died) for our sins. He chose to die a substitutionary death, on the cross, for all who would ever believe (Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.3:13; 1Pet.3:18). To take on the full penalty of their sin (unrighteousness) and impute to them the full reward of His sinlessness (righteousness).

4. The sign

- After giving the shepherds the message from God, the angel gave them instructions regarding where to find the baby Jesus: *"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger"* (vs.12). This may not seem like that clear of *"a sign"* (*sēmeion*) to us (we may have asked for more information). But the shepherds knew that the Messiah was to be born in the small town of Bethlehem (see 2:15). The fact that the baby was *"wrapped in swaddling cloths"* (vs.12) would not have been much of a clue (since most all babies would have been treated in this way). But the fact that Jesus would be *"lying in a manger"* (vs.12; Lk.2:7, 16) – a feeding trough – would be all that they needed to know.

B. The Heavenly Praise (vs.13-14)

- Then, *"suddenly"* (*exaiphnēs*), joining the angel, was *"a multitude of the heavenly host"* (vs.13). The word *"multitude"* (*plethos*) can refer to any untold/unknown number but also can refer to a number that is beyond counting – possibly hundreds or even thousands or more! (see Heb.11:12). Regardless of the actual number, this would have been quite an assembly of angelic beings – one awesome worship service!
- Notice that Luke recorded that the angels were *"saying"* (*lego*), not singing. We know that angels do sing (see Job 38:7; Rev.5:8-10). Unfortunately, we often limit *"praising God"* (vs.13; see Rev.5:11-12; 7:11-12) to singing to God. The angels very well may have praised God by proclaiming (declaring) His glory. We must not, however, relegate praising God or worshiping God to singing alone.

More important than whether the angels actually sung, are the words they declared: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* (vs.14). These words affirm that sovereign supremacy of God, and His eternal and infinite worthiness.

1. Glory to God

- First, in saying *"Glory to God in the highest"* (vs.14a), the angels declared that the birth of Jesus Christ glorified God in the highest heaven. The phrase *"in the highest"* (*hypsistos*) refers to God as the one true – the Most High – God. There is no god (idol, created thing) that is equal to or above God. In biblical times, people would place their idols or shrines on high places as an object of their worship (to appear supreme and powerful).

Luke 1:31-36 ~ "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High [*hypsistos*]. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ³⁴And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High [*hypsistos*] will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.'"

Luke 1:76 ~ "And you, child [John the Baptist], will be called the prophet of the Most High [*hypsistos*]; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (see Lk.6:35; 8:28; 19:38)

- Height often symbolizes supremacy in power and authority. Today we use terms like “high courts” (of law), “high” society, and “high” levels of security. As the Most High God, there is no one or nothing greater than God (Yahweh) and nothing should be worshiped as God. The birth of God’s Son brought glory to God as it was according to God’s sovereign will and redemptive plan.

2. Peace on earth

- While Christ’s birth brought God honor in heaven, it also brought peace to earth: *“on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”* (vs.14b). This peace is not freedom from worldly chaos or war, but peace with God. Jesus is the *“Prince of peace”* (Is.9:6), and His sinless life and substitutionary death reconciled sinners to God. A person cannot truly have the peace of God if they are not truly at peace with God (Phil.4:4-7).

Rom 5:1-2 ~ “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (see Rom.5:8-10; Col.1:19-22).

- This proclamation also affirms God’s work of reconciliation to those *“with whom he is pleased!”* (vs.14). In other word, God’s gift of peace will not come to all humanity but only those who receive His Son as Lord and Savior (see Rom.5:10; 8:7-8; Heb.11:6; 13:21; Jn.3:18, 36)

C. The Earthly Proof (vs.15-21)

- The angels seemed to vanish just as soon as they appeared: *“When the angels went away from them into heaven ...”* (vs.15). The shepherds wasted no time in deciding to leave for Bethlehem: *“... 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’”* (vs.15).
- ✓ **Illust:** “We see in them no doubts, or questionings, or hesitation. Strange and improbable as the tidings might seem – they at once act upon them. They went to Bethlehem in haste. They found everything exactly as it had been told to them. Their simple faith received a rich reward. They had the mighty privilege of being the first of all mankind, after Mary and Joseph – who saw the new-born Messiah with believing eyes!” (J.C. Ryle; *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Luke*; 2:8-20).
- At this moment, there was nothing more important to them than Jesus. The news of the Savior’s birth changed their lives, and dominated their hearts and minds. They were instantly and overwhelmingly preoccupied with Christ.

1. What the shepherds saw

- Once they decided to go to Bethlehem, *“they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger”* (vs.16; *“haste”* [*speudō*]; hurried). In their wonder and joy, the shepherds rushed to see the baby Jesus. Imagine their excitement along the way. Imagine them first approaching the manger scene – seeing Mary and Joseph (and they seeing them). Imagine what it was like to for them to see the Christ in a feeding trough.
- The shepherds see exactly what the angel promised (2:12). Their eyes beheld the King of kings, Prince of Peace, the Son of God, *“lying in a manger”* (vs.16).

2. What the shepherds said

- We do not know how long they were silent, if at all, but we know that *“when they saw”* (vs.17) the scene, the baby Jesus, *“they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child”* (vs.17). Imagine that conversation! Mary and Joseph were not expecting shepherds to the make-shift maternity ward, and they certainly were not expecting to hear their testimony of the angelic announcement. Not surprisingly, *“all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them”* (vs.18; *“wondered”* [*thaumazō*]; surprised, amazed).

This was a common response to the miracles and teaching of God – even at His birth. But sadly, as we see throughout the Gospels (and maybe in our own lives), the amazement of salvation can wane and the enticement of sin can eclipse or replace our “wonder” of Jesus Christ.

- The news of the birth of Christ was spreading. The scene was electric with joy and conversations. The promised Messiah had arrived, marked with divine affirmation. *“But Mary treasured [syntēreō; to keep or preserve] up all these things, pondering [symballō; to converse or consider] them in her heart”* (vs.19). This was undoubtedly a lot for the young Mary to take in. But she responded appropriately, not getting swept up in the excitement. Her response was not merely emotional, not superficial, but meditative and heartfelt. She must have wondered what would become of her child. Whatever her thoughts, she did not forfeit the moment. She wanted to burn these things in her mind, and bind them to her heart. She is an example to us all.

3. What the shepherds did

- The shepherds eventually *“returned”* (vs.20) to their field (and homes), but there were certainly not the same. They returned as ones who had seen the Christ, and their lives were forever changed. They joined the heavenly angelic choir in *“glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen”* (vs.20; cf. 2:13-14). As is always true of God’s Word, everything happened exactly *“as it had been told them”* (vs.20).
- We then read: *“And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb”* (vs.21). Mary and Joseph were obedient to the law of God in having Jesus *“circumcised”* (vs.21; Gen.17:9-14; Lev.12:3) eight days after His birth, and obedient to the command of God, spoken by the angel, to call Him *“Jesus”* (vs.21; Matt.1:21).

Matt 1:21 ~ “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

- The name *“Jesus”* (vs.21; *Iēsous*) is the New Testament (Greek) equivalent of the Old Testament (Hebrew) for Joshua. It is, of course, fitting. For the name means “Yahweh saves.”

Acts 4:12 ~ “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Conclusion

- Let me close with what is perhaps a familiar, but poignant story:
 - ✓ Illust: Years ago, there was a very wealthy man who, with his devoted young son shared a passion for art collecting. Together they traveled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection. Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet and many others adorned the walls of the family estate. The widowed elder man looked on with satisfaction, as his only child became an experienced art collector. The son's trained eye and sharp business mind caused his father to beam with pride as they dealt with art collectors around the world. As winter approached, war engulfed the nation, and the young man left to serve his country. After only a few short weeks, his father received a telegram. His beloved son was missing in action. The art collector anxiously awaited more news, fearing he would never see his son again. Within days, his fears were confirmed. The young man had died while rushing a fellow soldier to a medic.

Distraught and lonely, the old man faced the upcoming Christmas holidays with anguish and sadness. The joy of the season, a season that he and his son had so looked forward to, would visit his house no longer. On Christmas morning, a knock on the door awakened the saddened old man. As he walked to the door, the masterpieces of art on the walls only reminded him that his son was not coming home. As he opened the door, he was greeted by a soldier, with a large package in his hand. He introduced himself to the man by saying, “I was a friend of your son. I was the one he was rescuing when he died. May I come in for a few moments? I have something to show you.”

As the two began to talk, the soldier told of how the man's son had told everyone of his father's love of fine art. "I'm an artist," said the soldier, and I want to give you this." As the old man unwrapped the package, the paper gave way to reveal a portrait of the man's son. Though the world would never consider it the work of a genius, the painting featured the young man's face in striking detail. Overcome with emotion, the man thanked the soldier, promising to hang the picture above the fireplace. A few hours later, after the soldier had departed, the old man set about his task.

True to his word, the painting went above the fireplace, pushing aside thousands of dollars of paintings. And then the man sat in his chair and spent Christmas gazing at the gift he had been given. During the days and weeks that followed, the man realized that even though his son was no longer with him, the boy's life would live on because of those he had touched. He would soon learn that his son had rescued dozens of wounded soldiers before a bullet stilled his caring heart.

As the stories of his son's gallantry continued to reach him, fatherly pride and satisfaction began to ease the grief. The painting of his son soon became his most prized possession, far eclipsing any interest in the pieces for which museums around the world clamored. He told his neighbors it was the greatest gift he had ever received. The following spring, the old man became ill and passed away. The art world was in anticipation.

With the collector's passing, and his only son dead, those paintings would be sold at an auction. According to the will of the old man, all of the art works would be auctioned on Christmas Day, the day he had received his greatest gift.

The day soon arrived and art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. Dreams would be fulfilled this day; greatness would be achieved as many would claim "I have the greatest collection." The auction began with a painting that was not on any museum's list. It was the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid. The room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked. Minutes passed. No one spoke. From the back of the room came, "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son. Let's forget it and go on to the good stuff." More voices echoed in agreement. "No, we have to sell this one first," replied the auctioneer. "Now, who will take the son?"

Finally, a friend of the old man spoke. "Will you take ten dollars for the painting? That's all I have. I knew the boy, so I'd like to have it." "I have ten dollars. Will anyone go higher?" called the auctioneer. After more silence, the auctioneer said, "Going once, going twice. Gone." The gavel fell. Cheers filled the room and someone exclaimed, "Now we can get on with it and we can bid on these treasures!" The auctioneer looked at the audience and announced the auction was over. Stunned disbelief quieted the room. Someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean it's over? We didn't come here for a picture of some old guy's son. What about all of these paintings? There are millions of dollars of art here! I demand that you explain what's going on here!" The auctioneer replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son ... gets it all."