

Series: Gospel of Luke

This Message God Reveals the Birth of His Son, Jesus

Scripture Luke 2:8-20

In spite of the many Old Testament promises about the coming of the Messiah, only a few individuals saw the baby Jesus and understood who He was. Joseph and Mary were not prominent individuals in the society of their day. Their arrival in Bethlehem, following their journey from the small city of their residence, Nazareth, did not attract any attention. They were strangers, forced by circumstances to find lodging in very humble and crude circumstances, in a stable. The stable was near a public inn which was full of people, but apparently none of the guests were aware of the birth. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were so isolated from other people that the birth of Jesus could have passed totally unnoticed and unappreciated by everyone.

In the absence of human awareness of the event, God took charge of publicity. There was an excitement and joy in the heavenly realms which could not be contained. First one angel, and then a great company of the angels of the Lord heralded the good news about the birth. The birth was the greatest event in human history. It needed to be publicized far and wide, and yet, the angels did not go to prominent and influential religious and community leaders. Instead they appeared to a group of shepherds, simple folk, who were in fields outside the village of Bethlehem.

Read Luke 2:8-20

God the Father had planned and orchestrated the conception and birth of His Son in His own unique way, and in His own unique way He announced the birth to a carefully chosen group of individuals. It was to shepherds, men who were at the low level of the working class, to whom the “good news of great joy” was announced. This was a strange method, considering that God intended the good news about Jesus to be communicated to all people everywhere. Yet, it was this small group of shepherds who were God’s chosen messengers to announce to the world the world-changing news about God joining Himself to the human race.

Just imagine the impression that the angels had on the shepherds. First one angel appeared and spoke to them. That was an awesome and terrifying supernatural experience. Then the glory of the Lord was all around them. The glory of the Lord is beyond human comprehension. And then a multitude of the heavenly host suddenly appeared, filling the sky with the sound of their praises to God. The shepherds witnessed a supernatural “sight and sound” show. The shepherds were being called by God to be His messengers, and God called them in spectacular dramatic fashion. No wonder that they wanted to “go into Bethlehem and see the thing that had happened, which the Lord had told them about.”

The shepherds had been told that the baby was the “Savior;” this word also means “Deliverer;” and that the baby was “Christ the Lord.” This information alone would have set the hearts of Jews racing, apart from the spectacular way it was delivered. All Israel lived in expectation of the Messiah. Perhaps it wasn’t an expectation that was always in the front of their minds; after all, the Israelites had been hoping for and talking about the Messiah for hundreds of years and it must have seemed to them that the promises would never be fulfilled. However, deep down, all Israelites held on to the belief that God would someday send His anointed One to reestablish a throne over a restored Israelite kingdom, just as David had occupied the throne of Israel a thousand years previously.

The words, “Savior,” “Christ,” and “Lord,” would have linked together the long standing promises and hopes of the Jewish people with their awareness of their present circumstances. The words meant that God was once again engaged with His people and was beginning to fulfill His promises.

The part of this episode that most astounds me is the reaction of the shepherds to the description of the appearance of the one who was Savior, Christ, and Lord. The angel said the shepherds would “find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” This was not the appearance or location that a person would naturally expect of Christ the Lord. God in flesh? In the flesh of a infant? In a lowly manger? It amazes me that this information was not a barrier to the faith of the shepherds. They eagerly hurried into Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby who was lying in a manger, and neither the setting in the stable, nor the impoverishment of Joseph and Mary, nor the fact that God was in the form of a baby, created doubts in their minds about the authenticity of Jesus.

Scripture indicates that after the shepherds saw the baby “they spread the word concerning what had been told them about the child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”

Did other individuals, after hearing the message of the shepherds, seek out the new born infant Jesus and His parents? According to the Scriptures, “all who heard the report of the shepherds were amazed,” but did anyone actually go to see for themselves? We don’t know. Scripture is silent. Would the Good News have had more credibility if it had come from the religious leaders? Perhaps. But God’s ways are mysterious. Scripture indicates that He works through people who have humble and contrite hearts. We know that the shepherds fulfilled their calling by telling the Good News to many people. They were the first witnesses and evangelists to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

The next encounters which are written in Scripture occurred forty days later, when Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to present their son to the Lord. According to the OT Law, they were required to go to the temple to consecrate Jesus because He was their firstborn male child. Our next Scripture reading explains what happened.

Read Luke 2:25-32

After Simeon had seen the baby Jesus, he was ready to die, and he faced his death with joy and thankfulness because God had fulfilled the promise which had been given to him. He had seen the One who was the Savior of all peoples. Of course, Simeon only saw an ordinary looking 40 day old baby, but he did not let his eyes deceive his mind. He had been told that he would see the Christ, and the physical appearance of a baby did not confuse him at all. Simeon knew that this ordinary looking baby was the salvation of God. I hope you noticed that the Holy Spirit is mentioned three times in connection with Simeon’s knowledge and confidence. The shepherds received one kind of direct revelation, and another kind of special revelation was given to Simeon by the Holy Spirit. Listening to God is the most essential part of being a follower of God. Simeon praised God for the privilege he had of looking on and holding God’s Son.

Let me make a side comment here: Simeon understood something that the Jews, even Jewish believers, found difficult to accept: that the salvation of God would not be limited to the Jewish people. Notice verses 30 and 31. The Christ would bring salvation to “all people.” He would be a special light of revelation to the Gentiles as well as for the people of Israel.

Is Simeon an example for us today? Yes, I think so. He was ready to die after seeing the Lord Jesus Christ. I suggest to you that this can and should be our attitude today. After people see Jesus and understand Who He is, and genuinely acknowledge Him, they are declared by God to be “ready to die” physically. They have met the conditions for eternity. The words of Simeon apply to us. God has revealed in His word the truth about Jesus Christ. Scripture clearly states that “to all who receive Him, all who believe in His name, He gives the right to become children of God.” Such believers are filled with joy and thankfulness for God’s salvation. I hope you all have had a Simeon type experience of meeting Jesus.

There was another person in the temple who also understood the truth about the baby Jesus.

Read Luke 2:36-38

Anna had faced significant disappointments in her life, yet she never lost her faith and hope. Her focus throughout her life was on God. Anna is an example of people who weather the storms of life because she stayed focused on God.

She and Simeon were among those who looked forward to the redemption provided by God, and they gave thanks to God for their late-in-life experiences of seeing the baby Jesus. The child they saw and handled was the fulfillment of many prophecies, the answer to their prayers. The highpoint of their lives.

The shepherds, Simeon, and Anna were specially chosen by God. In His own unique way, and according to His sovereign choices, God informed them about the birth of Jesus and about its significance. God revealed the truth about the birth to them, and they were sent by God to look upon His Son. God was selective, and apart from His initiative, no one would have had any idea about who Jesus was or about the significance of His birth.

Simeon and Anna were advanced in years when they were called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. Fortunately, age is never a barrier to sharing the Good News. Today we who are later in life can have our experiences of seeing Jesus and adoring Him, and the good news about Jesus continues to be entrusted to individuals, regardless of their ages, who are called and chosen and brought to a personal encounter with Jesus. This continues to happen according to God's purposes. In His own special way, and on His own initiative, God reveals His truth to ordinary people, people who will listen when God speaks to them, people who will come to understand the deeper truths of God's ways. These people will gain a satisfaction and contentment about their relationship to God in this life which will carry over into eternity.

The followers of Jesus Christ have a special appreciation for verse 14. They can join the angels in giving "glory to God in the highest" because He has done amazing things. He sent His Son to be incarnated into humanity; this is certainly cause for rejoicing because it led to redemption from sins. And in another special way, He sends His Son to be incarnated in the lives of believers. This is the basis of our relationship to God, the personal application of our faith and obedience. Glory to God indeed.

The second part of verse 14 is a statement of God's sovereignty. His peace is bestowed on individuals of His choice, to those "on whom his favor rests." God's favor rested on the shepherds and Simeon and Anna. God's favor rests on all those who are called and chosen, on those to whom He reveals the truth of His ways. Peace and contentment come to people who see Jesus for who He really is. Such people are able to "let go" of physical life. Death has no terror for those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ. With Simeon, believers can say, "Now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation."

There is yet another small group of individuals who had an encounter with the baby Jesus: the Magi, the mysterious Wise Men who came from the east to celebrate the birth of Jesus. They are important because they were the first Gentiles mentioned in Scripture to recognize the significance of Jesus' birth. These Magi saw the star of the Messiah. They knew this star was associated with a birth. They knew that the special person they were seeking was to be King of the Jews. They were so excited about these thing that they made a long two year trip in order to worship.

We don't know how God revealed the information concerning Jesus to the Magi. Possibly they had access to the OT writings. We don't know how they recognized the star as the special sign of the birth of Jesus. All we can grasp from the verses which mention them (in Matthew) is that God motivated them and guided them to their encounter with Jesus. During the final stages of their journey, a special star went ahead of them until it miraculously stopped over the place where the child was. God sovereignly selected these Wise Men, then enlightened them about the birth, and then guided them to the child. This was another example of the unique ways of God. He revealed the significance of Jesus' birth to the Magi just as He had previously revealed the Good News to them the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna.

The story of Christmas has two parts: the incarnation, the human birth of God's Son, and the sovereignty of God in selecting individuals to whom was given revelation about Jesus Christ. For those who are looking for God's salvation, the Christmas season is the time for a double celebration: the incarnation of Jesus Christ into humanity and the incarnation of Jesus Christ into personal lives.