

The Shepherds' Report

Luke 2:15-20

December 13, 2015

This morning we're going to look at a very significant portion of Scripture to wrap up, basically, this scene that we have been looking at in the narrative of the birth of Jesus Christ. This is a portion of this narrative that has to do with the implications of the Christmas story for the life of every human being on planet earth, including people right here in Greeley. So, right here in Luke Chapter 2 and verse 15, that's kind of where we're starting this morning and going to the end, we're going finish up the account of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. So, just take a look at your Bible there and look at verse 1. I'm going to start reading the full account there.

Luke 2:1-20, just to get it before us, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius

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was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’

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

We're going to be covering that final section, as I said, verses 15 to 20 this morning. And on the surface, it seems to be such a simple account, fairly straight forward. Shepherds go, they see the child, they report, they leave. That's it. The account begins, really, with verse 14, with angelic worship. And it ends also, verse 20, with worship, but this time it's human worship.

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And in this account, we see bookended on either side we see both angels and men have joined together. And they're crowding around this baby in a manger to worship him. Reminds us of that refrain in Isaac Watts' great hymn, *Joy to the World*, "Let Heaven and nature and sing." Let both angels and men give praise and glory to God. And that's what we see here.

Before we dive into our outline, I want to bring to the forefront, bring to the surface a question that kind of hovers beneath the surface maybe in the background of people's minds. The questions on the mind of, of other people, unbelievers especially, as we tell them about this Gospel that we believe and embrace, as we tell them about this Savior born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago that we worship and adore. To them it seems ludicrous that we would worship a baby in a manger, that we would worship a crucified man, that we would worship a historical event.

But it's a question that's in their mind that we want to bring out here. It's a question about the connection between history and authority. Between what has happened in history and

then what history demands for the world. Here's the question. Why should the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, more than two thousand years ago, obligate anybody to worship him as Savior and Lord? Just because this baby was born in Bethlehem, why does the fact of Jesus' birth create a must for other people? Why does his existence play some moral demand on all thinking creatures?

Another way to ask the question is this: Why does this Gospel that we share with friends and family, with neighbors and co-workers, why do the very facts of this Gospel demand the obedience of those who hear them? Why does the Gospel not only invite sinners to bow before Jesus, but more than that, why does it demand that they humble their hearts, demand that they bow their knees?

Over the past few weeks, we've been looking at the facts of history, a lot of facts. We've tracked this young family, Joseph and Mary, and Mary carrying her unborn child. We followed them through a region of the Roman Empire. We've watched as they made their way from Nazareth in Galilee, in the North, down to

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Bethlehem of Judea in the South. And we've been looking over their shoulders in the very birth room as Mary swaddled her newborn child and then placed him in a manger.

We've also been able to witness an incredible sight, it was really the subject of Ryan's prayer this morning. This incredible sight of angels descending on pasturelands in Bethlehem on some shepherds and revealing themselves to them. We have this angel of the Lord coming to humble shepherds. And we've watched as the ranks of an army of heaven appear praising God. We'd never know about that private meeting, by the way, if it weren't for the shepherds' report. They told Mary. Luke got the story from her and recorded it for us. But those historical facts, they become moral demands. Because the angels in verse 14 call the entire creation to give glory to God.

As we said last week, the angels aren't merely stating a fact, they're making a demand here, "Let glory be to God in the highest." Or another way to say it is a command there that might be assumed or inserted is, give glory to God in the highest. It's appropriate here that angels are the ones who have called

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us to give glory to God. The holy angels are utterly obedient to the divine will.

David described the angels in Psalm 103 as, at the end of the Psalm as "mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!" And they are. In verse 21 of Psalm 103, they are the Lord's hosts. They are, "his ministers, who do his will." They're, they're basically an example to us of those who are utterly obedient to God to give him glory. It's interesting to ponder that David wrote that Psalm, Psalm 103. His words may have been inspired in these very fields where the shepherds were, as David watched his father's sheep so long ago.

Nevertheless, it's angels, sinless and undefiled. It's angels, holy and pure, they are the first creatures to call men to praise God in light of this special birth of Jesus Christ. J. C. Ryle wrote this, "The angels know what misery sin has brought into creation. They know the blessedness of heaven and the privilege of an open door into it. This shows us the deep love and compassion, which the angels feel toward poor, lost men.

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They rejoice at the glorious prospect of many souls being saved and many brands plucked from the burning fire.” End quote.

That’s exactly right. That’s exactly right. These angels have watched in horror as sin has torn the world apart. And even though they don’t fully understand the things into which they look, they do wonder that God created man a little lower than the angels, but he created man to glorify God and give full praise and glory to him and here they are seeing the, the prospect of this coming to fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

So, it’s entirely fitting, it’s completely appropriate that a company of the angelic army, those who do God’s will. That they would call the shepherds to glorify God here. That an angel would announce the birth of our Savior to the shepherds. And notice what they do. They likewise, these shepherds, they go and worship. Like the angels in heaven, the shepherds also do his will. Angel of the Lord assumed that they would obey in verse 12. That’s a future tense. It’s an indicative. It’s an assumption of fact.

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It said, "This will be the sign for you," assuming that they would go and look at it. No need to command, no need to urge, no need to put pressure on them. The shepherds wanted to go. They wanted to see this Messiah for themselves, one wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger, because he was, after all, born for them. And that's where we see that among believers, among those with whom God is pleased, verse 14, with those God has chosen, that's where we see the demand of God and the desire of believing people come together. God's demand and our desire come together to bring glory to God in the highest.

These historical facts, they place a moral demand on everyone who hear them. It's not simply a benign story that informs Christmas tradition. This isn't something we can simply take or leave. This is a call to worship and the angelic soldiers of this heavenly army, they're not making this optional for us. Worshipping the newborn king is a moral obligation and here's why.

Every day, God pours out his goodness and his kindness on all mankind. He gives air to breathe, he gives food to eat, he

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gives us families to belong to, relationships to enjoy. God has poured out his common grace on all people, showering his blessings on all humanity, even on those who hate him. The atheists, who vehemently deny him and the secularists who consider him with, like a shrug of indifference. All of them partake daily, hourly, even minute by minute of God's common grace. Men fail to honor God as God. They fail to give him thanks and that's a sin because they ought to. The fact of God's common grace, it creates a moral demand for all humanity.

It demands that they worship him. It demands that they give him thanks, but they don't. They refuse. So, they're under his fiery wrath. They're born into condemnation and they continue to live their lives heaping up sin after sin after sin, which just brings more judgment, more condemnation, more wrath and they will one day face his judgment because they didn't honor him as God or give thanks, Romans 1:21. You see the connection there. God gives, historical fact and we're under obligation to worship.

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How much more is that true when God sends a baby born for us, “born this day in the city of David a Savior,” one who is the anointed one, the Christ, he’s born to be our Lord. You know what? We dare not despise such an indescribably gracious gift. We dare not despise that by turning away. This special act of grace, this historical fact, it demands exactly what the angels demanded. Give glory to God in the highest.

Why? Because he has provided for peace on earth through a baby in the manger. That baby is our only hope. That baby is our only chance to be right with God, to be saved from his wrath, to be forgiven for our many sins. “For there is salvation in no one else.” Acts 4:12, “For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” We dare not prioritize anything else. We dare not put anything else first. We dare not allow anything to stand in the way of our immediate, passionate, even aggressive obedience to him.

And that’s exactly where we want to pick up the story, with the shepherds’ reaction. The angelic host departs from them into heaven in verse 15 and you know what? They don’t sit still.

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They're eager, they're willing to give glory to God in the highest. That's what we're going to observe today. I've put some outlines points in your bulletin, the journey, the discovery, the diversity. I realized that those are all names of mega churches. Totally unintentional, but it is interesting, isn't it?

But let's take a look at the first point, verse 15: The journey, seeking the sign. The journey, seeking the sign. "When the angels went away from them, into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.'" It's interesting here that the verse says, "The angels went away from them into heaven," that is the angel of the Lord or, also including the multitude of the heavenly host. All of that company ascended into heaven. It, it receded into heaven.

So, no more noise from the angelic praise. No more blinding light that illuminated the entire countryside. The scene has returned to its lowlight ambience, its routine tranquility, it's mundane kind of complacency. But notice what the text doesn't

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acknowledge is going away, notice what doesn't leave. The glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord. The presence of God. That remained. And its brilliant light may have gone away, but the glory remained.

It reminds us of what that line in the hymn, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, which says, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel. Hark! The herald angels sing, 'Glory to the newborn king.'" Jesus our Emmanuel. Jesus our God with us. Jesus the glory the remains. With the birth of Jesus, the glory of the Lord will never again depart. God remains with us in Jesus Christ.

The grammar here indicates that the shepherds, they started talking with each other even while the angels were departing into heaven. So, the angels are taking off and they start talking. It's nothing short of an amazing, other worldly experience to see the angel of the Lord, to see this angelic army, this host of heaven. But the shepherds quickly turn away, turn to each other. They're more interested in seeking the sign

that the angel told them about. "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that's happened, what the Lord has made known to us."

For them, this isn't just about the experience per se; it's about the message. It's about the truth. This is about what's waiting for them in Bethlehem that they can confirm. This sign of an infant king lying there in a manger. The angels, yeah, they were an impressive sight, but their conversation was centered on what, get this, what the Lord revealed to them. They knew the source. God was the source of this revelation. His revealed word, it prompted an immediate response from them.

The shepherds had no other thought. They were leaving the sheep and they were going into Bethlehem immediately. The fact that a baby had been born that night, that a baby was lying somewhere in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. The mere historical fact of some baby, that's not what prompted their departure. It's the fact that, that baby was a special baby. That fact had been interpreted for them by God. Its significance had been brought out by the Lord God himself and that fact rightly interpreted, created demand and desire.

Fact in significance. Sign and things signified. That's what got them moving. That's what got them going. This was a Savior who is Christ the Lord. This Savior is born this day in the city of David and it was born for them personally. Nothing was more important. Nothing could, nothing else could demand their immediate attention.

So, without hesitation, without any doubt, without any questions, they left immediately to seek the sign. The Greek words in this verse, along with the grammatical construction, it is shouting the urgency and the haste of their departure. I mean they, they are getting out. It's just, it says they went with haste in the next verse. They hurried off. No mention of what they did with the sheep. We can imagine that they were somewhat responsible in caring for the sheep. They're shepherds after all. But it's notable that the sheep aren't mentioned at all.

Maybe a subtle bit of foreshadowing. Once the perfect Lamb of God is revealed, there is no more need for sheep to sacrifice for sins. Maybe that, but at the very least with no mention of

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the sheep, the emphasis here, the focus here is on a believing priority. There are some facts in life that are life-changing. Once you hear them, nothing else is the same. God showing up in the pasture to give you a message, that's one such experience. That changes everything. Who cares about tending sheep? In fact, I'll say this, to prefer the sheep over seeking this heaven-sent sign, that would be unthinkable, wouldn't it? It would actually be sinful to put a higher priority on sheep would be to disdain the heavenly vision, to treat it with contempt. They simply had to go. They had to leave immediately.

You know what, folks, these shepherds, they're our example. We don't know much about them at first, but now we see very clearly, these men are believers. They do what believers do. They drop everything and with no other thought, they embark on a journey seeking the sign. I don't know how many times I see people, Christians, church members, they put more emphasis on mundane things like work than they do on serving God and worshipping him. They put more emphasis and make more of a priority out of school or entertainment, or even, dare I say it? Focusing on the family. Family, school, work, obviously those are important things.

Obviously those are the normal issues of life and we can and must and do serve God in the midst of all those good things, but even good things can crowd out the most important thing. They can crowd out the priority of worship. Even good things can become idols to us. That's the beauty of God's gift of the church. That's the beauty of this weekly demand that he makes on our time and our attention. That's the beauty of this gift of preaching, paying attention to the preached word. That's the gift of a body that we can serve together, serve one another sacrificially giving one another for the physical and spiritual health of others. Some things are more important than work. Yeah, some things are more important than stuff. The shepherds understood that, so they went on a journey seeking the sign.

Let's consider a second point, the discovery. Discovery: Finding the baby. Notice the first attitude that drives their journey and then the, the effort that they put forth. This is the way with all genuine believers. They, they exhibit a believing attitude and then make a believing effort. Look at verse 16, "They went with haste and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger."

The attitude comes across in the manner of their departure. The language indicates here that they hurried. They made haste to get to Bethlehem. The haste that, that marked their steps here, it reveals the sense of urgency. It reveals a sense of zeal, an attitude that drives the action. They are exhibiting here an eagerness, a desire, a sense of longing. There's passion in their steps. They're not loafing to Bethlehem. That translated into effort.

The verb used in verse 15, "Let us go over to Bethlehem." That verb implies the town wasn't just over the next hill. This isn't just an easy jaunt. Bethlehem was not right next door. Traveling even a few miles through the hills would be a bit of a trek. And, in the darkness of night, it would make the journey even more arduous, maybe even a bit treacherous. And when the shepherds arrived at Bethlehem, maybe in the dark quiet of early morning hours, how would they find the baby? I mean, what are they going to do, go house to house? Bethlehem wasn't a big town. It's likely they'd stumble upon someone who could tell them where that pregnant woman came the other night, where she was staying.

But still. This verb here, *found*, is an intensified form of the verb *heurisko*. The intensified form is used only twice in the New Testament, only twice, it's both by Luke. It means to find after searching diligently for something. It suggests effort was put into this. There's a search that was required before they found what they were looking for.

Luke wants us to picture these shepherds as looking, and looking hard. They're knocking on doors. They're even disturbing other people as they try to find the baby. And those who search diligently and longingly, those who have desire and earnestness, those are the ones who demonstrate true faith. Those are the ones who demonstrate that they've been affected by what they believe, by what they've heard. Their search, you understand, may have had the effect of disturbing other people, right? Their pressing forward might trouble people who really prefer ease and complacency, but their trouble is worth the effort. And eventually, they find what they seek. Those who seek find, right? Those who put forth the effort energized by faith; those are the ones who gain the reward.

“And they found,” verse 16, “Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger.” And that order is a bit odd because Mary comes first. That’s uncommon in an account written in the first century, for a woman to come first in an order. But this really signifies that once again as Luke continues to do, it signifies her importance. It signifies, once again, God’s interest not just in men, but in men and women because both, created in his image, both given the duty and, and the privilege of worshipping and glorifying him.

Mary comes first, it signifies her importance. It’s her significance as the virgin mother of Jesus, and in fact, you’ll note this, she’s the only adult in all the infancy narratives who has a role later in Luke’s Gospel. She’s the only one from these first two chapters that shows up again. Joseph comes second in the order. He’s named and then forgotten. Poor Joseph, right? But as Joel Green observes, he says, “After getting Mary to Bethlehem, Joseph fades again into the background. His only role in Luke’s account is to certify Jesus’ status as son of David born in Bethlehem.” That’s not a bad role to have, right? It’s a very important role, very significant, very vital, but

now that his purpose has been fulfilled, the focus is on Jesus, as it should be.

You know, just a little comment there, all of us are replaceable. None of us is essential to the plan. Jesus is. He is the essential one. I can drop dead right now, don't want to, but I could and God will find somebody here. All of us are in that category. We're replaceable, God's program continues. He's not deterred by human failure or human change. In fact, he plans it for his glory.

Jesus is the third person mentioned here. He's the essential one. He's the focus. Once again, though, here he's not named. He's called the baby lying in a manger. That's the third mention of the baby lying in the manger. Verse 7, verse 12, verse 16, "The baby swaddled, lying in a manger." That's called emphasis, okay, when it's repeated that many times. Why? God wanted us to focus on the sign, just as he wanted the shepherds to go seek the sign, he wants the readers to focus on the sign. This baby, lying in a manger.

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What are we supposed to see? What does this mean? What does the sign signify? Well, the baby in a manger means this is a baby. It's a human Savior, born in a normal human way. He's lying before adoring parents, swaddled for warmth. He's peacefully resting. It's been a rough couple weeks of travel, bumpy road, all that, been a rough night. And he needs his sleep. Baby. He's human. He's had to be human, had to be made like us in every way that he could represent us to God as our High Priest.

But the baby in the manger means this is also he's, in a manger. He's a meek Savior. He's born in humility, born in poverty. He's not born in wealth. He's not born in fanfare. He's not born in pomp. This is expression of the tender, merciful, condescension of our God. This good news of great joy, it's for all people, all classes, all kinds without distinction. The baby in the manger means this is a universal Savior, as I've said born for all kinds of people, born for all kinds of sinners.

He's not a Savior for the rich only, but truly for all people rich and poor. In fact, James says that God has made the

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poor rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom he's promised to those who love him. God has demonstrated his intention to save everyone. Lowly shepherds included. It's as if God wanted to prove to them that he truly intended to provide them with a Savior, oh, yes, even them. Go, your Savior is in an animal's feeding trough. You're familiar with those, right?

So, this baby in a manger, it's a confirmation of the shepherds. You know what? The sign about this baby, everything that God said from Heaven as he evangelized them on the pastures in the fields. It's easily disprovable, isn't it? If this humble baby does not grow up to be the Savior, call off the celebration. Cancel Christmas because it didn't happen. It's not true.

But as the shepherds will watch. The development of this baby as they observe it from afar, growing into a boy, as we'll get to Luke Chapter 2, at the end of 2 where he's there at the temple in his Father's house. As they see him emerge as a young man in his thirties, then entering into Jerusalem as the king of the Jews. Everything that's said about him, everything that he

does, everything that he teaches, all the miracles that he performs. Oh, yes, these shepherds would know the truth about him. They'd point right back to this humility in a manger and to this sign. And they'd say it's all true.

The sign to the shepherds also provided another sign of confirmation to Mary. As they showed up at her doorstep, it's a confirmation to her as well. One commentator wrote this, "This is a paradoxical sign since the promised Messiah is to be found in lowly conditions, but it brings the shepherds to the manger so that they in turn act as a confirmatory sign to Mary." Interesting, isn't it? How God works all those things together, weaves them together. Look at verse 17, "When they saw it," when they saw the sign of the baby lying in a manger, "they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child."

Look, right here, in this birthing room, this is the very first believing fellowship in the presence of Jesus Christ. And their fellowship is in the truth. They shared. They told. They revealed, passing on what had been told them concerning this

child. The content of the shepherds' report, what they told everyone, it's actually not recorded in that verse, is it?

Luke has already told us what the shepherds said, verses 10-14. The shepherds told all of them about the angel of the Lords suddenly standing beside them in the camp. They told about the glory of the Lord shining around them. The shepherds told them about their terror, and then that calming command of the Lord, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy," as you can see there written, "that shall be for all the people. For unto you born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." There he is. There's the baby before them, wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger, just as the angels had said.

And so the shepherds continued their tale, telling them about the multitude of the heavenly host who joined the angel of the Lord standing beside him and along with them that night in the fields, angelic host said, "Glory to God in the highest, on

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earth peace to those with whom he is pleased!" Summarizing all that in verse 15 with this statement: they made known the saying, the happening, the event, what had been told to them concerning this child. The emphasis there is on the message. The emphasis there is on the exactitude of their testimony.

That is to say, the shepherds reported what they had seen, no more and no less. They're good witnesses here. They're providing a firsthand account and they didn't change their story in any way. They didn't embellish it. They didn't need to. And they didn't diminish it, they dare not! They simply passed on what they heard, what they saw, what they experienced. The emphasis here is on the faithfulness of their testimony. Utter truthfulness. Passing on only what they had seen, only what they had heard, only what they had experienced in the fields.

And listen, folks, that's our job, too. That is the role of a witness, to tell the truth about what you've seen and heard and experienced. If God was the first evangelist, well, then these shepherds, they have become the first human evangelists and they become our model. The first witnesses here of the

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Gospel to the holy family. It was that message that became the basis of the first believing fellowship, right there in the presence of Jesus, the Savior. It's the same message. That's the basis of our fellowship to this very day, isn't it?

Notice the very end of verse 17. "The shepherds made known what had been told them concerning this child." They made known what had been told them concerning this child, not their son. They made known to them concerning what had been told them about their baby. This child, they're pointing to the baby and talking about this child. Now, if it were only Mary and Joseph and Jesus in the room, this would seem a rather cold and distant way to refer to someone's baby.

But the wording in verse 17, and also what we're told in verse 18, it indicates that others are present here in the room, in addition to the shepherds, the parents and baby Jesus. It makes sense in their search for the baby, the shepherds had been knocking on doors around the neighborhood. They've been attracting attention. No doubt the shepherds' report spread around Bethlehem fairly rapidly as it does in a small town,

especially as it was fueled by their attitudes of excitement and zeal and obvious joy. These guys are lit up. And it's the middle of the night.

Brings us to a third point here. We've seen the shepherds' journey, we've seen their discovery, they sought the sign, they found the baby. Now, third point, the diversity. The diversity, responding to the Savior. Two different responses in verses 18 and 19. And it's followed by the effect of the shepherds, or the effect on the shepherds basically, in verse 20. Let's read it there, "And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them, but Mary treasured up all these things pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them."

There are three people, or you might say three groups of people here. There's all who heard, there's Mary, and then there's the shepherds. Also, three different responses recorded here. There's wonder, there's treasuring and pondering, and then there's glorifying and praising. Let's take those one at a time.

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First group of people, those who heard. We don't know exactly who they are. Obviously, Mary and Joseph are there, so they're a part of that group, but there are others, as well. No mention of whether or not they embraced the shepherds' report, believed it, but we do know from their reaction, it's a diverse audience. Some may have been believers, others not. The verb, wondered, there is the verb *thaumazo*. It can be translated amazed, or even disturbed, but they listened to the shepherds' report and as they, as these men describe the angel of the Lord, as they describe the glory of the Lord, this host of, this heavenly army, who wouldn't be amazed at that? Who would not find that amazing? Something to marvel at, this report. So those who heard the shepherds' report, they were astonished. They were amazed, marveling at what they heard, but, get this, amazement is not the same thing as faith.

Let me show you what I mean. Turn over just a couple pages to Luke 4:22, Luke 4:22, because this verb, *thaumazo*, it shows up there as well. After Jesus, after he read to the people Isaiah 61 verses 1 and 2. After he read that to the people in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, after he told about its fulfillment in himself, it says that, "All spoke well of him

and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth and they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

So far so good, right? Now look down at verse 28. As soon as they heard some convicting words, words they didn't like, "All in the synagogue were filled with wrath." That is they were absolutely enraged at this guy. Who does he think he is? They rose up, drove him out of the town, brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built so they could throw him down the cliff. Huh. Marveling one minute, enraged and ready to commit murder only a few minutes later. It just shows you *thaumazo* isn't necessarily talking about genuine saving faith.

Sometimes it does accompany genuine faith. Look over, now, just a few more pages over at Luke 8:22. Luke 8:22. It's been another tiring day in Jesus' ministry, he's teaching, preaching, healing, his disciples and he are looking to get away and they find a boat on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Look at verse 22 of Chapter 8, "One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and said to them, 'Let's go across to the other side of the Lake.' And so they set out, and as they sailed, he fell asleep."

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Just another sign of his humanity there. "And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. They went and woke him, saying, 'Master, Master, we're perishing!' And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' And they were afraid," and here it is again, "and they marveled, saying to one another, 'Who then is this that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'"

He's sleeping in the back of the boat, his humanity, right? He tells the winds and the waves and the sea, "Be still." Something more than just humanity in that person, right? Who is this? They marveled. These are disciples, right? Disciples marveling, which for most of them was in close connection in accompaniment with genuine faith. But, listen, it doesn't guarantee it, does it? Because who else was there? Judas was in the boat, too. Luke 11, Jesus cast out a demon. And all the people that were there marveled, but some of those who marveled at the miracle, nevertheless attributed the power that Jesus displayed to Satan, to Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Boy, you

can marvel on the one hand and then get absolutely cynical, jaded.

One more I want to show you in Luke 9:43. Just another fascinating demonstration of Jesus' power, particularly his authority in the demonic realm. You may remember Jesus cast out a demon of a little boy and then gave the boy back to his father. Luke 9:43, Luke records this, "All were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling," there's the word, "at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let these words sink into your ears, the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.'" That is to say, don't be fooled by the external expressions of amazement and wonder and even affirmation. Jesus predicted, these people, they're about to kill me.

On that note, turn to one final passage before we finish up in Luke 2. Turn to the end of Luke's Gospel to Luke 19:38. You know, keep in mind all these Luke references. We get to go through them together. Isn't that cool? I am so looking forward to that. And well, I'm doing it, we're doing it right now. We're

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going through Luke's Gospel, it's really cool. So, Luke 19, this records Jesus triumphal entry. At the end of his ministry as he rides into Jerusalem, he's there to be presented as their king.

And if you'll notice starting in verse 36, Jesus is riding on a donkey's colt, which is symbolic of royalty and, "as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near, already on the way down the Mount of Olives. The whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'" Hey, you notice anything familiar about that last sentence? Let me read it again. "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." Where do those terms come from?

Turn back to Luke 2, verse 14, the origin of that concept and even that marveling. The origin of the sentence though, quoted by the celebrating crowds, those, those words come directly from the praise of the angelic host as they joined the angel of the Lord in the presence of the watching shepherds,

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they praised God saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Folks, the shepherds' report spread. Those who heard, who marveled in astonishment, they eventually hailed Jesus as king.

And they used this verse, "Glory to God in the highest. Peace." Get this, though, within a week, those same people who heard, who marveled, who were amazed, who hailed, who vowed their allegiance, loyalty, and worship. They demanded his execution. Now that's something to truly marvel about, that's something truly amazing, that's something frighteningly astonishing; external affirmation, verbal, even you might call it flattery. Don't be fooled, amazement doesn't necessarily equate to saving faith.

Let's look at a couple of responses that do indicate genuine faith, starting with Mary's in verse 19. She's been the example all along. I love it that Luke pulls her out. I mean how could he not, right? But I love that Luke pulls her out and focuses our attention on this young girl. She is such a model of

faith. It says there in verse 19, "Mary treasured up all these things pondering them in her heart."

Grammatically here, Mary is set in contrast to the marveling onlookers. There, there are those who heard, those who wondered, but Mary. The word treasured is an intensified form of the word to keep watch over, to guard. Also, translated in some contexts to hold in reserve or to preserve for oneself. So, Mary was holding onto everything. She's gathering everything in. She's keeping it. She's collecting it. Ever since Gabriel made that first private visit to her in her kitchen there in Nazareth, she's been treasuring everything since. She's gathering it all together, she's thinking about it. It could start, really, in Gabriel's visit to her there in her home in Nazareth.

Mary treasured the fulfillment in her own self of Isaiah 7:14. That verse said, just to remind you, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Emmanuel." And then in Luke 1:31, there's a parallel. Gabriel told her, "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a

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son, and you shall call his name Jesus." Mary treasured that reality. She gathered that in. She's trying to make sense of all this. This is happening pretty fast for her. She treasured the truth that Gabriel revealed about her son. "He will be great, he will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." The child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. Wow!

Mary treasured in her heart what she heard in the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth when she went to visit them. She saw Elizabeth's greeting, the fact that she's pregnant, this older woman beyond childbearing years, barren all her life, pregnant. She's, what in the world? She hears Elizabeth's greeting. She hears the words of her own song prompted by the Holy Spirit. She hears the words of Zechariah's prophecy. She watched there the miracle of John's birth, the forerunner to the Messiah in her own womb before she returns home to Nazareth.

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And now, this, she's on this journey, taken, gets married to Joseph in a public ceremony, they take off down to Bethlehem, and now she's given birth and now these shepherds show up. Whoa! This is a lot! She took all of that, took it all in. She's gathering, she's collecting and now she's quietly pondering. She's thinking carefully about all of it. She's trying to draw conclusions to put together the pieces, connect the dots of everything that she has seen, and heard, and experienced. And again, note the contrast to the wondering, marveling onlookers.

According to one commentator, the verb tenses that are translated, the wonder of many, it was a transient emotion using the aorist tense. But this recollecting and brooding of Mary was an abiding habit. The tense was in perfect tense here. They were there to see a spectacle. Mary was inclined to worship. For Mary, she needed time to think, time to reflect, to understand the significance, to see the connections. She wasn't content with merely a superficial display. She wasn't content to have just a surface understanding satisfied with the impression that all this left on her senses. She wanted to get to the heart of it. She wanted to get to the heart of the meaning to accurately

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comprehend exactly what God was doing by exactly what God had said. That is the heart right there, folks, of true belief.

Look, we're not all the same personality, the same temperament. We're not all the same in intellectual strength or, or interest, but all true believers, they want to know God. Salvation isn't just about escape from sins and escape from the judgment of hell. Salvation, all of that just is a precursor to knowing God. Do we want to know him? That's the heart of true believers right there. We're not content to let the words pass by. We're not content to be intellectually stimulated, to enjoy the tickling of words as they pass through our ears, mildly stimulated intellects. All of that bypassing the understating, no. We're going to grab those things, we're going to hold onto them, we're going to look at them carefully.

True believers want to worship their God and they want to worship in spirit and in truth. For true believers, they want to discern the meaning, they want to know the truth. They want to know the true truth. That's how they order their lives, too. That's how true believers prioritize things. That's what causes

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them to stop and to wonder. That causes them to be careful about making snap judgments. They want to be clear about the facts that they have gathered. They want to be clear and careful about establishing and corroborating and combining and then drawing conclusions. Mary, she's not simply astonished. In fact, it doesn't even say she's astonished at all. It's almost as if this doesn't even come as a surprise to her. She's not swept away in superficial emotion. She's quietly contemplative. She's filled with a holy awe.

Finally, let's look at another result of believing response, the marks of genuine faith. They have been manifest all through this story in the shepherds. These guys are showing true believing hearts. And in verse 20, we see the result of their faith, which is joy-filled worship. The shepherds heard the announcement, the good news of great joy, and they believed it. How do we know that? Well, they left the sheep. They took off. They didn't have all their travel plans worked out. They didn't have their hotels booked. They didn't have all that stuff done. They just left. They were hasty about it, even you might say unwise. Who's taking after, who's taking care of the sheep? Come on. They just left.

They conducted an intensive search when they got there. It required effort and diligence, disrupting people. It upset their own comfort. It denied them sleep, changed their plans. Well, that's okay, that's fine. They didn't seem to mind at all. When they found what they were looking for, when they confirmed the sign, they went and did what other believers do, they shared the report, they witnessed the good news. They believed God. They told others his word. They were faithful to the message. They were truthful in their proclamation and it became, they became good witnesses. The first human witnesses to this Gospel revealed in front of them in Jesus Christ. And that became the basis of this fellowship among these believers.

And their faith is manifest again here in verse 20. What they saw that night was not manifestly, obviously a Savior, Christ the Lord. They simply saw a baby, helpless, dependent on its mother, swaddled peaceful, lying in an animal's feeding trough. But you know what? In spite of that, they believed. Based on the revelation of God, that what he said would actually come to pass, that that baby lying there looking helpless, looking poor, in poverty, that that baby was God himself, Christ

the Lord. Their eyes told them it's just a human baby. Faith taught them to take God at his word, to trust that the baby is the Savior of the world. And how do we know that they believed the sign? Because they returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

So, the account ends as it began. It began in verse 14 with angelic worship. It ends here with human worship. The angels and the men have joined together in worship. And as we said, they responded to the obligation, the demand that was on them by this incredible gift of grace. But their worship didn't feel like duty. It didn't feel like an obligation. Their duty was a delight. It was driven by deep desire. They worship, you know why? Because they wanted to.

The account ends as it began in another way as well. In verse 15, the angels departed going back to heaven. Here in verse 20, the shepherds also depart going back to their flocks and fields. At the end of the day, the worshippers, both the angelic and the human, they both go back to work. Monday is

coming tomorrow, isn't it? We gotta go back to work. They continued doing what they're created to do.

But as they return to their jobs, as they return to their roles, to their regular duties, angels and men who believe. They are filled with praise and glory to God. They are fueled by joy, by heartfelt worship. The verbs there, glorifying and praising, both present tense, indicates continuousness of their worship. They continued to reflect on what had been told to them. That's what they took back into the field as they watched the sheep. They're still thinking about it. They're still meditating and it continued to produce this heart of worship.

In all of the diversity of the response to the birth of Jesus Christ, to the Gospel, all the reactions to, "the good news of great joy which is for all people," the diversity of response and reaction to that news, that historical facts, you know what? It really boils down to just two responses. There are many who reject and a few who believe.

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What response will you have? Even among those who marvel, demonstrating astonishment, amazement, and wonder, in the end will the Lord find in them a heart of faith? There are a few who, like Mary, ponder and contemplate. A few who think and meditate, a few who give glory to God and praise him and thank him. And for those who devote their attention to the shepherds' report in a heart of faith, they will come out the other side in wonder, and love, and praise. They will go back into the world, like these shepherds went back to their flocks, to engage with family and friends, to engage with work and activity. Not caring as much about the work, not caring as much about making money, not caring as much about the project or the thing that's due; they care mostly about looking for opportunities to share this joy with other people. Because after all, what else is there? What are we living for? What are we breathing for, except to give glory and praise to God? That's what marks a heart of genuine faith.

Let's pray. Father, we give thanks to you once again with the breath that you've given us in our lungs, with the tongues you've given us in our mouths, we give praise and honor and glory to you. You are worthy of all worship and praise, all

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might and glory and power and honor and we join the angels as they've called us to worship. We join them in this obligation, this duty.

And for us believers, we join them in this desire to worship you. Thank you so much for the message we've received this morning from your word. Thank you for the shepherds' example. Thank you for dear Mary, her heart of faith. She's so instructive to us, such an example, such a model of how we ought to live our lives and prioritize our thinking. We give all praise, worship to you and ask that you would glorify your son, Jesus Christ through us, through our words, through our example this season as we share the Gospel with people. In Jesus' name. Amen.