

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:  
Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus  
Swift Creek Baptist Church, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
Wednesday, December 13, 2023

Luke 2:17-20 “Ways to Observe Christmas”      Read vv.8-20 to give the context.

Intro. I need not inform you that so often Christmas is observed by so many people in the wrong way. Some take advantage of the holiday by engaging in selfish gratification, such as getting drunk, gluttony or engaging in some other sinful activity. Many major on Santa Claus and materialistic gratification. And even though many of us Christians want to remember the true meaning of Christmas, we often fail to achieve our desire. We are so busy going to parties, special events, buying Christmas presents, and even doing church related activities that we lose a true sense of what Christmas is all about.

So tonight I want us to think back to the first Christmas night. I want us to catch the excitement and wonder of the birth of Jesus. And from the activity of those involved in the nativity, I believe we can follow their example, and observe Christmas in a more meaningful and appropriate way. So tonight, I want to set before you 4 ways to observe Christmas that will give and receive spiritual blessings this Christmas season.

First, we should observe Christmas:

## I. BY WITNESSING TO OTHERS ABOUT CHRIST

God used some humble shepherds to be the first human witnesses that prophecy had been fulfilled and the Messiah had been born. They celebrated Christmas by telling others about the Lord. To what purpose were angels sent, if the message was not to be spread abroad? So let’s consider together:

A. The Example of the Shepherds – In v.17 we read of the shepherds, “Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.” The shepherds were probably the first to visit baby Jesus. After they had seen the Christ child, they began to tell others of their marvelous discovery that the Messiah had been born. It is not clear to what extent they did this. But the implication in v.18 that “all” that heard it wondered or marveled points in the direction that the shepherds certainly told more than just Mary and Joseph. At the very least they told the group of people who had gathered to see the baby. Furthermore, the language of v.20 seems to suggest that surely they also shared their praises with others as they returned to the fields, including any shepherds that remained with the flocks. And as you compare Luke 1:1-2, I wonder if Luke interviewed any of these shepherds? It is quite possible that some of the young shepherds could have been alive some 50-60 years later.<sup>1</sup> It would have been some experience to hear their eyewitness account!

Their witness was no doubt prompted by their excitement. Their discovery was second to none. They had witnessed the simple and the sublime. What could be more simple and humble than a peasant couple with a newborn baby in a stable? And yet they had also seen angels. They discovered the truth of what the angels had spoken, for their eyes had witnessed the truth of the prophecy of the angels. They had said in v.12, “And this will be the sign to you: You will find a

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke could have interviewed people during his trip with Paul to Jerusalem in Acts 21.

Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” They did indeed find a babe lying in a manger, which was a very unusual place to find a baby! That was a sign indeed! Surely this strengthen their faith that this babe is the Messiah for whom Israel had long been waiting.

Do you remember how excited you were when you first discovered the truth of the Gospel and became a believer? [Apply].

So we not only see the example of the shepherds to bear witness of what they had seen and heard, but also:

B. Our Need to Witness - Have we not also something to relate which demands that we also bear witness of Christ? Though we have not seen angels, we have the written testimony of the shepherds who did. What they learned was revealed from heaven. And what we know has been revealed to us through God’s holy Word. Any person who receives a revelation from God is duty bound to declare its truth to others. In Acts 4:20 the apostles said, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” In Rev. 22:17 we read, “And let him that hears say, Come.” Can we be any less sure that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world? We even have more evidence than the shepherds had. We can read of hundreds of fulfillments of prophecy in the life of Christ. And we also have the record of the matchless love of Christ. Not only was He willing to sacrifice the glory and comforts of heaven to endure the pain and humility of childbirth, but we know that He was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, by dying on the cross for our sins. If the amazing story of the birth of Jesus caused the shepherds to be witnesses, how much more should the amazing sacrificial love of Christ on the cross cause *us* to be witnesses!

After all, we know more than the shepherds! In addition to the Scriptures, we can say from our own experience that Jesus Christ is real. When we were born again by the Spirit of God, Christ was in a sense born in our hearts. We sense His presence and working in our lives. The effectiveness of the proclamation of the shepherds was the fact that they had experienced seeing Christ for themselves. And when we can speak from both the Bible *and* experience, then we can have great effectiveness.

Notice also to whom it was that God entrusted this holy task of proclaiming the good news. God did not send His angels to the learned Rabbis. Instead, it was to unlearned, lowly shepherds that the message was sent. But God enabled them through the power of the revelation to spread the good news. It is true that an uneducated brother is not fit for *all* work, but he is quite able to tell of what he has seen, heard, and experienced.

If you have sensed the presence of Jesus in your life, and if you have received truth as from the Lord, felt its tremendous power, then you can tell of what you know, even though that knowledge is limited. Let us tell our family, friends, and others that we know of the coming of Jesus into the world, and that He came to save all men from their sin, if we will only repent of our sins and trust in Him. Let us tell our children and grandchildren the true meaning of Christmas. At family Christmas gatherings consider sharing stories with one another of what Christmas means to you.

So let us observe Christmas by looking for opportunities to tell others about Jesus. A second way we can observe Christmas is:

## II. BY HOLY WONDER AND ADORATION

In v.18 we read, “And all those who heard it marveled (*thaumazo*)<sup>2</sup> at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” They realized they had just experienced something absolutely wonderful and amazing. So from the example of these people, we see that we also should contemplate the wonders of this Christmas story about Christ. There should be private times of meditation. During our special Christmas services, you should reflect upon the wonder of what Christmas is all about. Let your soul lose itself in wonder at what Christ has done for us.

In particular, with thoughtful consideration you can truly marvel at:

A. His Birth and Incarnation - Do you consider the birth of Christ to be wonderful? There have been billions of babies born, so why should we marvel at *this* birth? This birth was unique indeed. The shepherds marveled at the angels and fulfilled prophecy. They no doubt wondered at the thought that God’s promise of the Messiah had finally been fulfilled. But I doubt that they fully understood that the baby was God incarnate! How could God become a baby!

Yet *we* have more reason to marvel, for we fully understand that God did indeed become incarnate in human flesh. That is the greatest wonder to me, of all that happened that night.

We should also wonder at:

B. His Great Love - That God should consider sinful man, and instead of sweeping him away with destruction, He should instead devise a wonderful plan for his redemption, and that He should Himself undertake to be man’s Redeemer is indeed marvelous! It is hard to believe that God would humble Himself to become a baby, but it is even more amazing that God would lovingly humble Himself to suffer and die on a cross for our salvation!

So this Christmas season I encourage you to take some time and reflect upon all the reasons why we should be filled with wonder at the coming and birth of Christ. Don’t allow yourself to get so busy that you do not have time to engage in wonder and admiration of Christ.

Another way we can observe Christmas is to:

## III. PONDER AND PRESERVE THE TRUTHS OF CHRIST

Mary did more than wonder. She also pondered. V.19 says, “But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” She exercised 3 parts of her being: her memory - she kept (*suntereo*) and retained all these things in her memory; her affections - she kept them in her heart; her intellect - she pondered them. Let’s consider each of these exercises in detail. From her example, you should:

A. Exercise Your Memory – “Mary kept all these things....” She was treasuring, carefully storing away, all these things that she had seen and heard. Years later she could recall every detail of what happened at the time of the birth of her Son. Even so we are to make a special point to remember our Lord Jesus. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He commanded us to do it in remembrance of Him. He wants us to remember Him and what He has done for us. And even though He did not command us to observe Christmas once a year, it can be useful in reminding us of the wonder of the incarnation.

---

<sup>2</sup> this is a favorite term of Luke and is found 13 times in his gospel and five times in the book of Acts (Stein).

But in Mary's example, she purposely sought to remember the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. No doubt in later years Mary was able to tell many people of these events, perhaps including Luke, the author of this gospel. But we cannot benefit from remembering what we do not commit to memory. What mother doesn't remember special events relating to her child! To this day I remember details of Andrews first birthday party, including how he got cake all over his face! So what you learn about Christ, and what you have experienced in your relationship with Christ, commit it to memory. The Psalmist said, "Your word I have hidden in my heart..." (119:11). Don't let the truths go in one ear and out the other.

B. Exercise Your Intellect – Notice that Mary *pondered* these things.<sup>3</sup> That word (*sumballo*) means to confer with one's self, to piece together in your mind what something means. Mary would go over each detail of what she had seen and heard, the announcement of the angel Gabriel months before, her miraculous conception, the report of the shepherds and so much more. Did she ponder God's providence in arranging the birth of Jesus to take place in Bethlehem? No doubt she recognized her child's divine calling and destiny; exactly what that entailed was not known to her.

Even so, let your intellect be exercised concerning the Lord Jesus. Turn over and over by meditation what you read about His birth, and how God would save us from our sins through Jesus.

C. Exercise Your Affections - Mary pondered these things *in her heart*. Her heart was moved by what she saw. Her heart and affections were very active toward the Lord Jesus. Many times Mary must have held the Lord Jesus in her arms, pondering what all of these events meant. She must have wondered what Jesus would do when He became a man. But she did more. She held Him with love in her heart. She was devoted to Christ, even in the darkest days of His crucifixion. She was one of the few followers of Christ that followed Him all the way to the cross.

Is this true of you this Christmas season and all the year? As you reflect upon the coming and mission of Jesus, does this provoke love in your heart for Jesus?

Finally, another way we should observe Christmas is to:

#### IV. GLORIFY AND PRAISE GOD

That is what the shepherds did in v.20, "Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen...." And that is how we should respond to the amazing story of Christmas as well. We should also worship and praise God as part of our Christmas celebration. I wonder how many millions of people will celebrate Christmas without attending even one worship service at Christmas?

Notice with me 2 truths about this wonderful work of worshipping and praising our Savior:

A. The Place of this Work - Notice that the shepherds glorified and praised God as they returned. Returned to what? Returned to their business to look after the lambs and sheep again. You do not need to quit your job and become a preacher to glorify God with your life and lips. We should glorify and praise God, not just at church, but elsewhere as well.

Notice furthermore:

---

<sup>3</sup> Likewise, we read in v.51 what happened after the body Jesus was found in the temple instructing others, "His mother kept all these things in her heart."

B. The Means of Glorifying God - They glorified God by *praising* Him. Psa. 50:23 says, “Whoever offers praise glorifies Me....”<sup>4</sup> They followed the example of the angels, as we see in vv.13-14. I wonder how they went about praising and glorifying God? Did they do some good, old-fashioned Baptist shouting? Did they do a “holy hop” on the way back! Did they sing praises? Singing is indeed one way to praise the Lord.

I hope you will come to our Christmas services and just sing from your heart in praise to the Lord. Brighten your day with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing more and murmur less, sing more and slander less, sing more and mourn less.

What was the subject of their praise? They praised God for what they had seen and heard. They were privileged to hear a message from the angels! Have you praised God for what *you* have heard? What a wonderful gospel we have all heard. God loves us, and has sent His Son into the world to die for our sins, so that we all can be forgiven. All we have to do is to repent of our sins and trust in Him alone for our salvation.

Also, to be more specific, they praise God that what they had seen was in agreement with what they had heard. Do you see that in the last of v.20, “...praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.” Have you not found in your own experience that the gospel is true, just as the Bible says? Jesus said He would give you peace. Haven’t you enjoyed it? He said that you should have joy, and comfort, and eternal life through believing in Him. Haven’t you experienced all of this? Haven’t you experienced a changed life, just as the Bible promises in 2 Cor. 5:17? Haven’t you experienced His saving grace, His goodness, His providential care, and so much more? Then praise Him!

Conclusion: So this Christmas season, I hope you will observe Christmas by witnessing to others, engaging in wonder and adoration, pondering and preserving the truths about Christ, and praising God. God has done so much for us; we can sure do these things for Him.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978); H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of Luke* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Christmas Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976 reprint), 31-42 [25G.41]; Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary: Luke* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1988). Other sources may be listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

#### ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The “live” recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author’s own words. To obtain an audio or video recording of this message, go to [www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker](http://www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker). Dr. Felker’s email address is [S+Felker&2@aol.com](mailto:S+Felker&2@aol.com) (remove signs).

---

<sup>4</sup> Notice the Hebrew poetic parallelism of Ps 86:12, “I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And I will glorify Your name forevermore.”