

“Responding to Christ’s Birth”

Luke 2:8-18

(Preached at Trinity – Christmas Service – December 22, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. This Wednesday is Christmas Day. All of us would admit that Christmas is a wonderful season. The well-known Christmas song made popular by Andy Williams says it well:
*It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you be of good cheer
It's the most wonderful time of the year*
2. We’ve been in the Christmas season for several weeks. For most it is a season for returning to family traditions and storing up new memories. It is full of images of garland and bows, of twinkling lights and Christmas desserts; of family gatherings to exchange gifts.
3. The retail world puts its own significance upon the Christmas season. They’ve been months preparing for it. Most retailers are dependent upon the Christmas season to end the year in the black. In fact, the first Friday after Thanksgiving is called Black Friday, the day that carries the retailer into profitability.
4. Is this all Christmas is? What is the significance of this holiday?
Is it more than “kids jingle belling and everyone telling you be of good cheer?”
As Christians we know it is infinitely greater. It is the celebration of the birth of Christ the Savior. But there is more to consider.
The question I want to set before us this morning is: What is the proper response to the birth of Christ?
5. Most people know that Christmas has something to do with the birth of Christ. But for most it is just a story—a story with shepherds and wisemen. But this story is like none other. This is the story of a person that demands a response.
What is the proper response to the Christmas story?
 - I. Few give a proper response
 - A. Most simply ignore His birth. They don’t deny it. They just ignore it.
 1. The celebration of the birth of Christ is an uncomfortable reality for many.
 - a. Most much prefer to make it a secular holiday.
 - b. Rather than singing hymns that turn our eyes to Christ they prefer the endless secular songs that have intruded into the holiday.
 2. It is easier to dismiss Christ than to make room for Him in their otherwise crowded lives. It reminds us of the birth narrative:
Luke 2:7 NAU - "there was no room for them in the inn."
 3. When Jesus was born He was cast aside. There was no room for Him, and many continue maintain this posture today. He is simply unwelcomed. Have you made room for Him, or is He being kept in the outer part of your heart? Somewhere in the stable.

- B. For others, just ignoring the birth of Christ is not sufficient. Jesus must be forcefully removed. They also don't deny His birth. But they hate the thought of it.
1. Jesus is highly offensive to them. This is why many retailers strive to avoid offence by instructing their employes to announce, "Happy Holidays."
 2. Most cannot tolerate Christ because He is far too threatening. This is plainly portrayed in the Biblical text.
 - a. King Herod was fearful of a rival King. His solution was simple. Find Him and put Him to death!
Matthew 2:3 NAS - "And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."
Matthew 2:16 NAS - "Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi."
 - b. The Scribes and Pharisees also despised His birth and maintained a solution like the one Herod attempted—destroy Him. This was particularly true when Jesus began to clearly announce His deity.
John 5:18 NAS - "For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."
 - c. Ultimately, all of Jerusalem joined together do rid themselves of Christ.
John 19:15 NAS - "They therefore cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!"
 - d. This is the universal response to the birth of Christ. He WILL NOT reign over us!
Psalms 2:1-3 NAS - "Why are the nations in an uproar, And the peoples devising a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed: ³ "Let us tear their fetters apart, And cast away their cords from us!"

II. So, what is the proper response?

- A. The One who was born in lowly conditions was first announced to the lowly
 1. The position of a shepherd was considered one of the lowliest.
 - a. We can see this with David. He was the youngest brother and was relegated to caring for the sheep.
1 Samuel 17:14-15 NAU - "David was the youngest. Now the three oldest followed Saul, ¹⁵ but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's flock at Bethlehem."
 When Samuel came to seek God's anointed and called forth the sons of Jesse David wasn't even present.

- b. We can also see with Moses. For 40 years God humbled him as he cared for the sheep of his father-in-law.
Numbers 12:3 NAU - "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."
- c. At the time of Christ's birth the only people lower than shepherds were lepers. They were normally uneducated and were viewed as unreliable and dishonest. They were not allowed to testify in court. And yet, God chose these men to be His witnesses.
2. The shepherds were in the field caring for their flock. It was nighttime and all was quiet.
Luke 2:8 NAU - "In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night."
- a. Often at night several shepherds would bring their flocks together into one fold and then in the morning they would separate their flocks. The sheep recognized the voice of their shepherd.
Remember the words of our Savior:
John 10:27 NAS - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"
- b. On this evening they were gathered together as usual and something amazing happened. Suddenly there was angel standing before them and was enshrouded by blinding light. The shepherds were terrified. Never had they ever seen such a sight.
Luke 2:9 NAU - "And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened."
- c. The angel spoke and encouraged them not to be afraid. He had come to bring them good news.
Luke 2:10-11 NAU - "But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."
- d. The message of the angel was indeed good news. He announced that the long-awaited Messiah had been born. The Savior had arrived.
- e. Suddenly, there was an enumerable host of angels singing forth the praise of God.
Luke 2:13-14 NAU - "And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased."

- B. Their first response was that of belief. They responded in faith.
1. Notice the text doesn't say:
 "let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see **IF** this thing has happened."
 They wanted to go and see firsthand what God has announced to them.
Luke 2:15 NAU - "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."
 2. The angel has announced the good news of the birth of the Savior. They knew He was *their* Savior and they went to meet Him. There was no hesitation. The text implies they left their sheep and immediately went to see Christ the Savior. Regarding the care of the sheep, they found some solution. Nothing was to keep them from running to meet the Christ.
 3. Does this Christmas story announce the birth of YOUR Savior? Have you trusted Him as your Savior?
 Kent Hughes writes: "It is not enough to hear about Jesus. It is not enough to peak in the manger and say, 'Oh, how nice. What a lovely scene. It gives me such good feelings.' The truth is, even if Christ were born in Bethlehem a thousand times but not within you, you would be eternally lost. The Christ who was born into the world must be born in your heart."¹
- C. Second, they announced what they had heard about the birth. They couldn't keep it to themselves. They had to share the good news they had received.
1. They didn't keep it secret. It was the most significant thing that had ever happened to them. They told Mary and Joseph and many others. Their testimony had a profound effect upon those who heard them.
Luke 2:18 NAU - "And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds."
 2. Those who have received the good news of the Gospel are to share the good news of the Gospel.
 Does this describe your response to the birth of Christ?
- D. Finally, their hearts were filled with praise
Luke 2:20 NAU - "The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen"
1. They heard the announcement of the angel and they saw the heavenly host glorifying God.
 2. But this isn't all that they saw.
 - a. On one hand the birth of God incarnate was like every other human birth. Mary went into labor and delivered a baby. Upon birth He would have cried like every other baby. The baby was swaddled and placed carefully in the crib – which in this case was a feed trough. The shepherds saw a baby. If you would have been there, you would have seen a baby.
 For most this is all they see. This is all Christmas means to them—the birth of a baby. It's the nativity scene—a baby surrounded by shepherds and animals and wisemen.

¹ Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word, Luke*. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), page 89.

- b. But is this all you see?
 Yes, for most Jesus was ordinary and unappealing.
Isaiah 53:2 NAU - "He has no *state*ly form or majesty
 That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that
 we should be attracted to Him."
 But for those with eyes to see Jesus exceeded all expectations. The
 shepherds saw Him through the eyes of faith.
 John described Him:
John 1:14 NAU - "And the Word became flesh, and
 dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the
 only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."
- c. When Jesus was brought to Jerusalem Simeon also looked upon
 Him through the eyes of faith and declared:
Luke 2:29-30 NAU - "Now Lord, You are releasing Your
 bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; ³⁰
 For my eyes have seen Your salvation,"
- d. Have you seen anything in Christ that has captivated your heart
 and mind? Has He become your delight of delights?
- 3 The shepherds then returned praising God for they had seen the Savior
 Is your life filled with praise for the Savior?

Conclusion:

1. How do you look upon the birth of Christ?
 Do you know Him? Has this season filled your heart with joy?
 Do the words of Isaac Watts strike a chord within you?
 Joy to the world, the Lord is come
 Let earth receive her King
 Let every heart prepare Him room
 And Heaven and nature sing
 And Heaven and nature sing
 And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing
 Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
 Let men their songs employ
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
 Repeat the sounding joy
 Repeat the sounding joy
 Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy
2. Christmas is a reminder of God's eternal redemptive purpose for mankind.
 - a. God set His love upon a multitude He has determined to adopt and call His own.
 He sent forth His Son as Redeemer—to save His people from their sins.
 - b. But God's purpose went beyond a birth.
 Christmas must make way for Easter. Jesus died and was raised again.
 He is no longer a baby in a manger - He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings
 He will return to judge the world.
3. As you consider His first advent don't forget to ponder the second.
 He's coming back. Press on in patience and courage as you wait for Him in hope.