

The Shepherds' Report, Part 1

Luke 2:15-20

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 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 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.

And in this account, we see bookended on either side we see both angels and men have joined to 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?

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 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 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, 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 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 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. 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.

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 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.

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. They’re eager, they’re willing to give glory to God in the highest. That’s what we’re going to observe today.

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 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, born for them personally. Nothing was more important. 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 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 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,

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right? Those who put forth the effort energized by faith, those are the ones who gain the reward.