

The Shepherds' Report, Part 2

Luke 2:15-20

This baby in a manger, it's a confirmation of the shepherds. 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, 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 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 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 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.

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 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. 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." 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. 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. 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? 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, 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 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.

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 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.

And now, this, she's on this journey, 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 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 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 emptiness. 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; 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.

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 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 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

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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.