

## Luke 2:15-20

### Introduction

Christmas has come and gone... So now what? What do we do now – just wait until the anticipation and excitement of next Christmas? Of course, that’s the danger of special days and special seasons. We can attach so much meaning to the day or the season that when the day or the season is over, we lose some of the sense of joy, and wonder, and awe. Christmas is over. And so that begs the question: *now* what? Or maybe we should ask the question like this: “*Jesus has been born*. Now what?”

Luke tells us how Jesus was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger, and then how the angels came and announced to the shepherds the good news of great joy: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord... Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among the children of His good pleasure.” And then verse fifteen begins:

**I. Luke 2:15a** – When the angels went away from them into heaven...

You could say that “Christmas” was over. Imagine the darkness of nighttime out in the fields suddenly transformed by the dazzling light and brilliance of the glory of the Lord! Imagine a multitude of the heavenly host all praising God together and with one voice! And then imagine what it was like when the angels went away from them into heaven. The silence and darkness of nighttime – same as it was before. There is no left over glow in the sky. There are no continuing echo’s of the angel’s voices. There is no longer any sign or evidence of what just happened. The world goes on sleeping, the sheep are there the same as always, and except for the normal night sounds and stars in the sky, all is quiet and dark – same as always. *Now what?*

Well, the *announcement* of the Savior’s birth demands our *response*. The good news that Jesus has been born demands a *response* from us that lasts *all year long*, every year, for the rest of our lives. And for Luke, it’s very important that we see this and understand this. Luke describes for us the *response* of the shepherds (15-17, 20), and the *response* of the bystanders at the house (18), and the *response* of Mary (19; cf. 1:34, 38), and in other places he is very careful to describe for us the *response* of Zechariah (1:18-20), and the *response* of Simeon (2:25-32), and the *response* of Anna (2:36-38). For Luke, the announcement of the birth of the Savior *demand*s our response – a response that lasts all year long. So what should our response be?

**II. Luke 2:15-16** – When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem [Greek: “at once”] 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.

It’s important for us to see that when the shepherds set off for Bethlehem, they weren’t just doing what *they wanted* to do – they were doing what *God expected* of them. The angel said to them: This will be the *sign* for you: *you will find* a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (2:12). God announced the birth of the Savior to the shepherds not simply so that they might *know* of His birth, but so that they might go and *find* Him. And Luke is very careful to tell

us that the shepherds determined to go “*at once*”, *without delay*, and that they went “*with haste*”. And they “*found* Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.”

When the shepherds went to see what the Lord had made known to them, this was the *obedient response* of their *faith*. The shepherds were men of faith. And now Luke holds the shepherds before us as an example for us to follow. It was not enough for the shepherds to know of their Savior’s birth. It was not enough for the shepherds to rejoice in the Savior’s birth. They must *go*, and *find*, and *see* the baby in the manger! And they must do this “at once”, and “with haste”! When it comes to the message of Christmas, the first *obedient response* of *faith* is to go and *see* what the Lord has made known to us – to go “at once” and “with haste”. To gaze upon the Savior... to set Him before our eyes. To *see*, and not just to *hear*. But too often, we’re satisfied with the angelic announcement – after all, that was a pretty big deal... shouldn’t that suffice? We’re satisfied with the hearing of the preaching on Sunday morning. We’re so satisfied with the hearing, that we don’t desire the seeing. We hear His birth preached at Christmas time, and we rejoice. But then we don’t go at once, and with haste, to see Him for ourselves – to set Him before our *own eyes*. ***But faith requires an active initiative and response on our part.*** We must not simply rejoice in the announcement... we must *go* to *see* Him!

“Here is described to us the obedience of the shepherds... They hasten to see Christ. [And so] in the same manner, we know that Christ is held out to us, in order that our hearts may approach him by faith; and our delay in coming admits of no excuse... The shepherds resolved to set out, immediately after the angels had departed... [So] instead of allowing the word of God, as many do, to pass away with the sound, we must take care that it strike its roots deep in us, and manifest its power, as soon as the sound has died away upon our ears... we are required to show the readiness of faith.” (Calvin)

Christ has been held out to us this past Christmas in order that *we*, like the shepherds, may approach him by faith, and without any delay. Of course, we can’t literally go to Bethlehem and see the baby in the manger, but He is “cradled” for us in the Scriptures. And I think that here is *one* very practical way that we can apply the example of the shepherds. To *hear* about the birth of the Savior at Christmas time, and then not to go at once and with haste to seek a true and glorious *vision* of that Savior in the Scriptures is truly a failure to *respond* obediently and in *faith*. To rejoice in the birth of the Savior at Christmas time, and then not to be driven by this rejoicing to the pages of Scripture where this very Savior is made *visible* to our *eyes* is a serious contradiction. If we have truly *heard*, then we should want to *see* for *ourselves*. And so, by setting before us the example of the shepherds, Luke exhorts us to go *at once* and *with haste*, just like they did, to *see* this thing that the Lord has made know to us – to *see* the Savior whose birth has been announced to us at Christmas time. As one way to apply this, I would highly recommend a specific Bible reading plan – especially one that will take you through the entire Bible in a year. (<http://www.esv.org/resources/reading-plans-devotions/> / see especially “Every Day in the Word”) This truly is one of the best “New Years Resolutions” we could ever make.

“When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem [*at once*] 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.” May we do the same! Let us not allow the word of God to pass away with the sound.

Instead, let us take care that it strike its roots deep in us, and manifest its power, as soon as the sound has died away upon our ears. Let us show the readiness of faith! May we be just as zealous and obedient as the Shepherds.

**III. Luke 2:17** – And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

When the shepherds saw Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger, it would have been *easy* for them to wonder if the angels had only been a dream or if they had been just plain wrong! Think about it! The angels have gone away into heaven. Life appears to be the same as it's always been. And there could be *nothing* more *normal* or *mundane* than what the shepherds found in Bethlehem. A house crowded full of people. An infant baby just born to two peasant parents sleeping in a manger. And yet this *was* the “*sign*”, and the shepherds were men of faith in God's Word. And so instead of hiding the reason they had come, or whispering it only to Mary and Joseph, they made it known (at the very least) to all who were in the house. They made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. “An angel has appeared to us, proclaiming to us that this baby—the one laying right there in that feeding trough—is the Savior. He is Christ the Lord.”

Once again, this was just the shepherds' obedient *response* to the announcement of the Savior's birth. What did the angel say to the Shepherds? – “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for *all the people*...” (2:10) God sent the angels to the shepherds because they were devout men of faith, and because they had been looking and waiting for the salvation of Israel. But they were not the only ones who had been waiting! This good news of great joy was not just for them, it was for *all* the people – for all Israel (cf. Luke 1:17, 68, 77). This good news is for all who have ever longed for the Messiah, and for all who ever *will* long for the Messiah – and so you must *tell* this good news to others! God announced the Savior's birth to the shepherds not simply so that they might *know* of His birth... and not simply so that they might go to see Him, but so that they might tell others. And so Luke is very careful to tell us that the shepherds “*made known* the saying that had been told them concerning this child”.

Notice that their job was not necessarily to debate or to convince, but simply to *make known* what they had heard – no matter how improbable it might *seem* to others. Here is the second obedient *response of faith* to the message of Christmas. *If* we have rejoiced in the good news of the Savior's birth (and I know that we have!), then we should remember that this news is for *all* the people. There are others who need to hear. It's really very simple. To hear, and see, and rejoice, but not be ready and willing to tell others is truly a failure to respond *in faith* to the message of Christmas. But by setting before us the example of the shepherds, Luke exhorts us to tell others, and to make known what we have heard concerning Jesus. Here is another wonderful “New Years Resolution” to make in dependence upon God's grace. Who can we tell? Who will we tell this year?

When the shepherds saw the baby lying in a manger, “they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child”. May we do the same! May our *faith show* itself in this same way as we *respond* to the message of Christmas.

**IV. Luke 2:18-19** – And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

When we return to Matthew next week, we will look a little closer at the response of those who “wondered at what the shepherds told them”. For right now, we can just say that it is not *enough* to wonder or be amazed. The *only* response that pleases God is faith. Mary didn’t simply “wonder”. She “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart”. Luke is the only one who says this about Mary, and he says it *twice*. Later on in Luke chapter two, he writes:

✓ Luke 2:51 – And [Jesus] went down with [His mother and father] and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Luke continues to emphasize how we ought to *respond* in faith to the message of Christmas! This time it’s *Mary* who serves as an *example* for us to follow. Just as Mary “treasured” and “pondered”, so also should we. To “treasure” means to store away in the sense of *keeping* and *preserving* something (YLT). So the emphasis is on keeping *instead of losing*, holding on to something *instead of letting go*, or remembering *instead of forgetting*. When Mary treasured up all these things, she was refusing to let go of *anything* that she had seen or heard. On the other hand, to “ponder” means to *think* and to *meditate*. It literally means to *put things together* in our minds. To “ponder” means to seek a *deeper* understanding.

Luke 2:19 (NLT) – But Mary *kept* all these things in her heart and *thought* about them *often*.

Luke 2:19 (TEV) – Mary *remembered* all these things and *thought deeply* about them.

***Faith requires this active initiative on our part.*** And so Luke’s third *response* of faith is to actively bring these things to our minds, and to think deeply about them. By “deep” we don’t necessarily mean complicated or complex. We just mean the mental diligence and energy and effort that we apply to our meditation on the good news of Jesus Christ – our *Savior*. The question is not whether we will think deeply (we all do), but whether we will think deeply on the Savior who was born for us. To *hear* this good news, and to *see* this good news *should* produce in us a longing for an always *deeper* and *fuller apprehension* of the good news – of what God has done for us in Christ. This isn’t just a message that we hear and “get”. This is a message that we hear and keep on “getting” every day for the rest of our lives. And so we must diligently and actively *treasure* the message of the Savior in our minds and hearts... so that we might think deeply about our salvation.

“Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” May we do the same! “If we are wise, it will be the chief employment, and the great object of our life, to consider with attention those works of God which build up our faith.” (Calvin) This year, let us guard against being so caught up in the busyness of our earthly affairs that we have no time to treasure and ponder so great a salvation.

**V. Luke 2:20** – And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

With this fourth *response of faith* to the message of Christmas, we come right back to where the shepherds started when the multitude of the heavenly host was praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest...” And once again, we can be sure that Luke is not just reciting a historical fact. He is purposefully setting the shepherds before us as an example for us to follow.

When the shepherds returned to everyday life in the fields, they took the theme of the angels, and from that day forward they made it their *own* – praising and glorifying God that *unto them* had been *born* a Savior. Now today, we know not just about the Savior’s birth *for us*, but also about His death – for us, and His resurrection – for us, and His ascension – for us, and His present reign – for us, and His future coming again – for us. *Glory* to God in the highest! We have so much *more reason* than the shepherds to glorify and praise God, because we have heard and seen *so much more* than the shepherds. Isn’t it obvious that apart from glorifying and praising God, there can be no true faith? And we’re not just talking about in the church! Luke says that the shepherds “returned” (*to the fields and to the flocks*) glorifying and praising God. And so our whole life should be characterized by this glorifying and praising of God. This is the goal and the climax of *all* our responses to the message of Christmas – *worship*.

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” May we not be any different from the shepherds. For us as a church, *and* as families, *and* as individuals, may this new year truly be full of worship for all that we have seen and heard – for the amazing salvation that God has given to us... *in Jesus Christ*.

### **Conclusion**

Christmas has come and gone. So now what? Let us go and see Him. Let us tell others. Let us treasure and ponder. Let us worship.