

Luke 2:15-20 "A Birth That Can Change Your Life" **

Main Idea: By looking at what the shepherds did in Luke 2:15-20, we discover that Jesus' birth is truly a birth that can change your life. We also learn see four steps involved in a proper response to Jesus' birth.

I. Step #1—The proper response starts with investigation (15).

II. Step #2—The proper response leads to discovery (16).

III. Step #3—The proper response produces a witness (17-19).

IV. Step #4—The proper response results in praise (20).

A television interviewer was walking the streets of Tokyo at Christmas time. Much as in America, Christmas shopping is a big commercial success in Japan. The interviewer stopped one young woman on the sidewalk, and asked, "What is the meaning of Christmas?" Laughing, she responded, "I don't know. Is that the day that Jesus died?"

There was some truth in her answer.

It's sad, yet true. Many today don't know the truth about the birth of Jesus. And many who do know the truth about the facts don't know the significance of those facts, for indeed, when you really come to know the truth about Jesus you'll never be the same again.

In our study of Luke 2 during the past two weeks, we've been learning the *truth about the birth of Jesus*. Two weeks ago we examined the familiar account of our Lord's birth in Luke 2:1-7 and saw that it was a birth the earth ignored. There was no fanfare, just Joseph and Mary all alone in an animal shelter.

Last week, from Luke 2:8-14, we saw a contrast, for the birth that earth ignored heaven applauded. An angel appeared to some shepherds with the birth announcement. Then the hillside was flooded with a host of angels who praised God shouting, "Glory to God! Peace to men!"

With your Bible opened to Luke 2, I want you to observe something that is very important. Luke devotes more verses to telling us how people responded to Jesus' birth than to the actual account of it. The birth story appears in verses 1-7. The responses appear in verses 8-38.

What's the point? There is a RIGHT way to respond to the Christmas story, and God wants us to know what it is.

Just what is the correct response to the Christ of Christmas? In Luke 2 Luke shows us how the angels responded (13-14), how Mary responded, and Simeon (25-35) and Anna (36-38). And then of course, there are the shepherds.

This evening we're going to look at Christmas from the perspective of the shepherds. Just how did the shepherds respond to the Christ of Christmas? By looking at what the shepherds did in Luke 2:15-20, we discover that Jesus' birth is truly a birth that can change your life. We also learn see four steps involved in a proper response to Jesus' birth.

I. Step #1—The proper response starts with investigation (15).

Verse 15 say, "When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'"

The spotlight is on the shepherds. According to verse 8, the very night of Jesus' birth these shepherds were busy in a Judean field. What were they doing? Luke says they were keeping watch over their flocks.

Then what happened? All of a sudden, an unexpected visitor took the shepherds by surprise! In fact, notice the three short, staccato-like statements in verse 9.

1. An angel of the Lord appeared to them.
2. The glory of the Lord shone around them.
3. They were terrified.

The angel spoke to the shepherds. Verses 10-12, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

It was Jewish custom for a birth to be celebrated with music. When a boy was born, local musicians congregated at the house to greet him with simple music. Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem. There were no earthly minstrels. But that didn't keep the minstrels of heaven quiet! They pulled out all the stops in verse 14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

You remember the scene well, don't you? Most of us have read it again and again. We've seen it portrayed in dozens of Christmas programs. But let's look at it once more, if possible, as if we'd never heard the story before.

Surely, one question would arise in our minds. Why *shepherds*? Why did God choose shepherds to be the first to hear the grand news of the Savior's birth?

To answer that you need to know something about Jewish shepherds in the first century. Shepherds were despised by the orthodox "good" people of the day. The care of their flocks placed demands on them that prevented them from following the Jewish ceremonial laws. They couldn't observe all the meticulous handwashings and rules and regulations. So shepherds were ceremonially unclean.

But who does Luke say were the first to hear of the Messiah's birth? Was it Caesar Augustus? No. King Herod? No. The High Priest in Jerusalem. No. God bypassed men of royalty and men of religion. He sent His angel to common, even despised shepherds.

I think that fact amazed even the shepherds, for listen to their words again, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, *which the Lord has **told us** about.*" He told *us*!

Yes, God revealed the truth of Christ to shepherds. Why is that significant?

Throughout his gospel, Dr. Luke has a heart for common people. This fact caught his attention, that God revealed the birth announcement to common shepherds. It says much to us about who the Christ-child really was, and why He came into the world. Listen to Jesus as He later speaks (Lk 5:32), "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

This is critical to see. You'll never understand why God sent His Son into the world until you admit the truth about yourself. You'll never appreciate the Christ of Christmas fully until you grasp and admit that you are a lost sinner and desperate for Him.

By the way, it's also possible that these were special shepherds. We know that their flocks were near Bethlehem. It may have been that these shepherds were in charge of the sheep from which the Temple offerings were chosen (for Bethlehem was but a few miles south of Jerusalem). If that's the case, how fitting that those who looked after the lambs of sacrifice would be the first to hear of the Lamb of God who came to

take away the sin of the world!

How did the shepherds respond to this grand revelation from God? They held a conference in verse 15. They made a unanimous decision. They said, "Let's go check it out." That's the first step to responding rightly to the birth of Jesus. It starts with investigation.

There's a lesson here for us. How must we receive God's revelation? We have God's revelation, too. We have His written Word. How should we respond to the amazing truths it contains about Jesus? The shepherds show us. They received the message first by faith, then by obedience.

They did NOT say, "Ah come on now. Be real. A Savior has been born? Christ the Lord? And in Bethlehem? And God sent an angel to reveal it to us? Man, what did we eat this evening that prompted this hallucination!" Was that how the shepherds responded? Obviously not.

They received God's message by faith, for in verse 15 they said, "Let's go see this thing that *has happened*." Then they verified their faith by obedience in verse 16.

If you're not a Christian I urge you to study the record. Make an honest assessment of the biblical account. Read it. Think about it. The proper response starts with investigation.

II. Step #2—The proper response leads to discovery (16).

"So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger."

Think about something. The angel never told the shepherds to go see Jesus. He just announced that Jesus was born. There was no question that they would indeed go, however. They could not help but go after hearing this amazing news about the Christ-child. You can't help but be drawn to Jesus once you learn Who He really is!

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So the shepherds went. Verse 16 points out they did so "with haste," as the KJV puts it. Who watched the flocks? We don't know. And it didn't matter. Nor does anything else matter when you have the opportunity to come to Christ!

There's a contrast here. Do you remember what the religious leaders in Jerusalem did in Matthew 2 when they found out this special baby's birth? They wouldn't go. Even after they heard about it, they wouldn't go check it out.

But the shepherds did. And what did they find when they arrived? Here was their discovery. Luke's description is very specific. The shepherds followed the angel's instructions and located the nativity scene. It wasn't some cozy, picturesque scene as we often think of it. Please look at the nativity scene through the eyes of the first visitors, the shepherds. What did they see?

First, they "found Mary." She was a young, very ordinary looking Jewish girl. They also found "Joseph." Again, there was nothing spectacular about him. But then they saw the reason for coming, "the baby."

Do you feel the simplicity of the scene? There's no fanfare. No festivity. No glamour. None of that. Just a peasant couple. And a baby.

What impressed the shepherds about the baby? Did they see a halo around His head? No. Did they see an angel perched by his side? No. What did they see? What caught their eye? It was where the baby was. And where was He? "Lying in the manger."

Jesus was lying in a *manger*. The Greek term is *fatnay*. According to one Greek lexicon, "The term 'crib' normally refers to the place where an animal stands when it feeds. The 'manger' is a relatively large box or rack containing hay, and a 'feed box' is a much smaller container, usually for grain. There is, of course, no way of knowing precisely where the baby Jesus was placed, but it would be very appropriate for the baby to have been placed in the feed box or in the manger."

Just think of it! The shepherds had heard the angel's announcement, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord!" The shepherds had heard the host of angels fill the night sky with their praises saying, "Glory to God in the highest!"

But when the shepherds arrived what did they see? A baby. A baby born in a place usually occupied by animals. God's Anointed One lying in a feed-trough-cradle! Oh, what a shocking sight this was!

Granted, the shepherds had been forewarned in verse 12, "You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." But no Jew in the first century expected the Messiah to be born in poverty, in a cattle shed! That didn't fit into their plans. That wasn't the kind of Messiah they expected, or wanted.

What's more, no Jew in the first century expected the Messiah to die a criminal's death. But that's what He did 33 years later, on the cross, according to God's eternal plan.

And why did it happen this way? It's because Jesus came into the world with this objective in mind, right from His birth. He came to SAVE us.

Here the angel again, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a *Savior* has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (10-11)."

There's a story about a European monarch who used to worry his court. Do you know what he did? Often he would disappear from the palace and dress incognito and mingle with his people. One of the king's men asked him not to do this. "It's not safe." The monarch answered, "I cannot rule my people unless I know how they live."

But for the Son of God it was more than that. He didn't become a man merely so He'd know how we live. He became a man because we needed a substitute, someone who could reverse the curse brought on the world by the first Adam.

There are four steps involved in a proper response to Jesus' birth. It starts with investigation. It leads to discovery. Then what?

III. Step #3—The proper response produces a witness (17-19).

Verse 17—"When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child."

Luke says, "When they had seen Him." The shepherds had a firsthand encounter with the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Listen. You can't pass on something with conviction what you haven't experienced personally yourself. The shepherds had heard God's revelation about the Christ-child. Then they saw Him. The next step was quite natural. The KJV says, "They made known abroad." They *spread the Word*.

That's ironic. Did you know that shepherds were not allowed to testify in court? Yet God used humble shepherds to be His witnesses to testify of the Messiah's arrival! They couldn't contain themselves. They just had to pass on the good news.

Who did they tell? Apparently to the village people in Bethlehem—whoever was awake, and maybe to some

who weren't awake until they woke them!

How did people respond to their proclamation? Verse 18 says, "And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them." The people were amazed. Again, I can't help but see a contrast here. They were amazed, but there's no mention that they went to see. A lot of people are like that. They dabble in the things of God. They like to hear God's Word, but when it comes to *acting* on it, well, that's another story.

A carsalesman, friend of mine referred to such people as "be backers." He said he saw them all the time in his lot. They'd show up, seem really interested in a particular car. "Yea, I like it! I'll be back!" But they never came back. They were "be backers," all talk but no action.

Many are like that with Jesus. They seem interested in Him. They'll make all kinds of promises, "I'm going to start going to church soon." But it's just talk.

In verse 19 Luke describes someone who certainly did more than talk a good talk. "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Mary treasured these things. What things? The things the shepherds reported, the angel's message.

I really think the shepherd's visit was a great encouragement to Joseph and Mary. Surely, this young couple must have had all kinds of unanswered questions as they looked into the eyes of their newborn. And then the shepherds arrived and said, "An angel told us your baby is the Savior, Christ the Lord."

It must have seemed like a dream. But Mary treasured up all these things.

Here are the steps again as modeled by the shepherds. The proper response starts with an *investigation*—you must look for the truth about Jesus. That leads to *discovery*—you must come to meet Jesus personally. But once you do, you must spread the word. True discovery produces a *witness*.

Right there is what life is all about, getting to know Christ and then making Christ know to others. There is nothing more important than those two pursuits. Not making money. Not being successful. Nothing.

Do you know Christ? If you do, is it a priority for you to get to know Him better every day? Are you making Christ known? When was the last time you shared with someone what Christ means to you?

IV. Step #4—The proper response results in praise (20).

Verse 20 says, "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

That was some return trip back to the field! In fact, do you know what the shepherds did along the way? Luke says they had a praise service! He says that as they returned they were "glorifying" (Greek "doxadzo" from which we get "doxology") and "praising" God. Their hearts erupted in glory and praise to God.

For what? Again Luke is very specific. He says they were glorifying and praising God for all the things they had HEARD (that's God's revelation from the angel) and all the things they had SEEN (namely, the Christ child in the manger scene). And what they had heard and seen were just as they had been told.

In his record Luke recognized the grace of God in all this. The shepherds did not seek God. There they were tending their flocks, going about their business. God broke into their world. God sent the angel to them. God delivered a special message for them. God told them where they could find the Christ-child. God privileged them to behold with their eyes the Messiah. And it all happened, Luke says in verse 20, "just as they had been told."

It's passive. God told them.

So it is with us. This evening, through the preaching of His Word God is probing hearts. You may not have come here seeking God, but He has sought you. And you have heard His Word today. How will you respond to the Christ of Christmas?

Centuries ago commenting on this Matthew Henry said, "They thanked God that they had seen Christ, though in the depth of his humiliation. As afterwards the cross of Christ, so now his *manger*, was to some *foolishness* and a *stumbling-block*, but others saw in it, and admired, and praised, the wisdom *of God* and the *power of God*."

What is the correct response to Jesus' birth? It starts with an investigation, leads to a discovery, produces a witness, but here's the climax. It *results in praise*. Praise. Praise that involves your lips and your life. From this point on Jesus becomes the focus of your life.

Notice again how the story ends. Did you see where the shepherds went in verse 20? They "returned." They went back to their fields, to their occupations.

Listen. When we come to know Christ, what does our Lord want us to do? Hide away in some monastery? No. He wants us to go back to the real world as transformed people. He says to go back and let the people who know us see the reality of Christ in our lives. Go back and live a life of worship. Go back and live a life of praise. That's the proper response to the birth of Jesus.