

Christmas Message

Title: “Visiting a Divine Baby”

Luke 2:15-20 ~ December 11, 2011

OBJECTIVE: *To help us respond to God’s message with faith in Christ – and share God’s message with others.*

Announcements

- Welcome / guests
- Christmas services at cdobc – next Sunday is the Cantata: “Only Love” – 9 & 10:30
- 2012 Offering envelopes
- Church Directory info cards
- Poinsettias – purchase yours “In Memory” or “In Honor” of someone – call the church office

Opening prayer

Over the past several years – since 2006, I have been working through the account of Jesus’ birth in the book of Luke. Today is the 11th message in this Christmas series – and message #12 will be on Christmas Day – 10:30 service – no adult S.S. – children’s ministry will be nursery – 5th grade.

Turn to Luke 2:15-20 – as we read of the shepherd’s visit to Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus.

Read Luke 2:15-20

God reveals Himself to the humble. vs. 15a

“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven...”

The revelation of God is for all people, not just those who are at the top of Society.

He did not announce His arrival / birth to the religious leaders, the intellectual elite and scholars. The Angel’s herald of Jesus’ birth was not given to the wealthy or the powerful. The announcement of His birth was to a group

of shepherds. Jesus' birth is surrounded not by fanfare and royalty, but by lowly shepherds, cattle, sheep, and the smells of a stable. An odd place for the Savior of the world to show up! This fits perfectly with the values of the Kingdom. Jesus came to serve, not to be served. He came to heal the sick, not hang out with the healthy. He taught that the last will be first, and the first will be last. He told us to pray for our enemies, and to love those who persecute you. He said the meek shall inherit the earth, and the poor in spirit will be blessed. God's ways are not the ways of man, and we see this truth in living color at His birth.

In the first century, shepherds were despised by the culture at large. They were not allowed to give testimony in a court of law since they were assumed to be liars. They were thought to be thieves who would steal sheep that didn't belong to them. Since the Jewish religion was the center piece of the society, and because the shepherds were ceremonially unclean due to dead animals they would encounter in their work, they lived on the margins of society – unable to participate in the religious practices that the culture valued so much. This is ironic since many believe that the very sheep they would have been watching that night would eventually be used in the Jerusalem temple which was located a few miles from the fields of Bethlehem. But it's to this group of people – those despised by society – the lower class of society – it's to this group that God reveals the birth of the Savior!

It speaks volumes to the inherent value of all people, and it challenges our treatment of those on the lower rungs of society.

The right response to God's message vs. 15b-16

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

The right response to God's message is to examine and embrace it.

They heard the message of God through the angels, and they talked about it to one another. They discussed it. In our culture, faith/religious belief is an individual thing. It's taboo to talk about it in public or with those you want to keep as friends. Now it's true that putting your faith in Christ is an individual decision that you alone are responsible for. The faith of your father or mother – the faith of your spouse is not transferable to you! You must examine the Gospel message – the good news about Christ, and then it's up to you to embrace it! But faith is not supposed to be a taboo topic in public discourse! We need to talk about it and discuss it with others! These are the most important matters in life – and we have these great public dialogues on every other aspect of our lives:

- What we eat

- What we wear
- How to shave
- What perfume or cologne is best
- How to entice a man or woman to become your spouse
- What music and movies are the best
- How to invest our money
- How to raise our kids
- How to spoil our grandkids
- How to back-up and repair our computers
- What plants we should put in our yard
- How to choose the best car
- How to finance our home
- What towns are the top 10 towns to live in

Yet we're not supposed to talk about faith and the great truths that has occupied philosophers, motivated kingdoms and shaped the course of human history?!!!
Does this expected silence in the area of faith make sense to you?!!!

The shepherds talked with one another, and decided to go to Bethlehem. They recognized the message from the angels as the truth – as a message from God. This message was too important to ignore or to put off until a later time, and the text says they “...hurried off and found Mary and Joseph.”

We need to have a sense of urgency when we hear God's Word!

John Calvin says *“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.”* (Commentary on Luke)

When the sermon is over, do you forget what was said?
When you read the Bible, does the truth stay in your mind after you close the book – or does it vanish away?

We’re not sure how long they had to search to find the baby, but when they found it, imagine their surprise when they walked into a smelly stable, and saw Joseph, a common, ordinary man, and Mary – a young teenage girl. Once again, John Calvin has some interesting thoughts here:

“This was a revolting sight, and was sufficient of itself to produce an aversion to Christ. For what could be more improbable than to believe that he was the King of the whole people, who was deemed unworthy to be ranked with the lowest of the multitude?”

Have you ever wondered what the shepherds thought when they saw young Mary, and Jesus lying in a feeding trough in the stable? Granted, they were told by the angel that the baby would be “wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger”, but to see it and realize that this is the “Savior” (2:11) of the world!

I wonder what the conversation was like...as the shepherds told Mary and Joseph of the angles lighting up the desert sky, and if Mary talked about the angel that

visited her nine months before, and if Joseph shared how he was ready to divorce Mary until an angel appeared to him also, comforting him with the news that the baby “...conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20).

Do you ever put God in a box...expecting – or demanding that He works according to your preconceived notions or according to the plan you have created? Do you realize that God typically works through the weak and the humble – so He is not robbed of glory? (1 Cor. 1:18-31).

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” (1 Cor. 1:25)

God takes our best – the things we covet the most – and turns them upside down to accomplish His purposes!

Telling others about Jesus is a response to faith. vs. 17-18

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Notice their focus was on Christ – not on Mary, Joseph, or the other details of the night. (“...had seen him...about this child...”)

It was clear to the shepherds that they were witnessing the work of God first hand. The angels had spoken the Word of God to them – and it was confirmed when they found the baby just as the angels had said.

They responded by telling everyone they could! They couldn’t keep their mouth shut! The amazing events of

the angels and the birth of this baby was too good to keep to themselves!

The response they had as they “spread the word” is amazing given their low status in the society, which leads me to believe that their recounting of the events was so convincing that people were amazed at what they heard. What an example the shepherds are for us. Do you ever doubt your ability to “spread the word” about God?

Like them, we who are believers in Christ also have an amazing story to tell. We have a testimony that speaks to our complete and eternal forgiveness, a new life and new spirit we have in Christ, and a joy that surpasses the peaks and valleys of this life. Unfortunately, many Christians are silent about their salvation and what God has done and is doing in their life.

“The typical believer prays sincerely about his work but never talks candidly with his non-Christian colleagues about his faith. He is only comfortable evaluating his spiritual life in a “spiritual” context. This results in spiritual schizophrenia as the Christian bounces back and forth between the stock market and sanctification.

Such categorizing would be plausible if Christianity were nothing more than a moral code, an AA pledge, or a self-help course. But Christianity claims to be the central fact of human history: the God who created man invaded the world in the person of Jesus Christ, died, was resurrected, ascended, and lives today, sovereign over all.

If this claim is valid – if Christianity is true – then it cannot be simply a file drawer in our crowded lives. It must be the central truth from which all our behavior, relationships, and philosophy flow. We must set all earthly issues within the context of the eternal.”

(The Christian Mind, by Harry Blamires, quoted by Chuck Colson in The Glory of Christmas, p. 39)

Oikos! As a church, we have realized that one of our primary responsibilities is to prepare you to share the Gospel, to encourage you to share the Gospel, and to equip you to share the Gospel. You will be much more effective at sharing the Gospel with your Oikos (Family, friends, neighbors, co-workers) than I would be!

I pray we will learn from the shepherds, and copy their passion and excitement to “spread the word” about Jesus!

When God uses you, be humble – and amazed. vs. 19

19 “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

I see a lot of humility in this verse.

Have you ever wondered what she pondered in her heart?

How will I teach the omniscient God the abc’s?

Will I ever need to discipline Him? How do you discipline a holy God?

What do I tell *Him* about God?

Will He have friends?

What if He is a picky eater? (What will that say about my cooking?!)

The birth of my baby boy was announced by angels!

How come the Messiah's birth wasn't more grand or elaborate?

Why would God allow this to happen in a dirty, smelly stable?

Luke tells us that Mary "...treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

All the events of the previous nine months – and especially the events surrounding the birth, she thought about. The truths of God – and her experience with the promises of God were precious to her. She treasured them – guarded them – she kept them safe in the confines of her heart.

What do you ponder about God's work in your life?

Do you ever stop and consider your own salvation and how God has protected and guided you over the years?

Do you ever ponder the deep truths of God and reflect on the wonder and depth of Scripture?

Do you look upon the Word of God as a "treasure" and protect it by memorizing it?

The shepherd's response to seeing baby Jesus was to tell everyone they could. Mary's response was to take special note of what God had been doing, and to "treasure" them and "ponder them in her heart".

What do you ponder / consider / contemplate the most?

What occupies the space in your heart?

Christmas leads us to worship. vs. 20

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

When the truth of God is revealed to you and you see the hand of God at work, do you glorify God?

When the promises of God are realized in your life, do you worship the Lord?

Does God’s activity in your life move you to praise Him – to give Him the glory and credit?

Application

Examine and embrace the Gospel message.

This morning, you have heard the Gospel message – that Jesus was born, so that He could die on the cross so our sins could be forgiven.

You are now responsible to examine that message from God – and then to embrace it. God does not drag you into the family of God – forgiveness is not forced on you – you must embrace it.

Admit your sins

Believe in Jesus’ death on the cross

Choose to follow Him daily

Tell others about the Savior.

The shepherds couldn’t keep their mouth shut – the news was too good...and too amazing!

Who have you told?

Who are you praying for and hoping to share Christ with?

Worship as you ponder Christmas.

Notice the shepherds weren't going to church when they were praising and glorifying God...they were going to work!

Every blessing – every work of God in your life – give praises to Him and worship Him for His grace and truth.