

## How to Experience Christ this Christmas

### Luke 2:8-20

#### Introduction

Every year after Thanksgiving, Jan and I start to ask each other a question, "Has Christmas come for you yet?" "Have you experienced Christ this Christmas?"

When I lived in Kansas City, I used to occasionally shop at a Wal-Mart type store there. And the thing I most remember about the store is that all of the cashiers in the store would say the same thing. After they had tallied your bill and taken your money and sacked your merchandise, just as you were getting ready to leave, they would always say, "thank you, please call again." It was a habitual response. Now some stores have registers that say it. That's what it sounded like. Was it live or computer?

Sometimes, I notice that people – especially religious people -- tend to respond to God about the same way. God suddenly appears in their lives. Maybe He has helped them fix a problem, or deal with a crisis, or go through a difficult illness or a tragedy. But, when its all over, they respond, "Thanks God, please call again."

Look with me in Luke 2:8-20 at the response of the shepherds when God came to them.

*<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

*<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

*<sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

#### Why did God Come to Shepherds First?

Shepherds were pagans. They weren't religious people. They weren't even allowed to testify in court because their character was so questionable. Why did God come to shepherds first? Answer: He didn't!

The first announcement God made about the coming of Jesus was to a priest, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. God first came to the

religious leaders of Jesus' day. And it wasn't some vague sign. God came to Zechariah while He was serving in the Holy of Holies at the most sacred duty any priest ever got to perform – and God sent the angel Gabriel to speak to him. When Zechariah wasn't sure it was for real, God struck him mute for the next nine months.

So, how did the religious leaders respond? Here they are at the temple of God in Jerusalem, the center, the focus of human spiritual life. The priests, the descendants of Aaron, the Levites, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees all had their world headquarters right here. The angel Gabriel came and spoke to Zechariah and all these religious leaders saw Zechariah's condition, they knew God was doing something powerful there. How did they respond? They said, "I wonder what that was all about? Oh well, look at the time." They bundled Zechariah up and sent him home. "Thanks God, please call again." And they just went on about their business. They wouldn't allow God to interrupt the routine of their lives – whether it was their family life, their community life, their business life or their religious life. "Thanks God, please call again." They were so busy doing religious work for God that they missed it when God Himself came among them.

So God came again. Only this time, instead of coming to the priests, who didn't respond the first time, God came to some shepherds tending their flocks. These were ordinary shepherds [maybe they were tending temple flocks, we aren't sure] – just a bunch of guys out on a hill doing their job. And God sent His angels to announce to them the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we think that the only people God talks to are religious leaders and the only place to hear from Him is in religious institutions like churches or Bible Colleges. But this isn't the only place where God is speaking. I fear that the reason we don't hear from God more often isn't because He isn't talking, it's because we aren't listening. Do you want to experience Christ this Christmas? Listen; God is talking. We need to be listening all the time or we may miss God's voice.

**EX.** When you are expecting a really important telephone call, you are listening carefully for the phone. As opposed to when you aren't really expecting to hear from anybody all that important, you are a lot more casual about answering the call. We can treat God the same way, "No thanks God, please call again."

If we are going to experience Christ this Christmas, we need to listen the way the shepherds were listening.

### **1. Listen Like the Shepherds**

*Luke 2:9* An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. *10* But the angel said to them, "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.

The shepherds listened to the angels, so they heard God's message about Jesus. They could have run away, they could have ignored them. They didn't. They listened.

If we are going to experience Christ this Christmas, we need to listen. God speaks in some very unorthodox places at times. He interrupted a church service to speak to Zechariah. He interrupted some guys on break at work to speak to the shepherds. Of course we need to pay attention to the basic ways God will talk with us. Dr. Attig will tell you that God communicates powerfully through journaling. God speaks clearly through His written Word. God speaks consistently through regular times of prayer. But to experience Christ, we need to be living with an attitude of expectancy, anticipation ... Jesus may speak at any moment.

If we are going to experience Christ this Christmas, we need to listen for God's voice and then; take the time to focus on God's message.

#### **A. Focus on God's Message**

*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." Luke 9:15*

The shepherds heard from the angels and they started talking about what they had just experienced. They didn't say, "wow wasn't that nice, now --what were we talking about before we were interrupted?" If we are going to experience Christ this Christmas, we need to listen and we need to focus on what God has said.

When the angel brought the shepherds a message from God, they thought about it. They talked about it. They focused their attention on it. Of course they had to continue watching the sheep. Sure, the regular routine of their lives had to continue. But the focus of their interest became the message that they had received from God. God's message dominated more of their conversation than which teams were

playing in the Coliseum that weekend or which store had the best sale going.

If we are going to experience Christ this Christmas, we need to listen for God's voice, focus on what He is speaking to us and then:

### **1. Actively Respond to God's Message**

What was the difference between the way the priests responded to God when God spoke to Zechariah and the way the shepherds responded? The priests ignored it and the shepherds actively responded. To experience Christ, we must respond to His message.

If we are going to experience Christ this Christmas, we must listen for His voice, focus on His message to us and respond to what He is telling us. Look what the shepherds did.

#### **A. Come to Jesus**

*So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. Luke 2:16*

The first response to a message from God is to come to Christ. No other response is appropriate until we have responded by coming to Jesus. The angels announced that a Savior had been born. Jesus, that tiny baby, was born in order to die on the cross at Calvary. He did that so that we could have the opportunity to come to Him and receive forgiveness for our sins.

#### **B. Remember Christmas is about Christ**

Christianity is about focusing on Jesus. Experiencing God this Christmas means focusing on Jesus. I've heard preachers preach against commercialism at Christmas my entire life. I love commercialism; I'm an American! I love tinsel and holly and Christmas trees and all those pagan symbols. I love Santa Claus and Charlie Brown and Bing Crosby in the mall and all of the trappings of the season. What other time of year does every pagan in America sing and talk about the birth of Christ?

But in the middle of all the frenzy of Christmas activity, Jan and I keep asking, "Has Christmas come for you yet?" What we mean is, "Have you experienced Christ, this Christmas?"

### **CONCLUSION**

When the shepherds experienced Christ,

### **3. Tell Others About Jesus**

*<sup>17</sup>When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. Luke 2:17-18*

These men had heard from an angel of God that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior who would make a way for them to be free from sin. They had gone and seen the Christ child personally! They were excited! They had seen Jesus. They couldn't contain themselves. No one was forcing them to talk about Jesus. No one had to guilt them into talking about Jesus. God had just turned their lives upside down forever and they couldn't stop talking about it. You can't meet Jesus and not have your life changed. If your life hasn't been changed – you haven't really connected with Jesus. What God does is good and its worth talking about.

They responded by praising and glorifying God.

#### **4. Respond by Praising and Glorifying God**

*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Luke 2:20*

Are you excited about your relationship with Jesus this Christmas? You know the Christmas present I want for each of us? JESUS! You can have a life-changing exciting relationship with God through Jesus Christ right now.

Look at the table. Many of us will gather on Christmas Eve to light the Christ candle and to celebrate the reality that the babe who came is the king who died that we might live.

Have you experienced Christ this Christmas? If we're going to experience Christ this Christmas, we've got to listen. We've got to focus on what God has said to us and we must commit to respond in obedience to whatever He says to us. Remember, Christmas is about Christ.