

The Story That Never Gets Old (Part 2)

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Date: 25 December 2016

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[0 : 00] Now, I want you to take your Bibles and open them to Luke chapter 2.

! Our passage for this morning will actually be toward the end of the story that Grandpa Mike Dersham read this morning to our children and as well as reading it to us. I chose this text last Sunday, if you will recall, if you were here, some of you were visiting and weren't here, and so I really have already preached through the larger portion of this passage of Scripture, this beloved story. And now I want to finish it this morning and really take up that part of it that occurs after the birth of Jesus. Most of the story helps us understand some of the events that took place leading up to the birth of Christ, help explain how Mary and Joseph made their way to Bethlehem so that the baby could be born there. Some of the things that took place to bring all that about, all of which was under the sovereignty, the sovereign authority of God. And so we did that, but now the baby has been born, of course, there in that stable or whatever it may have been. Some have thought it might be a cave. I don't really know. Cave doesn't seem as neat to me as a stable.

You can just decide whatever it is because the Bible really doesn't tell us. But the baby's born and the shepherds have come to the stable and they've come to see with their own eyes what the angel announced to them. And so I want to begin a reading starting with verse 15 of Luke chapter 2 and just to follow it through to the end of this portion of the story, which ends in verse 20.

So it was when the angels had gone away from them into heaven that the shepherds said to one another, let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child.

And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told them.

[3 : 08] What a story. Even as I was sitting there listening to Mike read the story, I'm still, you know, as many times as I've read it myself, as many times as I've heard it read, it still just draws me in to the story. And so it's a beautiful story, wonderful story. And it is a story that never gets old, of course. And it is a story, as I mentioned last week, that is much more than just simply an historical account of how Jesus came into the world, how he was born as an infant and so forth.

It's more than just a narration of that. It reveals a number of things to us, as I mentioned last week, and we spent our time talking about these things. In the first place, it reveals to us the very sovereignty of God, or what I call the autonomous master at his birth. And the autonomous self-ruling above all masters at the birth of Jesus was not Caesar Augustus. It was God himself who superintended his will. And he was able, of course he is able, sovereignly, to lead a king, to lead a nation in order to move his holy family from Nazareth to Bethlehem so that the child could be born there as planned, as prophesied. So the autonomous master at his birth. It also reveals, though, on the other side of that, the ignorance of mankind, or what I call the oblivious mortals at the birth of Christ. That would include Caesar Augustus, totally oblivious to what was going on in his realm at the time as the Lord of glory is being born. Had no clue about that. And if there was an innkeeper, and I think there had to have been one, he was completely oblivious to what was going on. And all of Israel slept that night away as the Lord, their Messiah, was being born. And then the story also reveals kind of the road, the beginning of the road to Calvary, or what I call the mysterious manner of his birth. And again, I'm just totally enthralled by the notion that a sovereign God could do all that he did, move an entire world in order to get his holy family from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

And yet, when they got to Bethlehem, there's no room for them there. It's just amazing to me. But it is the first indicator of the hard road that Jesus would travel all the way to Calvary.

And then finally, last week, it reveals to us the gospel. The gospel, the good news of God's plan to redeem a lost world, or what I called the glorious meaning of the birth of Jesus. And all of this we looked at last week. And there is one more thing, really two things, but I'm going to combine them together. Two things that this story reveals to us, this story that never gets old. And it is these two things, and I put them together. The joyous memory at his birth, a memory that continued on, that leads to the victorious mission, the victorious mission of his birth. And to see these things, these various things, I'm going to deviate a little bit from the order in which they appear in the story, because I want us to think about these things in the order in which they are experienced by us, or they should be experienced. Because the three things that we're going to look at this morning from the story, not everyone has experienced yet. And so these three things, and here's the first one. That is, the coming of Jesus results in a contemplation. Contemplation begins with contemplation. [7:17] And I would suggest to you, those of you who are seated here, who are born again believers, your followers, your disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, that it began with you, at least in your consciousness, with a contemplation. It thought about a certain thing. And I want you to notice what the story tells us about Mary in verse 19. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

So let's just kind of pick this apart a little bit this morning. All these things, what is that referring to? Well, all these things simply refers to Mary's experiences, all the experiences that she had over the past few weeks and days, and especially the past few hours. And what did Mary do with all of these experiences? Well, the Bible tells us she kept them all. Kept them all in her heart.

She kept all these things in her heart. Now, the word kept is interesting, and some versions of the Bible kind of bring this out, but a better translation would be treasured. She treasured all these things, all these experiences that she had had. I mean all of them. She treasured them. She, in a sense, put them in the treasure box of her heart. And then Mary, the Bible says here, pondered them. Pondered them. And the word pondered also. Very interesting word. We could translate it contemplated. That's why I've named it that. She contemplated these things. And the word that is used here in the Greek language is, means to throw together or to bring together. And so the idea behind this very picturesque word is to bring it all together and try to understand what it all means. I mean, you think about all the shit experience.

And she is treasuring all those things and bringing them together, trying to understand why it all happened and happened the way that it did happen and what it all means. And so it's contemplation. Everything went into the treasure box of her heart. For example, what she had heard about Zacharias and Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, and what transpired about the birth that led to the birth of John the Baptist. She treasured that. She put that in the treasure box of her heart. How Joseph responded when she told him that she was with child. And it wasn't his. And it wasn't anybody, any man's. And the Bible doesn't give us, you know, that conversation, but you know it took place. And she treasured that in her heart. And she also treasured the amazing dream that Joseph had and the vision in that dream and the angel speaking to him and explaining to him about the baby that his betrothed wife was carrying in her womb. You know that Joseph told her about that. In fact, I think it was from Joseph through Mary that Luke got it in order to record it here in this gospel. But she put it in the treasure box of her heart.

And then also her strange encounter, the encounter she had herself with the angel Gabriel. When the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the conception of this child in her womb, and she put that in the treasure box. The long and difficult, arduous trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem and all of the events that took place surrounding the birth of her first son, this precious baby, Bethlehem and the inn and the stable and the manger and all of the rest of it. She put that in the treasure box of her heart.

[11:07] And then the surprise visit by the shepherds that we just read about and what they shared with her about the holy visitation, this heavenly host that they saw that appeared before them there, an incredible memory, experience. And they shared that with Mary and Mary treasured that in her treasure box. And what the angel, especially what the angel said to the shepherds about this first born, her first born baby. See, she put all of these things in her treasure box, in her heart, and there would be more things that would come very shortly, like the wise men that would come and visit after this.

And the strange words of old Simeon there in the temple, and Anna the prophetess, and King Herod's threat upon her little newborn baby, and the trip to Egypt and back, and many other things.

All of it she treasured in her heart. She put it in the treasure box of her heart. All of these amazing experiences. And this treasure box she would open from time to time. Can you imagine that she would?

Opening that treasure box, and looking at its contents again, and looking very deeply into these things, and also looking into the meaning of them. See, it's contemplation. Mary kept all these things and pondered them. Contemplated them. These things that she kept in her heart. And my thought is, how the world needs to do that today?

How the people of this world need to do that? They need to contemplate the events of that first Christmas. And why should they? Well, because of the saving gospel that is contained in this story. And it is. It's all throughout.

And by the way, I think that's why the devil is working so hard to remove, to have removed, all of the images and vestiges of a biblical connection to that very first Christmas.

[13:17] Because the devil knows that when people see that, they'll contemplate that. They see that little baby lying in a manger in some nativity scene in some mall or some courtyard or some church. And they'll see these images and other images that are connected with the biblical story.

And that some of them may believe. And some may be saved. And by the way, that actually is the prime goal of our celebration of Christmas.

It is that people be saved. That's why the story is included in the Bible. It's not just to give us the details of the birth of the Savior.

It is that people will read that and be saved. That's the whole goal of it. I like the third stanza of the carol that we sometimes sing this time of the year, Good Christian Men Rejoice.

By the way, it ought to say good Christian women too. We all ought to rejoice together. But listen to the third stanza. Good Christian men rejoice with heart and soul and voice.

[14:24] Now you need not fear the grave. Jesus Christ was born to save. Calls you one and calls you all to gain his everlasting hall. That's heaven.

Christ was born to save. Christ was born to save. So it all begins with contemplation. Like Mary contemplating the events surrounding the birth of her first child.

This miraculously conceived, divinely conceived child in her womb who is divine himself. The birth of Jesus. She contemplated that. And we need to do the same thing.

And to put together, and here's the idea, exactly what she did. To put together in our minds the why of it. And the meaning of it.

And of course, to come to the right conclusion about all of that. That Christ was born to save.

Second, adoration. First, contemplation.

[15:22] And then second, adoration. You see, contemplation then leads to adoration. Adoration of God. And we see this in the shepherds.

Verse 20. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told them.

All right, so this is an expression of worship, isn't it? An expression of adoration. Adoration of God. Glorifying and praising God. Their hearts, you see, were filled with adoration.

For what? Well, for all the things that they had heard and seen. And we need to note the order. Heard and seen.

That is, what they saw that night agreed with what they had heard earlier that night. It all came together.

[16:22] What they heard, they saw. And really, that would include not only what they heard that night earlier from the shepherds, but it really, for these Jewish shepherds, it would have included everything they had heard all their lives as Jews.

All they had heard all their lives about the Messiah, including what Moses had said about the Messiah and recorded in the Old Testament Hebrew Bible.

And what David had said about Messiah, and Isaiah had said about Messiah, and what Jeremiah had said about Messiah, and Daniel, and Micah, and Zechariah, and Malachi, and all the rest of the prophets.

They had heard these things, read to them, and they had memorized most of this, concerning, especially concerning the Messiah. And now, what the angel said to them about Messiah, that he has come.

This is great news to them. Incredible news. The angel said, He's come. The one you've heard about. All these years, since you were just a little child.

[17 : 30] It's come. He has come. Go see for yourselves, is what the angel said. And so, what did they do? They went to see. Went to see for themselves.

And so, they saw for themselves the truth of what they had heard. And what they had heard, again, was proved by what they saw.

And what they had longed for all of their lives, was proved. Now, it was here. It had become a reality to them.

It was incredible for them. What God said he would do, he did do. He did do. And so, their hearts were filled with adoration for God.

Worship for God. Now, the question I would ask, and you can answer it, do we have any less reason today to respond in the same way with worship?

[18 : 33] What took place 2,000 years ago? What took place then? And what took place there, in Bethlehem, was real.

It's not just some fable. Not just some children's story. Not just some myth. It's real.

What happened there that day is real. And what did happen? God was manifest in the flesh. The Savior came. God reconciling sinners unto himself.

And the reality of that event is still producing fruit today. Isn't it? You want proof? Well, how about this guy standing behind the pulpit?

How about you, hopefully all of you, sitting out there in the pews? It's your proof positive. Proof positive that the fruit of his coming is still being born today.

[19 : 37] And our response should be no less than that of the shepherds in Bethlehem. We adore him. Worship him. And we adore him.

Worship him. Because what we have heard to be true, the gospel, what we've heard to be true is now what we have seen to be true in our own lives, you see.

And then one more thing this morning. Proclamation. And this is the natural progression of things. Or should be. Because contemplation leads to adoration.

We love him. Adoration then leads to proclamation. We just simply must tell people about it. And that's exactly what happens in the story.

Again, the shepherds are the example. Verse 17. Now when they, that is the shepherds, had seen him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child.

[20 : 45] Made widely known. That's three words in the English, just one word in the Greek text. And it is a word that means to make known thoroughly.

And not just thoroughly in the sense of the thoroughness of the message itself. Actually, it's pointing more to the thoroughness of its spread, of its proclamation.

In fact, it could also be translated to publish abroad. That is, everywhere. Now, what exactly did they tell everyone? The saying which was told them concerning this child.

That's what the Bible says. That's what they were telling everyone. The saying concerning this child. And what exactly was that? Well, you have to go back to verse 11 to find that out. And verse 11 says, where there is born, this is what the angel said, there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

That's what we are to proclaim. to the world. He's the Savior, he's Christ, he's the Lord. And we are to publish that abroad.

[21 : 57] That is, we are to make it known thoroughly to every corner of this world. And you might be thinking, well, why should anybody listen to me?

Have you ever thought that? Why should anybody believe me? I mean, who am I to tell them? I mean, they won't believe me. Now, you could not be less respected than a bunch of shepherds, I assure you.

Did you know that shepherds were at the bottom of the social register of respectability? I mean, they were at the very bottom. They were kind of the scum of the earth to most Jews because of their occupation primarily but also because of their character, typical character of a shepherd in that day.

No one respected shepherds. I mean, no one, which makes it even more amazing that God would use shepherds as his first witnesses to the coming of Messiah to the world, isn't it?

Because shepherds were not respected. They were notorious liars, actually. And so, why would anybody believe the word of a shepherd? And not only that, but in a religious sense, they were, in the Jewish mindset, they were unclean, unworthy people.

[23 : 21] It would be a very rare thing that a shepherd would be allowed to worship in the temple because they were unclean. So, why would anyone believe that a holy angel would actually have spoken to shepherds if it would make sense to people?

And certainly, no one would believe that God had announced the arrival of their Messiah to, of all people, shepherds.

I don't know, we don't have that kind of mindset about shepherds. We think of it more romantically, you know, kind of beautifully and these beautiful shepherds and what a wonderful occupation to be out there tending the cute little fuzzy sheep and that was not the case to the Jewish mindset.

Why would anybody believe them? And yet God used them, announced the birth of Christ first to them and sent them out first to testify to the coming of the Messiah no one would believe them.

No one respected them. The shepherds certainly knew that. And yet they were faithful witnesses nevertheless. Verse 18 says, and all those who heard it marveled, that is, they heard the testimony of the shepherds, they marveled as they wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

[24 : 54] Now, you know, honestly, the implication here is not that everyone believed them. I'm not trying to say that. And if you're faithful as a witness for the gospel, not everyone is going to believe you.

They spoke it and proclaimed it nevertheless. So, the implication here is not that everyone believed, but all were deeply stirred in their hearts.

The hidden part of them, you know, deep down in their hearts. And I think, no doubt, some did believe. This is the victorious mission part of it.

Some did believe. And today, some will believe. You can be sure of that. A mother and her four-year-old daughter were Christmas shopping, at a very busy mall, something that's very familiar to most of us.

Perhaps you were at one of those busy malls yesterday. And so, they were shopping, and the mother was just stressed out beyond imagination. She had her list, and she was just trying to get all the presents that she needed to buy, and looking for them, and time was growing short, and she's just a frazzle, just a frantic mess.

[26 : 15] And so, at one point, they stopped for a moment so she could look over her list while her daughter stood beside her, and they stopped right in front of the window of a Christian bookstore.

And so, the little girl was standing there, and she looked inside the window of this Christian bookstore, and there was a beautiful nativity scene. And eventually, she tugged at her mother's coat and said, Mommy, why is that little baby laying there in the hay?

to which her mother responded very curtly, we don't have time for that right now. We've got to get ready for Christmas. How true, isn't it?

True to life. Well, you know, we can say now, though I'm sure there are some stores open somewhere, but Christmas shopping is over, right? That's all done with today's Christmas Day.

Take time, would you, to worship the baby that was laying in the hay? Worship him.