

An Event That Demands a Response

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all this morning and especially on this morning just a few days after the Christmas day and I trust that all of you have had a good Christmas this year and the kids probably had the best fun of all right.

And receiving multiple gifts, I'm sure. And then, you know, it's always a joy to be on the giving side of that and to have those gifts wrapped up for those special ones, be it a spouse or children, and then watch them open up those gifts and the eyes, you know.

Of course, you know, you can always read in the eyes, especially this is true of adults, you can always read in their eyes whether it's really what they wanted or not. Did you have that experience this year, you know, and you're looking and you're thinking, I hope you like that.

And they say, oh, yes, I love that, just what I wanted. And then, you know, they're going to take it back after Christmas and get exchanged for something else.

But I trust everyone has had a good Christmas this year. I know that we have. We've had some extra company. And it's been a joy, especially our granddaughters, one of them standing up there on the pew.

[1 : 35] And my grandma, or Nani is her name, that is grandma's name. So it's been good, very good. Well, take your Bibles this morning because we're still kind of thinking on the Christmas kind of theme.

And I want to do it one more time before we move on and kind of get away from the Christmas season. I want you to open your Bibles to Luke chapter 2 one more time here in 2014.

And then next Sunday, we'll spend some time kind of focusing upon the theme of the new year. And then after that, we'll get back to the Gospel of Luke as I have been preaching through it.

And that'll kind of be our scheme for the next several weeks. Luke chapter 2, and I'm going to read here in just a moment verses 8 through 20, even though we've already read some of that passage this season, in fact, last Sunday.

But we're going to focus on the Christmas story a little bit differently. And the focus this morning will be mostly upon the response, how we are to respond to this event.

[2 : 52] In fact, I've entitled this message, An Event That Demands a Response. And so I want you to particularly pay attention and focus upon that aspect of the story.

And I'm going to help you with that as we kind of look at each element of the text in which we're going to be reading here in just a moment. So Jesus has been born. He's already been born. He's been lying in the manger. And we see that whole scene. And we've come really to the end of Luke's account of the birth of Christ.

Now, the wise men have not yet arrived to visit the Holy Family and to visit the baby Jesus. But Matthew is going to tell that part of the story. But essentially, in Luke's telling of the story, we have come to the end of it.

We've come to the end of his recounting of the birth of Jesus Christ. And so that's about over with. And yet it's not forgotten because, again, you see, this is an event.

[3 : 51] The birth of Christ is an event that demands a response, an ongoing response. And so let me go ahead and read the passage, and we're going to focus on various parts of this passage this morning.

So Luke chapter 2, starting with verse 8. Now, there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people.

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

[4 : 58] 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.

Now, what might you picture in your mind? I mean, just kind of a picture in your mind of a certain thing. When you hear the words amazing, or awesome, or astonishing, or breathtaking, would it be some kind of natural wonder of God's creation like perhaps the Rocky Mountains, let's say, or maybe Pikes Peak if you've ever been there?

Now for me, it would be the Smoky Mountains. I love the Smoky Mountains. And some of the scenes there in the Smoky Mountains are to me awesome, and they're astonishing, and they're kind of breathtaking.

[6 : 27] Or maybe it would be for you a shooting star. You know, sometimes you'll see a shooting star and just happen to look just at the right moment and see it go across the night sky.

And especially those that are just really vivid and bright, and it's just awesome to see something like that. Or maybe it would be, again, on a nice clear night to look up and see all of the stars, to see the Milky Way on a really clear night.

Or if you've had the pleasure of seeing the Aurora Borealis. I've never seen that, just have seen films of it. But that would be something that would be awesome.

And so when you hear those words like astonishing or breathtaking, would it be some natural wonder? You know, sometimes it can even be some man-made wonder.

You know, like some huge castle built on top of a mountain. Or maybe a cathedral, a large cathedral. Or maybe it would be some modern skyscraper today.

[7 : 30] You know, man has been gifted by God in his ingenuity to construct some pretty amazing things. And we would use words like that to describe them.

Amazing, astonishing, breathtaking. But having said all that, have you ever noticed that when you have the opportunity to see these things a second and a third and a fourth time, have you noticed that, you know, somehow they tend to be a little bit less impressive each time you see them?

Well, Luke chapter 2 is all about an event. A wonder. Actually, we could call it a wonder of God. That is a supernatural wonder.

Not just a natural wonder, but a supernatural wonder. As one person put it, a holy astonishment. This thing that God has done here in Luke chapter 2.

And it is something, this holy wonder, this holy astonishment, is something that should never lose its luster. It should never pale. It should never become common. You know, even though we read it and reread it many times over, and each year, this time of the year, we go back to it and read about it and hear sermons about it and think about it.

[8 : 51] And even though it has become a very familiar story about a very familiar event, it should never ever become common or lose its wonder when we hear about it.

And I'm referring, of course, you're thinking I'm referring to the birth of Christ. Indeed, I am. But I'm referring specifically to the incarnation. The incarnation.

That's what the birth of Jesus Christ is all about. It's the incarnation of God the Son. It's a wonder and a holy astonishment that instead of letting me go on my sinful way, and instead of letting me suffer the consequences of that sinful way, God devised a wonderful plan for my redemption and your redemption.

God manifested himself in human flesh, came into this world born as a little baby, grew to be a man, lived a relatively short life, and yet a perfect life, and then died a cruel death upon a cross to pay the price for my sin.

That's putting it all together. You see, and listen, unless your heart is cold, unless your heart is hard, you cannot help but stand in awe of this marvelous, glorious, gracious, marvelous miracle of God. [10:26] And it should never ever become common. The incarnation of his only begotten Son. And so we really should say right now what the Bible says, every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea will one day say, blessing and honor and glory and power be to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.

Revelation chapter 5 verse 13. That should be on our lips now. You see, listen, do you want a vision of divine love? You want a vision of deity and sovereignty that is so simplistic and yet beyond human comprehension, human thought?

Do you want a vision of grace and mercy and love so amazing? Then look first to the manger in Bethlehem at the incarnation. And of course, it just being the first in a string of events that lead us all the way to the cross and the resurrection and our redemption in Jesus Christ.

The wonder of that. And what if you had been there? You know, I quite often, I've said this a number of times, quite often I'll read in the Gospels and there are just certain key stories in the Gospel that I just can't help but immerse myself in and can't help but wish that I could be there to see these things and to experience these things.

And what if you had been there when Jesus was born? Like Mary and Joseph were and like the shepherds ultimately were and a little bit later the wise men whoever they may have been.

[12:02] What if you had been there? How would you have responded to that? What would that sight have caused to happen inside of you?

And what kind of result would have taken place in your life an ongoing, lasting result? See, Christmas demands a response from us.

Now Christmas is over, all right? The day is over. And the day that we typically have set aside to commemorate and celebrate and think on and ponder the birth of Christ.

That day is over and yet we still are responding to it or we should be. And that's my point here this morning. Christmas demands a response from us.

It's an ongoing response. It is a lifelong response. And we can learn about the right response from those who were there that first Christmas.

[13:02] In fact, Luke reveals four very definite responses to the birth of Christ. To that very first Christmas. And I shall take them in the order in which they appear.

And this comes toward the end of the text that I read a moment ago. I started with verse 8 to kind of set this up because we begin with the shepherds. And the responses that ought to be true of us, we can learn many of them from the shepherds themselves.

But we find four responses. And I want to give you four words that will help identify these four responses to the birth of Christ.

And here's the first one. Proclamation. The first one is the word proclamation. You know, the proclaiming of something. The proclaiming of a truth.

And so the first response is a proclamation. Verse 17. Look at it again. Now when they, of course we're talking about the shepherds, when they had seen Him. Each word is important here in this passage.

[14:10] When the shepherds had seen Him. They saw Him with their own eyes. The shepherds had been there where Jesus was born.

The angel sent them to that very spot. The angel told them in advance who they would find there. And they found Jesus there, just as the angel said, wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in the manger.

And because of what the angel had announced to them, they knew who this person was, this baby was. And they knew what He meant to them. And they knew all of these things and they went and they saw it.

And so look again in verse 17. Now when they had seen Him, then what? They made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child.

Proclamation. Proclamation. They made widely known. Now we need to understand just a few things about this proclamation from the story.

[15:14] First of all, the shepherds, these shepherds had something worth proclaiming. Something of great worth. You see, these lowly shepherds, and I kind of described who these shepherds were last week.

You know, they were the, you know, the dredge of society. That is in the eyes of most people of the day. They were lowly, poor, they, you know, the kind of outcasts.

They were on the lowest of strata in, among people. And God gave these lowly shepherds the answer to the riddle of the ages.

That's really pretty incredible when you think about it. The Jews had been looking for and longing for the Messiah. They didn't know exactly when he was come. I think there was a heightened expectation in that day because of some things in Scripture and some prophecies that they could begin to put together.

And God had also placed in their hearts a kind of heightened expectation. And yet they were looking and longing for the Messiah. And now he had come. Actually did come. And the shepherds had seen him.

[16:17] And the shepherds proclaimed what they saw. It's really very simple, isn't it? Now, wouldn't it have been grand to have been entrusted with the supreme answer to the question of the ages?

Just like the shepherds were. And that question, of course, I guess you could say essentially is, what is to be done about my sin? That's the question of the ages. What's to be done about my broken relationship with the God of all creation?

And so, wouldn't it be great to have the answer to that? To be entrusted with that answer? Well, of course, if you're a Christian, if you're a born-again believer here this morning, you have the answer to that question.

And you have, each of us, we've all been entrusted with the answer. And people today, whether they realize it or not, and many do not realize it, they're looking for the answer to that question. There's something wrong, there's something missing, there's a problem there in their hearts and in their lives, and they're looking for the answer to that. And so, will you tell them?

[17:25] That's what we should consider here. This is the response to the birth of Christ. Proclamation. Proclamation. But let me tell you something else. Not only was it something worth proclaiming, but also you should note that the shepherds, these shepherds proclaimed something that had the mark of divine authorship.

This is something that came from God. And you know, this whole event, what the shepherds heard and what they witnessed and then when they went to Bethlehem, what they saw, it has kind of the unique blend of the sublime as well as the simple.

Simplistic. And just think about what the shepherds experienced that day at that, well, first, out in the fields as they were watching over their sheep and then ultimately when they traveled a short distance to the place where Jesus was born.

Just think about what they experienced at this time. The angels' visitation at midnight. That would be pretty awesome. The heavenly host, you know, singing there in heaven.

But I can't even imagine what that might have been like. And then, you know, this whole idea, they actually witnessed God coming as a baby.

[18:48] The infinite coming as an infant. Think about this. The ancient of days being born. Being born and being born to a peasant woman.

See the mixture of the sublime and the simplistic. How simplistic could it get? A stable, a manger, a carpenter and his wife and, you know, and a child wrapped up in cloths and lying there in that feeding trough.

How simplistic and yet also how sublime. The multitude of the heavenly host and the angelic announcement of the coming of the Messiah, the Lord, Jesus Christ, the Lord, the Savior.

Now, you know, think about it. We don't really have a complicated message to proclaim. Sometimes I think we try to make it more complicated than it is.

It's not a complicated message to proclaim to the world. Jesus is the one and only Savior. Repent. Believe in Jesus as Lord and be saved.

[19:57] That's pretty simple, isn't it? And even when Jesus was grown and began to preach, His message was simple and yet also sublime.

He said, Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. See, what good news.

I mean, that's good news. Come to Jesus and be saved. And let me say something else about this proclamation. Third, these shepherds needed no prompting.

Did you notice? They didn't need any prompting to proclaim this good news. And nothing said about it. In fact, you get the sense that immediately. I mean, they saw the child.

All right, so they heard what the angel said. They went and they saw the child and immediately, just as they went out and started telling everybody about it. They didn't need any prompting about that.

[20 : 55] They just simply went out and immediately started telling people what they heard and what they saw. And that's really all that we're supposed to do. What we've heard and what we have seen, what we know, what we believe, we're just to simply tell people about that.

And so, when God entrusts Christians with the good news of Jesus Christ, we don't have to, you know, think about it. we don't have to wait for some kind of special prompting.

We don't have to even pray about it. Whether we should go out and tell people about it, we're just supposed to do it. And to do it as we go, to do it every opportunity we have. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 4, but as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, and we have been entrusted with the gospel, he said, even so, we speak.

We speak. Not as pleasing men, because sometimes it's not pleasing. As simple as it is, it's not going to be acceptable to many, pleasing to many. He says, not pleasing men, but God.

Pleasing God who tests our hearts. Let me say one other thing about this proclamation. We'll move on. These shepherds proclaimed what they knew to be true. Now, that's pretty important.

[22 : 15] They believed this to be true, and they knew it and believed it experientially. And the point is, you cannot speak of the things of God until you have first experienced those things for yourself.

And then you can speak of it. It is when the good news is found in your heart. Excuse me. When the good news found in Christ is the good news found in your heart.

That's key. All right, so number one, then, proclamation. That's the first response this first Christmas. Proclamation. Go tell it on the mountains that Jesus Christ is born.

Christmas is an event that demands a response. Now, there are three more responses to the birth of Christ that I think are revealed very clearly in this story in Luke chapter 2, the story of the first Christmas.

And these are the responses that come after Christmas. All right? And there are three more and they really follow in logical succession.

[23 : 19] After the proclamation of the good news, then comes contemplation. That's number two. Proclamation, then contemplation.

Contemplation involves the engaging of the mind. Proclamation involves the engaging of, first, if you're on the proclaiming side of it, the mouth. And you proclaim what you've heard and seen. But thinking of proclamation in terms of the receiving side, first comes the proclamation through our ears and through our eyes and then comes the contemplation, the engaging of our minds.

Verse 18. And all those who heard it, what did they do? They marveled. Some virgins have wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

So the shepherds just went out and they began to proclaim and broadcast everywhere all that they had heard and all that they had seen. And then everybody who heard what the shepherds proclaimed began to think about it.

[24 : 22] And they marveled. They wondered. Not just simply considered it, but they contemplated it. They marveled. And really the word, the word that is used there in the Greek text means that they were amazed.

They were astonished. Which means they seriously contemplated what the shepherds told them about the birth of Jesus Christ.

Now, that's the right response. The initial response. The right initial response to the word of God. When the word of God is proclaimed. That's the right response to the word of God about the word of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Remember when Jesus and the apostles were in a boat together and a storm came up. And they were afraid and Jesus calmed the storm.

You remember that story. Famous story. The Bible says that Jesus rebuked the wind and the sea. Remember that story? And then how did the disciples respond?

[25 : 25] Well, in Matthew chapter 8 verse 27, the Bible says they marveled. They wondered, saying, who can this be? What kind of man is this?

That even the winds and the sea obey him. That was their contemplation of what Jesus had just done. What they saw with their own eyes.

They marveled at this. They wondered. Remember when Jesus healed the paralytic man? And the Bible says in Matthew 9, 8, Now when the multitude saw it, because it was witnessed by everyone who was there, they marveled.

They wondered and glorified God. You see, contemplation is the initial response of the heart that is searching for God. And we hear the word of God.

We see God's word coming true and we see at least in our minds the events that the Bible describes for us about the coming of Christ and how he was born and who he was and his life and his death and all those things.

[26 : 37] We contemplate these things. Now in the context of the first Christmas, it is a holy contemplation that draws us to that infant child. the baby Jesus.

But ultimately leads us to the infinite Savior. And they're one in the same. Don't ever forget that.

Alright, but contemplation is not enough. That's the initial response.

Contemplation falls short of a complete response to the good news of Jesus Christ and to his birth and everything that came after. And that leads us to the third response.

And that is meditation. Now we could kind of conceptualize this in this way. On the receiving end of it, proclamation is something that comes through the ears and through the eyes.

We hear and see the message. And then contemplation involves the thinking, involves the mind.

[27 : 41] We contemplate this. And then meditation involves the heart. So it comes through the ears, eyes, into the mind and down into the heart. And that's exactly how we see this happening and unfolding for us in the story.

Verse 19, and we get this from Mary, but Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

See, meditation. Now most scholars tell us that Luke wrote this portion of his gospel, the portion that includes the birth, the details of the birth of Christ.

He wrote it based upon the testimony, the direct testimony of Mary, the mother of Jesus. I mean, there are things here in Luke chapter 2 that only Mary would have known.

And so he got this from Mary, many scholars believe, and I happen to believe this to be the case.

And that's why Luke's account of the birth of Jesus Christ is so unique and so complete and so vivid.

We don't have any account like this anywhere else, certainly not in any of the other gospels, nowhere else in scripture. And so I think Luke got this directly from Mary and we can kind of imagine this happening.

[28 : 54] You know, Luke with pen in hand, you know, he's sitting down with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and she recalls every single detail of the events that surround the birth of her son Jesus, the Lord and Savior.

And Luke is writing it all down. And it's sort of as if Mary got out the family photo album. I know they didn't have photos back in those days, but you can kind of imagine this, you know, and she is showing Luke every picture and she is describing all of the details around that picture, you know, picture just simply a snapshot.

And then she's filling in all of it with her testimony about what happened. And we can kind of imagine this, you know, there they are sitting together and she's got the photo album out and she says, here's a picture of my bedroom in Nazareth.

And you see that window right there? That's where the angel Gabriel appeared to me. And this is what he said to me. And so she's just, she's showing Luke these photos and then describing the events that took place around her.

Or maybe she said, here's a picture of that donkey I rode on, on the way to Bethlehem. And man, what a trip that was. And so she's describing that. You can kind of imagine this happening. You can imagine sitting down with someone and getting out the family photo album and say, look at this picture.

[30 : 20] Let me tell you what happened there and what happened there. And Mary's saying, here's a picture of the stable where I gave birth to Jesus. Do you see the stable there and there are the animals and so forth?

Let me tell you what happened there. And then there's a picture of the shepherds. Maybe she got a picture of the shepherds standing there and took a snapshot of them and said, here are the shepherds and this is what they told me.

They told me about the angel visiting them and then they came and visited with us and told us all about it. And so she's just kind of relating the whole story to Luke and Luke is writing it down. Now Mary didn't need a photo album. Of course, they didn't have it in those days. The Bible says she pondered these things in her heart. They were deep in her heart and in her mind. She was never going to forget them. And that's a real lesson for all of us. Not just related to the events of the birth of Christ but how about the events related to our own spiritual birth, rebirth, when we were saved.

[31 : 22] And our pondering the events in our own lives of God working in our lives and leading us and not only saving us but growing us and teaching us and instructing us and so forth that we ought to ponder even the very things of Christ that we know from Scripture about His birth.

You know, and we just kind of meditate upon these things about what the angel said about that and the manger and the shepherds and the wise men who came later and also to meditate upon His life, what He said and what He did and the places He went and the things that happened to Him in His life.

And then, of course, that leads us to His death, to meditate upon His death, His suffering and His cross and the shedding of His blood for us and for our redemption.

And then to meditate upon the resurrection and to see in our own mind's eye the stone that has rolled away and the empty tomb and the angel there and the ascension, ultimate ascension of Jesus back up into heaven.

And we can even in our minds meditate upon a future event like His return and we can take what the Scripture has said about that and what, some of the things that will happen at that time and we can meditate upon that and contemplate those things, you see.

[32 : 49] Meditation is so important and of course meditate upon the instructions of God in His Word to meditate upon those, to mill over them, to chew on them and to think and rethink and to apply and meditation is so extremely important to a believer and Mary gives us an example of that.

So we have proclamation and we have contemplation. These are responses to the birth of Christ. We have meditation and these are gradual things that must take place and then finally we have one last one and that would be adoration because you see when Jesus is the meditation of your heart then the fourth and final response to His birth and life and death and resurrection and the fourth and final response will be quite natural and that would be adoration.

And we have that in the text too 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.

They praised Him they praised Him for what they heard they praised God for what they saw and you put it all together they adored Him worshipped Him because what they heard agreed with what they saw it all came together and I'm not just talking about what the angels said to them but you have to consider what the shepherds had been hearing all of their lives.

See all of their lives they had heard what Moses had said about the Messiah and what David had said and what Isaiah the prophet said and what Jeremiah the prophet said about the Messiah and all their lives they had been they had been hearing about what Daniel and reading about what Daniel had said and Micah and Zechariah and Malachi and all throughout the Old Testament prophets and now they had heard what the angels said as they were out there tending their sheep and they had heard all of these things about the Messiah but that wasn't enough for them they had to go see for themselves and so the Bible says in verse 15 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 they couldn't wait to get there you see their hearts were thrilled by all of this that all that they had heard about the Messiah had now come to fruition their hearts were filled them with adoration what they had heard all their lives and what they had heard from the angel had come to pass and what they had longed for and all the people were longing for they now realized it had come true and so what God said he would do he did you see adoration now let me ask you a question do we have any less reason to respond today in the same way the shepherds responded in their day you see what took place more than 2,000 years ago produced the fruit of salvation in their lives

[36 : 15] I really believe so I believe they were saved they believed and the reality of that event that is still producing the fruit of salvation today not just simply the birth of Christ but but it being the part of a whole string of events that brought about redemption for all those who will believe the fruit of salvation is still being born from the life of Christ and the proof of that is this guy standing up here preaching and the proof of it is with many of you hopefully all of you sitting here in this room here

this morning so you see our response should be the same as that of the shepherds we adore him we adore him because we have heard and we have seen someone has said we've talked about the virgin birth this year but someone has said that the proof of the virgin birth is the reality of the new birth the new birth in Christ our salvation alright so

Christmas is an event that demands a response proclamation contemplation meditation adoration