

CITY LIFE CHURCH  
ADVENT  
**Luke 2:8-20: 8**

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14** "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" **15** When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

I. Intro

- a. My name is John Seago, I serve as one of the elders here at City Life Church and I have the joy of continuing our advent series this morning.
- b. In our passage today, we see various ways we respond to the birth of Jesus Christ: one of the chief ways is celebration.
- c. My kids have a new part of their lives to celebrate: The weekend. My wife homeschooled our children for three years and they started in a charter school this year. A lot of things have changed for them. First off they can't do school in their PJs anymore. They have a strict and sometimes icky uniform. We can't take spontaneous field trips. But one of the biggest consequences is on their schedule. They have to wake up early every morning and we have to be stringent about bedtime. So my kids, for the first time in their lives, understand and appreciate weekends. Weekends were not much of a deal when we homeschooled. But now it is an event to be celebrated. They countdown to the weekends, tell their friends, only 5 more days until the weekend. And they wake up with great joy on Friday mornings.
- d. Today, we will look at how we react to the birth of Christ. Above all it is to be celebrated, to be shared, and to be pondered.
- e. Let's Pray.

f. So, the birth of Christ is to be celebrated, to be shared, and to be pondered. All these are intertwined so we will spend most of our time on the first point that...

g. The birth of Jesus is **to be celebrated**

h. Our passage picks up right outside the city where Christ was born.

i. And we have these new characters in our story: the shepherds. Don't quite match the pristine nativity image we usually think of.

i. In the Old Testament people watched their own sheep for their families' so it was typically a noble thing, however in our setting, 1<sup>st</sup> century middle east that's not the case. Being a shepherd was like day labor, they were hired workers and these guys had an awful reputation.

ii. They were thought of as being "dishonest and thieving"

iii. One Jewish authority said "there is no more disreputable occupation than that of a shepherd."

j. So, these are just regular guys doing their monotonous jobs; watching sheep, protecting them from thieves and animals when these supernatural beings shining with light interrupts their night shift.

i. we see in verse 9, "And an angel of the Lord appeared to them"

k. The Supernatural has burst into the natural. How this something we can celebrate? How is this something we even believe?

i. If are very familiar with the story or grew up around church, angels are not a big deal.

ii. But, even in Jesus' day there were groups that objected to the existence of angels (Sadducees in Acts 23:8), just like today where many of our neighbors and friends in the city hold to reductive physicalism: Everything that exists can be reduced down to its fundamental physical or material parts; no room for supernatural, angels, or the soul.

iii. Although we may be uncomfortable with it, Christians need to be clear on this fundamental point, the Bible teaches that Angels are just part of the spiritual realm that permeates our everyday life.

iv. One theologian puts it this way, "An unbelieving world may dismiss talk of angels as mere superstition, but Scripture offers it as insight into the state of affairs as they really are."

l. The mere idea a supernatural, a higher realm beyond this world could bring hope and is worth celebrating. Some of the greatest art, movies, literature point us to the beyond.

m. However, look, the word "angel," their very name, means 'messenger.' This is their primary role throughout scripture: they make announcements for the Lord. And they show up when the God is doing something significant.

i. So the beginning of Luke is so hopeful because for 500 years there had been silence from the Lord, no prophets, no angels no miracles, and now in 6 BC (as recorded in Luke) we see a flurry of supernatural activity. Angels

appearing to multiple people. And now not just one, but a horde of transcendent beings appear to these regular dudes.

n. So Christians should point out all the longing and evidence we have of the transcendent higher realm of reality, but let's not miss the point here.

i. Imagine obsessing over the existence of a big mysterious amazon prime box delivered to your front door. It'd be foolish to spend your time examining the outside, the decals, the design of the box. The value of the box is the gift inside that it brought you. Open it up!

o. Similarly the value of the Angels is the message they bring from the Lord...

i. The Angel announces that the shepherds should have great joy and not fear because "I bring you good news."

ii. This whole phrase is actually one word in Greek and it includes the word translated "gospel."

iii. So this here is the angel claiming, "I bring you the gospel."

p. This 'gospel' or 'good news' is to the source of great joy "for all the people"

q. Look in verse 11, the angel explains further, "**For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**" Read that again in verse 11.

i. This may seem like pretty concise. That's it? Shouldn't the angels give us some more details?

ii. No, this announcement is potent. Its like a Ghost Pepper hot sauce, a small drop packs a punch.

iii. This one line is the gospel acorn that will grow into a tree of immeasurable size and beauty of the good news of all that God is doing in human history.

iv. In Israel, everyone knew the Jews were waiting for deliverance from their political enemies, maybe a military campaign, some restoration to their kingdom status and prestige they enjoyed under King David.

v. So, even the Shepherds saw the significance of the announcement: the messiah is here.

vi. Look at the words used:

1. A Savior: Someone to deliver them like Moses.

2. Who is Christ: "Christ," the Greek word for Messiah, the anointed one, a formal title.

3. The Lord: This is the surprise. This means that that individual sent to save is not just a warrior, a leader... BUT is God himself. Jesus is the Lord. Somehow.

vii. So, this is what the angel is telling these shepherds, a baby was just born that the entire OT has been waiting for, for thousands of years, promising and anticipating this one fragile infant that was just born in that nearby town.

r. This message did not just fulfill their anticipation but exceeded it! This is so much better than the earthly leader.

- i. Mathew gives us an account of an angel appearing to Joseph as well, and he explains to Joseph “you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matt 1:21).
  - ii. He was not going to be a leader to elevate the nation of Israel, but God himself coming to restore all of humanity. – This is the gospel.
  - iii. NO WONDER this message was accompanied by blinding light and the glory of the Lord! This is God himself, creator of the universe, breaking into human to deliver us.
- s. The angels continue to expand the good news in verse 14, a whole choir of angels show up to sing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”
  - i. This was needed message to this specific audience:
  - ii. The Shepherds on the margins of society. Looked down on by others.
- t. Good example of how the Birth of Christ is to be celebrated in the face of social injustice.
  - i. We can easily identify groups like the shepherds in our society today. We have plenty of marginalized people.
  - ii. **Christians and non-Christians alike realize there is so much change needed in our city**, the fall has corrupted man and nature alike so that abuse, decay, wickedness, and injustice abounds.
  - iii. From the riots in Paris, deadly violence of terrorist groups to the discord and chaos in our own backyard. Our world needs peace.
  - iv. We need a messiah to overcome. To take over. To restore peace and justice in our world.
  - v. The good news is that God is already on the move. He is already unfolding his plan that ends in a peaceful city where truth and justice abound.
- u. But like the shepherds, we must not miss the core thing to be celebrated.
  - i. A justice and peaceful society, the end of racism, hate, attacks on human dignity are all fruits that stem from the gospel acorn.
  - ii. The more fundamental truth of the good news is that because of this baby we will have peace with God.
  - iii. Look back at verse 14, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”
  - iv. This is a message of divine favor. That the coming Messiah will actually bring God’s favor upon us. All of these social evils stem from our rebellion against God.
  - v. The peace of salvation that individuals receive to replace their enmity with God.
  - vi. Today those who have been given faith are no longer enemies with God, but adopted children and heirs. Paul wrote that we were enemies we have now been reconciled to God by the death of his Son and so we should rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- vii. Even though at times things seem to be getting worse, God has a plan of reconciliation that will change all things. There will be peace in Christ's kingdom, though Redemptive history is not complete yet.
- v. This should bring us an explosion of joy. The joy of my eight-year-old son sitting in the theater when the new Spiderman movie finally starts after months of waiting and what seemed like an endless stream of trailers. Could hardly stay in his seat.
- i. What do you celebrate? The toast with friends when you finally got that dream job or promotion? The dance of joy you can't help when your team wins the bowl game? (That was for all four of you who care about football).
- ii. Do you celebrate the gospel? Not something of great joy anymore? Year after year we observe advent, week after week we talk about the gospel. Do you have gospel fatigue this morning?
- w. Maybe you can't celebrate the good news because you don't believe it.
- i. Too many questions about the supernatural, problem of evil, historical proof of Jesus. Bring these questions to the church bring them to Scripture. The Bible stands up to those questions. And there's a lot of historical data to study. But usually the most compelling evidence is not reading the historian Josephus or pointing to the writings of Roman politicians of the time.
- ii. There's a much deeper argument for the truth of the good news. We know that we need a Messiah. We look into the world and see injustices. We look into our hearts and see disorder and longing. We have been designed to long for the supernatural. A desire to have a relationship with our Creator who gives us a higher and more satisfying meaning.
- iii. This morning if you're a Christian who can't find joy in the birth of Christ or if you're not a Christian who can't find faith in the birth of Christ, part of the answer is the same: ask God for it.
1. This seems like a copout, but when I was a skeptic doubting the existence of God, it was God's grace, not my intellect that brought me back to faith.
- iv. Whether you find the gospel joyful or true does not affect God's existence and the truth of the scripture. The gospel is actually the core truth of reality. The ministry of Christ actually shapes human history and gives our lives meaning. Pray for joy in this truth and pray for faith to see the truth.
- x. Two follow up ways we celebrate the birth of Christ.
- y. Christ's birth is **to be shared**
- z. Let's look in verse 16-17, we see the Shepherds, "And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger." And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child."
- aa. After this amazing proclamation they went and shared what was revealed to them.
- i. If we are filled with the joy of the gospel, it will come out of us.

ii. When we embrace this idea that the Messiah is bringing peace on earth between men and between us and God, then we will not be able to contain it.

iii. Like a couple that can't wait to share the good news of expecting their first child. The joyful news explodes out of them in that announcement to friends.

bb. Sharing the gospel, spreading the good news is often seen as an item on our spiritual to do list, a chore we must complete. But think about a familiar but helpful analogy.

i. If I'm walking through the hospitality room with a cup of coffee and someone bumps into me and coffee spills out. Think about it. Why did coffee come out? Because someone bumped me. No, no... why did *coffee* come out (not water or tea)? Because there was coffee in the cup.

ii. We often don't share the gospel because we don't have joy of the gospel or don't believe its true. Those two areas we pointed to above.

iii. Too often our cup is full of self-obsession, pride, idol of comfort and so those are the things that pour out when we're bumped into in a conversation.

iv. Church, we have to fill your cup up with the reality of the gospel. We have to share the good news with ourselves!

cc. Husbands are you sharing the gospel with your wives when those insecurities and self-criticism spill out? Do you point them to the infinite love and acceptance the Savior has for them displayed on the Cross?

dd. Parents, are you sharing the gospel with your children, when you lose your temper and need to confess to them and remind them that you are a sinner but God forgives us all and is the perfect heavenly Father?

ee. Church, are we preaching the gospel to ourselves and our friends when we despair over the sins and brokenness of the world? Of our political leaders?

ff. Now, notice I skipped verse 15.

i. Before the Shepherds ran off to tell Joseph and Mary what they had heard, look what happened. Verse 15. "When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.'"

gg. The shepherds were going to verify what they believed.

hh. The angels provided proof and didn't just tell them to trust blindly.

i. Verse 12 the angel actually told them "This will be a sign for you: you'll find the baby..."

ii. For us, there is evidence of God's work that we should examine, test, remind ourselves of.

iii. At the beginning of every elder meeting and every leader meeting we set aside a time of evidence of grace. Time to share with each other evidence we have of God's grace in our lives, our church, and our city.

1. This is one way we fill up with the good news. Reminding us the gospel is breaking through into our daily lives.

iv. Also that the shepherds realized this was something revealed to them. Even the evidence was given that it was the Lord that made it known to them.

- ii. Even if you are a Christian and have believed the gospel for decades, you may need to rediscover it. By going and seeing what the Lord has done.
- jj. Three practical ways to do this:
  - i. Read the gospel of Luke. We always read the first two chapters during Christmas time, but keep reading into 2019. Go back to the source of the good news. Follow Jesus along his earthly ministry.
  - ii. Second, revisit your testimony. Write out or better yet share your story of how Christ was made known to you. This reminds us of what the Lord has done and gives us hope for his ability to continue that work.
  - iii. Third, share and ask for others to share evidences of grace. At a meal with friends or just hanging out. Deliberately share or ask what is something that has happened lately that is an evidence of God's grace in our lives.
- kk. We need to take care to fill ourselves with the gospel then we will give it to others.
- ll. Maybe you need to grow in this area, study how to share Jesus without freaking out.
  - i. That's actually the title of book we recommend: *Sharing Jesus without Freaking Out*.
  - ii. We can boldly share the good news because:
    - 1. God is the one who makes known.
      - a. Remember those words of the Shepherds "Which the Lord has made known to us."
      - b. Same with us, we may share the gospel with our family or friends, but only the Holy Spirit opens their eyes to see the truth of the good news.
    - 2. The gospel is for everyone.
      - a. Remember over in verse 10, the angel said "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."
      - b. After all, The angels brought this message to these disreputable shepherds.
- a. Lastly, Christ's birth is **to be pondered** (This is another way we celebrate).
  - mm. Towards the end of our passage there is this really interesting dichotomy between how people responded to the message of the angels.
  - nn. Look at verse 18, "And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them."
  - oo. This word wonder means they were amazed, astonished, marveled.
    - i. This moment is definitely worth our wonder. This baby is Christ the Lord, the Messiah of the world, in the equivalent of a grungy inner-city hostile.
    - ii. The desolate circumstances and setting for this magnificent other worldly appearance, song, and message.
  - e. Wonder is a passive astonishment. We saw the same response to Jesus during his public ministry but it doesn't always lead to faith.
  - f. So there is passive wonder, but look at what Mary did.

i. Verse 19 says, “But Mary treasured up all these things pondering them in her heart.”

ii. She treasured these things: held on to them.

iii. And she pondered these things in her heart.

iv. This term ponder is great: To bring together, to deliberate, to turn over in one’s mind.

v. Mary, the mother of Jesus, took these things into private meditation.

vi. Reflecting on the meaning of all these things the Lord revealed to her.

g. To find the joy and truth of the gospel, the significance of the birth of Christ, we have to ponder these things.

h. We need to spend private time thinking about the gospel.

i. What do you ponder? What do you hold onto, turn over in your mind and examine privately? Maybe it is the first thing that comes to mind when you try to sleep.

i. In stressful seasons of my work I ponder my reputation, my image, I re-examine and question what others are saying about me and my organization. Like a carousel of self-obsession and narcissism the same thoughts revolve around and around not making any progress, not getting me closer to truth, just looking at myself in my reflection of my idol.

ii. I have to actively stop those thoughts and remind myself of the gospel. Of God’s acceptance, that he is in control of my job he’s called me to. I have to remind myself that He is able to accomplish his will with or without me and my desired reputation.

iii. What do you turn over in your mind?

j. The Bible actually tells us what to ponder and meditate on.

i. Paul writes in Philippians 4, “**8** Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **9** What you have learned<sup>a</sup> and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

k. We have to keep coming back to this. The Lord is saying we will have peace by pondering what is worthy of praise.

l. And Mary is pondering the greatest truths of human history and the most perplexing metaphysical and spiritual questions that can be pondered.

m. **So what is there to ponder?**

i. Jesus himself – infinite power and knowledge tucked away into a real human baby.

ii. Divine plan – All historical events are subplots and subsequent to God’s story.

iii. Man finding favor with God – Proudful and hate-filled people have been given access to their holy and justice creator.

n. Verse 19 – This pondering is not on its own. Its not philosophizing for the sake of a mental work out. Pondering Jesus leads to glorifying and praising God.

i. They left in worship and evangelism.

o. These reactions feed into one another.

i. When we celebrate the birth of Christ, we share and we share out of private meditation on the gospel the brings us deep and lasting joy.

ii. Let's continue to celebrate the birth of Christ this morning, church.