The Announcement of Jesus' Birth, Part 3
Luke 2:15-21
42-27

Open your Bible, if you will, to Luke chapter 2. Second chapter of Luke records the birth of Jesus Christ, records the historical event of the Word becoming flesh, of the One by whom all things were made becoming man. And we have already gone through this narrative down to verse 14, which is really the great thrust of the narrative. We have seen the divine elements all the way down.

And actually this morning as we come to verses 15 to the end of the section in verse 21, we really come to the somewhat human part. And it's a pretty simple and straightforward message. It's one with which most of you are very familiar. It's a simple story about the shepherds' response. I could just tell you that story or have you read it and make a few comments and you'd have it. There's nothing complicated there. There's nothing hidden, nothing mysterious. But as I went over it I found that it served to me as a good illustration, a good illustration, a good analogy of what happens when anybody embraces the Savior. The details that are given in the account down to verse 21 show us by illustration form what happens when someone comes to Christ.

Now we're going to look at that in a minute. Just a brief review will get us to that point. The first seven verses of the chapter tell the story of the birth of Jesus. Verse 7 describes the fact that Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. Remember she was a virgin at the time and remained a virgin until after the marriage which was after the birth of Christ. She wrapped Him in cloths, laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. That's really all the Bible records via Luke about the birth of Christ.

It's understated, to put it mildly. It occurred in obscurity in a stable. The King of kings and Lord of lords, the Son of the Most High God, the Son of David, the Christ, the Lord, the Savior, laid in a feed trough, the most monumental event in human history occurring in the most distasteful circumstances and in obscurity. Caesar didn't know that it had happened. Quirinius, the governor, didn't know it had happened. Herod didn't know it had happened. The high priest didn't know it had happened. The chief priests and scribes and the elders, Sadducees, Pharisees didn't know it had happened. The literati, the elite didn't know it happened. In fact, nobody knew it had happened. Even the people who were there in the stable when it happened didn't know what happened. The inhabitants of earth had absolutely no idea what went on in Bethlehem.

But heaven knew and it didn't take long for heaven to respond. And that's where we pick it up in verse 8, and you remember what happened. "In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the field and keeping watch over their flock by night, and an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you, you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.'"

That is a glorious portion of Scripture. The heart of it is in verse 11, "There has been born for you a Savior." And as I tried to point out last time, it's not that Jesus saves you from your meaninglessness, it's not that Jesus saves you from your anxiety, it's not that Jesus saves you from your poverty, it's not that Jesus saves you from your lack of fulfillment, it's not that Jesus saves you from your trouble. Really there is no guarantee in this life that you're going to be rescued from any of those things. Jesus saves you from the eternal wrath of God, that's the issue. It's not that Jesus saves you from anything in this life in particular. You may still struggle through all kinds of troubles and struggles and you may still have a measure of unfulfillment. You may even find life to be less than you want it to be in this world, more painful than you can bear. There's no guarantee that that will change in this life.

But Jesus came to save His people from their what? Sins, from the penalty of their sins, first of all, which is eternal hell, the wrath of God, the power of their sins by giving them the Spirit of God so they can be victorious over their sins even in this life, and finally the presence of sin, when we leave this world and enter His glory; that's the good news that He would save His people from their sins and therefore save them from the wrath of God which is eternal wrath in hell forever. The wages of sin is death. And that death is not just spiritual death or separation from God, but eternal death, separation from God forever in a place of torment and punishment.

The child was born to save us from the wrath of God. And we saw how that unfolded in those verses. The angels came and proclaimed the good news to the humblest of all people. The lowest people on the socio-economic ladder would be shepherds. They were unskilled, uneducated, untrained. They weren't allowed to give testimony in a court of law because they were considered untrustworthy. They were the lowest of the low and it was specifically to them that the heavenly message came, ignoring all the great religious leaders and educators. The Lord was thereby saying that He was coming to the humble. He always said He could come to the humble. Way back in Isaiah He said He would come to the poor. First Corinthians, Paul said that there would not be...not many noble, not many mighty, but it would be the poor and base and weak. The shepherds illustrate that.

We also saw the extent of this good news. It's for all the people, at the end of verse 10. It's for all the people. And that extends, first of all, to Israel who are the people, the nation Israel, but beyond them to the whole world. And that's the broadest definition of the extent of the gospel, to all the people. The narrowest definition is in verse 11, "For you a Savior," for everybody and anybody, for all the people and for you. There's not salvation in any other, there's no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, according to Acts 4:12. There can't be salvation in any other. And isn't it wonderful that the One Savior, the only mediator between God and man, has made salvation available to all the people and to anybody.

And then we saw the person of the good news. We saw this child described by the angel who was talking to the shepherds. He said, "He is the Savior who is Christ the Lord." And in those descriptive terms and titles is all that needed to be said. He is the Savior, first of all. He is the Christ. That is He is the Anointed One, the Messiah who will take up the throne of David. He also is anointed in the sense that He will be the great High Priest, anointed in the sense that He will be the greatest prophet to ever walk upon this earth. He is the Anointed One. That's what the word Christ means, the Messiah.

And then He is Lord. And I told you that over 6,000 times the word "Lord" is used in the Old Testament to refer to God. And it becomes the most common name for Jesus in the New Testament, affirming that Jesus is indeed God. So here is a child who is God in human flesh. Here is a child who is the anointed Prophet, Priest and the great King fulfilling Davidic promise. Here is a child who is the Savior of the world, sovereign God, sovereign Lord and Savior and King. And we said last time that the purest and truest and most basic confession of the Christian faith is, “Jesus is Lord.” You can say a lot of other things about Jesus but none of them will save other than Jesus is Lord.

And you remember then the shepherds said to the...to one another, as we pick it up in verse 15, "We've got to go see Him.” “We've got to go see Him." That's where we're going to pick up the narrative today. We've gone through the fact that after this announcement all of a sudden a multitude of the heavenly host showed up in verses 13 and 14. This literally was a very rare glimpse of heavenly worship brought to earth. You don't get too many of those. There's...there's, of course, the more familiar one in Revelation 4 and 5 where we're literally taken in to the throne room of heaven and we can see the worship of heaven going on. This is another one of those very rare glimpses, only in this case we're not caught up in a vision to heaven, but heaven comes to earth in the presence of these very lowly shepherds out in the evening in a hillside in the region near Bethlehem. A whole host of angels came down to do on earth what they do all the time in heaven. And what do they do? They praise God and say, "Glory to God in the highest."

And what were they praising God for? Because He had brought on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased. He had brought to earth salvation peace.

Just last time we closed with that little phrase "on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased," or literally in a better translation, "on earth peace among men of His good pleasure." To put it another way: "Peace to those to whom it pleases Him to give peace."

It's a salvation peace that will belong only to those that God pleases to give it to. This is a great and gracious eternal decree. This involves the great doctrine of election, predestination. Before the creation of the universe God chose to save some just because He was pleased to do it. Angels, you see, are not rejoicing or glorifying God for what men have done or will do, but because of what God has done and will do. It's not that God's salvation is a reward for those who have goodwill toward men, as the old translation says. But salvation is a gracious gift to those to whom God chooses to have goodwill. On earth, the Messiah, Savior, the Christ, the Lord will bring salvation peace to those whom God pleases to save.

And so we've gone through that whole great divine scene. Now imagine you're in the situation of the shepherds. I mean, life has been pretty plain and mundane, pretty common-place, pretty brown and vanilla. And all of a sudden all heaven has broken loose. You've just had an angelic messenger, perhaps Gabriel, tell you that the Messiah has been born, the Christ, the Savior of the world, God in human flesh. That angel has been accompanied by a whole heavenly host of angels who have come down and given you a taste of heaven and they are glorifying God and praising God for the salvation that He's brought on earth through the birth of the Messiah. And this is all anything... beyond anything imaginable to these men.

The question at this point is how did they respond? How did they react? And that's what I want you to look at. And it's just from verse 15 down to verse 21, it's a very simple passage, a very simple narrative but it serves as a good illustration. It's not an allegory, but it does serve as a good

illustration of how people respond savingly to the gospel.

Let me show you as it kind of unfolds. Verse 15, "It came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven that the shepherds began saying to one another, 'Let us go straight to Bethlehem then and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.'" That's where it all begins.

We don't know how long the heavenly host was there. We don't know how long that praise service went on. It doesn't tell us. Certainly was more brief perhaps than the shepherds would have liked. They probably would have enjoyed that it last a long, long time. But it was over, all of that praise and glory to God was done. They were praising God in the highest, that is in heaven and on earth they were realizing that God had brought salvation to those whom He pleased to choose. And then the angels went back to heaven to take up their place around the throne as described in Revelation 4 and 5 and keep doing what they they're always doing, what they're doing right now even as I speak in heaven, doing exactly right now in heaven what they were doing there that day on earth in the shepherds' field, praising God for the grace of salvation.

And as traumatic as it was, and you know it was traumatic because back in verse 9 it says they were terribly frightened. The shepherds when one angel appeared they were terribly frightened. Literally they were terrified. They were just absolutely scared out of their wits. And if one angel could do that to them, we can only imagine how frightening it was when all the rest showed up.

But apparently after the angels left they were able to gather their senses and collect their thoughts because it says in verse 15, "It came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven that the shepherds began saying to one another..." Spontaneously, mutually, collectively there was the same response from everybody. In fact, the Greek verb is what we call an imperfect in the... That's a name of a tense in the Greek language, and the imperfect tense, that’s the term that describes something that's not completed, that's continuous action. It's imperfect because it's not complete. They use that verb here to express the fact that this was an ongoing kind of discussion. In verse 15 they were all continuing to say over and over to one another this, we've got to go, we've got to go. There would be a little process involved here. Somebody has to take care of the sheep. They've got to figure that problem out, how are we going to get somebody to care for the sheep while we're gone, we've got to go. And they probably were talking about, well we need to do this and we've got to do that, and there's this task and that task. They were all embroiled in the fact that they had to get out of that place and get to Bethlehem. And there was spontaneity at this point. Nobody needed to lead them. Nobody needed to sort of get them to comply. Everybody had exactly the same response.

And by the way, Luke loves to record responses. He recorded Zacharias' response to the message from Gabriel. You remember, Zacharias didn't believe and so God struck him dumb, couldn't speak, and deaf, couldn't hear. And then you remember Mary's response was one of faith as opposed to Zacharias. And now we find the shepherds' response and the shepherds' response is immediate. They unanimously together collectively say: "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then." Nothing intervening, nothing distracting, we are going immediately. There's a sense of urgency in the Greek construction here. It's without delay, at once we're going to go.

Now traditional shepherds’ field’s about two miles from the town of Bethlehem, and so there would be a little bit of a walk involved in this. They wanted to get on the way immediately. They were in full

agreement. They said, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem then and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." They would most likely have had to walk up hill since Bethlehem sort of sits on a ridge. So as soon as they could they were on their way with a view to seeing this thing.

Let me talk about that word "thing" because you need a little more definition. It's literally the Greek term *rhēma*, and it means "a word," or "a reality." Let us see this reality. They now understand that they have heard the word from God, that there's a reality and the reality is that the Savior has been born. Now they can confirm it easy enough because the angel had said to them, you're going to find a sign, back in verse 12, you're going to find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying where? In a manger. Now that's just an unheard of thing and very unusual, probably never happened. Nobody would put a baby in a feed trough in a stinking stable. So that would verify that this was all true. I mean, they had seen the angels and that was verification enough. But they were going to get even more verification when in fact they found the child exactly where the angel said He would be, which meant this was not just an earthly situation going on, this was heaven and earth involved. They believed the angel.

And I think that's indicated in verse 15. They said, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then and see this thing that has happened." They believed. That's the first thing I want you to notice. They had a revelation from God and they believed it. And if I can borrow that as an analogy, that's how people come to Christ. They have a revelation from God and they believe it. The revelation from God is that the Savior has come and they believe it. That's step one and step two in the whole movement toward salvation. They believed that heavenly message. They believed that the Savior had come. In fact, that's evident because at the end of verse 15 they say the thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us. Divine revelation is where anybody's faith in Christ begins, anybody's salvation begins with a message from God. Faith comes by hearing the word about Christ. Faith comes by hearing the message. Romans 10, Paul says how shall they hear if there's not a preacher?

And so it's critical that we understand that the first step in the process of someone being converted is they have to hear the message. The revelation comes first. They heard it and they believed it, they believed it, the Spirit of God obviously having prepared their hearts. I told you a week or so ago that I felt that these men chosen to be the recipients of this divine message were probably true Jews, that is they were believing Jews not just secular Jews, that they truly believed in the true and living God, that they were no doubt among those looking for the redemption of Israel, waiting for their Messiah. They would have been genuine believers in the true God who had repented of their sin and had come to God and sought His grace; all of that because their hearts were so ready and their responses were so right. And they heard the heavenly revelation and they believed it. They believed the fact that Messiah, the Savior, and Christ, the Lord, had come.

Their faith in the word of God then caused them to pursue Christ. And that's the third step in anybody's life in coming to Christ. First you know the revelation, secondly you believe the revelation, and thirdly you come to Christ. You ascend to that. You embrace Christ. And that's essentially...illustrated that, it's not...it's not the intent of the passage to teach some spiritual truth but it's a wonderful illustration of a spiritual truth. Because verse 16 says, "They came in haste." Again, this idea of enthusiasm and eagerness that the language indicates that they're in a hurry and their enthusiasm is great. And they came in haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph.

And we don't know how they did that but that... There's a small village actually, a small village. They probably came into the village and said, "Does anybody know about a baby being born? Anybody

heard about a birth in the last few hours?" And they may have knocked on some doors and found some babies. There may have been several babies born that night or in recent hours. They were looking for one particular baby who would be placed in a feed trough. We don't know how that process went but word of mouth about the birth of babies spreads pretty rapidly and they continued to look. Verse 16, "And found eventually their way to Mary and Joseph." And they knew immediately, believe me, when they saw Mary and Joseph and they saw that baby in that manger, they for certain knew they had a word from God. Their search ended with the right find. That, I think, is a sequence to keep in mind: First the revelation, then the faith and then the action to pursue Christ.

Now what followed after that is also normal as an analogy or an illustration of behavior of someone who comes to Christ. It's witness. Someone who has heard the truth of the gospel, someone who has believed that someone has come and found Christ then witnesses. Look at verse 17. "And when they had seen this they made known the statement which had been told them about this child." Now let me stop you there for a minute.

I can't believe that there wasn't some large conversation between verse 16 and 17. I mean, here are these scruffy, grubby shepherds coming in the middle of the night into this stinking stable, finding Joseph and Mary and the baby lying in a manger. And they're all overwhelmed with what's happened, so Joseph and Mary must have had some response, saying, “Greetings, how can we help you?” And then they unfold the saga. Well, um, um, and I can just hear them all vying for telling the story their way as Joseph and Mary tried to sit quietly and listen. And it must have been wonderful confirmation for them as well, for any malingering doubts that might have been raised in their minds. And they told the story of how an angel came and an angel described one who had been born, good news of great joy, a Savior. He is Christ the Lord. And on and on, they told the whole story. And then a whole host of angels came and there were angels everywhere, and they were bright and they were shining and they were praising God and thanking God. And oh, it was incredible.

And as that story unfolded I think Joseph and Mary probably began to unfold some of their side of the details. Well isn't that wonderful because, you know, an angel came to me, Joseph might have said. And he told me not to worry about the fact that my virgin, betrothed, bride-to-be Mary was pregnant because the baby that was in her womb was put there by the Holy Spirit. She was not sinful. She was not unfaithful to me. That she was going to have a child who would be Immanuel, God with us, God in human flesh and that He would be named Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. And this all happened to me when I was deciding whether to divorce her or stone her to death. And I had a dream and in that dream an angel of the Lord came to me and told me the whole thing.

And then Mary might have quietly said, and, you know, I had a visit from Gabriel and Gabriel came to me even though I am just a young girl and a virgin and said you're going to have a baby and that baby is going to be Son of David, Son of the Most High God, He's going to rule over a kingdom that will last eternally. And it all is beginning to come together. And these shepherds, talk about being in on the scoop, they're in on it.

And at this particular point, it's Joseph and Mary and a handful of shepherds, and Zacharias and Elizabeth and they know about it, and really nobody else has the kind of inside information that these people have.

And what is their immediate response? After the whole thing unfolds, “when they had seen this, they

made known the statement which had been told them about this Christ." They went everywhere and said the Savior's been born, the Savior's been born. Christ the Lord has been born. They told the story.

They probably told the story about the angel and the angels, told the story about Joseph. And told the story about a virgin conceiving a child and unfolded the whole marvelous, incredible account. And again they illustrate what happens, I think, in the life of a newborn soul. First comes the revelation, they understand the gospel, then faith to believe the gospel, and then the action that goes and pursues Christ and embraces Christ. And then comes the immediate response which is to witness.

I'll tell you right now, folks. The most aggressive, faithful people in proclaiming the gospel are the newest Christians. Because the joy runs so high, the excitement is so great, the enthusiasm is so profound.

And so these shepherds become the first New Testament evangelists, the first New Testament evangelists. And they repeated the astounding revelation from God, as well as their own personal meeting of Joseph and Mary and the baby lying in the manger. They couldn't restrain themselves. I mean, this was the greatest news the world would ever know. This was the greatest news they ever heard, far beyond anything they could have ever imagined. I mean, there isn't anything in their humdrum life that could equal this. And I might suggest to you that true spiritual commitment is determined by the quality and the tenacity of one's long-term joy over salvation. You can say you're committed, you can talk about the commitment you have to Jesus Christ, but it really comes down to how much joy you have and how eagerly you share that.

They were eye-witnesses to the good news, eye-witnesses to the Messiah being born and they spread it. They couldn't restrain themselves, they couldn't contain themselves. And you know, when we stop doing that, when we stop having that kind of zeal and that kind of passion, when we betray a heart that is no longer overwhelmed by joy, when we betray a heart that is no longer unrestrained in its compulsion to tell others, we betray a sinful heart because indifference and ingratitude is a sin. It's amazing, you know, the longer people are Christians the less they seem excited about it. They move further and further away from the initial revelation of the gospel and become more and more involved with other things. You get a lot more excited about sports and restaurants and food and kids and grandkids and houses and cars and possessions and vacations and rarely ever do they literally burst forth with exuberant joy toward others who know not Christ because of their sheer compulsion to talk about the One who saved them from eternal wrath.

Well they...the shepherds did, and they told it far and wide. And it says in verse 18, "All who had heard it wondered of the things which were told them by the shepherds." I mean, what it did create was a stir. The word "wonder" is the word *thaumazō*, it's a... *Thaumazō* means to marvel, to be amazed. And by the way, it's...it's common in Luke's gospel. He likes that word and it's repeated again and again. I mean, the things that Jesus did caused people to be amazed, they caused them to wonder, caused them to marvel. I mean, that was pretty typical. You see him use that word in chapter 4, chapter 8, chapter 9, chapter 11, chapter 20. He uses it in chapter 24 and also in chapters 4 and 5 you get a similar kind of response. Jesus caused people to be amazed. There's no question about it. He was an amazing person. They had never seen anybody like Him.

And I think today there are people like that. There's a certain amount of wonder about Jesus,

particularly around Christmas season, you know. There's a certain wonder about the Christ child and wonder about the whole nativity situation. There's a certain amount of respect given to Jesus with regard to that. But that's not salvation. That is not salvation. Being amazed by Jesus doesn't do it. That's not enough.

That's very typical. As we flow through the book of Luke you're going to see that. That's...that's just curiosity maybe at its highest level. Widespread reaction was amazement, curiosity not commitment.

But I don't think that would have restrained them because they were so internally compelled to tell the story. I mean, angels, revelation from God, miracle conception in a virgin, Son of God, Son of the Most High God, born in a stable, laid in a feed trough, I mean, the whole thing was some kind of story.

And, you know, people would be pressed to believe it. They would be pressed to believe it because the angel comes and the angel says you will find Him wrapped in cloths and lying in a feed trough. And sure enough, that's exactly where He was. And if God wasn't working all of that, how could that all have happened? It had to be divine. God had to be working this whole thing out. The child was exactly where they were told by angels. And if angels are involved in this and angels know the whole situation, this has got to be from God. And as I told you before, people didn't see angels. Up to now Zacharias saw an angel and Mary saw an angel and the shepherds saw an angel and then saw a host of angels, nobody else did. So the idea that all heaven broke loose and a whole multitude of angels showed up, pretty amazing stuff.

And then it was all confirmed because they did exactly what the angel said. And sure enough, there was the baby in a manger. No wonder people wondered. And I think that's...that's sort of the contrast to the shepherds. The shepherds got the revelation, believed it and ran to Christ. Wouldn't it have been good if it said in verse 18, "And all who heard it went immediately to the manger?" It doesn't say that. They just wondered and went on with their life.

The next little comment in verse 19 I find interesting as well. It takes us into the heart of Mary. It says, "But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." This is just mulling them over, contemplating them deeply. She went much deeper, believe me, than the amazed people in verse 18. I mean, this is just...this is just beyond comprehension. Here is a 13-, 14-year old girl. She's looking into a feed trough and she's seeing there a baby that's come out of her womb. She's never known a man. This baby was conceived and born without ever knowing a man. This baby is the Son of the Most High God. This baby is the rightful heir to the throne of David. This baby is the Savior of the world. This baby is the anointed Messiah. This baby is God, the Lord. I mean, it's all so mind-boggling in the common world of human beings.

And Mary must have wondered, you know, when is He going to start saying profound, theological things? Tomorrow? Is He going to do miracles? What's going to happen here? What am I to expect out of this child? Will I have a normal relationship with this child that a mother has to a baby? Will I nurse this child as mothers do? Will I raise this child as mothers do? What will this child be like? And when will He enter into His glory? And when will He take His kingdom? When will that all happen? And how am I going to be a mother to a child that is God?

She must have wondered all those kinds of things, must have wondered even about discipline,

setting an example. How do you set an example for God? I mean, anything that would come into a mother's mind must have come into her mind. She just pondered it. She just thought deeply about it. She thought deeply about God's redemptive purpose and how God had promised a Savior and a Savior had finally come.

And later on in verses 34 and 35 of this chapter, Simeon comes up to Mary and says...I hate to tell you this, Mary, but this child is going to pierce your heart like a sword. It's not all going to be wonderful for you. This is going to be very painful having this son. A sword is going to go right through your own soul.

And it's true. I mean, being the mother of the Son of God is a painful thing. She loved Him. She must have loved Him like no mother has ever loved a child because He was perfect. And yet she saw Him suffer. She saw Him suffer so profoundly and so unjustly. And eventually she was there when He was nailed to the cross. I mean, all kinds of suffering. She must have been thinking about a lot of things.

And isn't that analogous somewhat to the Christian experience? Just following the little illustration, first there at the revelation of the truth, the gospel, then there's faith like the shepherds put in what God said. And then there's action, to go and to find Christ. And then there's witness, the exuberance and the joy. And then comes pondering. After those initial days of euphoria, as you grow in your Christian life you begin to think more deeply about the realities of who He is. Here I am, you know, as a Christian a long time, after many, many years of ministry and I continue in my reading. I...I never get enough. I have an insatiable desire to know more about my God and my Christ just to plumb the depths of all there is to know and to ponder those things.

And when somebody is truly converted, I think there's never enough. There never comes a point of satisfaction. As Paul said, "That I may know Him, that I may know Him," and somebody might say, "You know Him, you know Him, you know Him better than anybody else." Yeah, but I don't know Him like I'd like to know Him. Mary illustrates that hungry heart that wants to understand the depth of this great salvation.

And then finally, in verse 20 — well not finally, I'll give you one more if I have time — it's a brief one. Next to finally, verse 20, the shepherds went back. Hey, did you know that when you become a Christian and you've had the greatest imaginable transformation and you heard the revelation from God, you believed it and you've embraced Christ and you've begun to witness, when all of that has happened and you begin to think deeply about the profound realities of who God is, who Christ is and what the saving purpose of God is unfolding in the world. When you've come to that point you still have to go back to work. Life goes on, doesn't it? Life goes on. And that's analogous to what happens. You go back. Only you go back with a different attitude. You go back glorifying and praising God. That's what they did. They went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen just as have been told them. It was exactly the way they were told by the angel, every detail was exactly accurate. And they went back with a whole new attitude.

I don't know what their attitude was like before they had this incredible encounter with the revelation of God. But it certainly wasn't like it is now. They may have been hopeful. They may have been worried and wondered and doubted and questioned and been wearied and all of that, but not anymore. They went back glorifying and praising God. And that too is analogous to what happens when a conversion takes place. There's a revelation. We hear the revelation of God, we believe it,

we go and we embrace Christ. There's witness that follows. There's a deep pondering about great divine truth as we deepen our knowledge of the Word of God. And there is also a life attitude of praise and worship to God that marks a believer.

Now by the time they got the whole story put together with the additional elements that Joseph and Mary would bring to bear on it, they were so filled with praise and thanks they were literally overwhelmed by it all. And they just went back glorifying and praising God for the whole thing. That's the attitude that Christians should have. That's what we... That's what we come together on the Lord's day to do, glorify and praise God. We're not here like some churches are to entertain you, we're not here to sort of tweak your life and make you feel better about yourself. We're here to get you to stop thinking about yourself and start thinking about whom? About God, our Lord Jesus Christ. We want you to glorify and praise God. We want you to be lost in wonder, love and praise. That's why we...we have music like these songs that you hear and that you sing. We want to lift you up. We want to give expression to the praise that's in your hearts.

They knew that this child would be the Savior, the Christ, the Lord, fulfill the Davidic promise, Abrahamic promise and the promise of the New Covenant. They couldn't restrain themselves. Their lives were just filled with praise.

And the more you know that, the deeper you think about those salvation truths, the greater you sing. Clayton commented about the fact that the...that the music succeeds in this church because of our theology, because of our knowledge of the Word. And he's right. It's not because of the acoustics that you sing with all your heart like you do, it's not particularly because somebody whips you into that because they don't. You sing that way because it comes from deep inside, because you grasp the truth, right? And you give expression to that glorious worship.

There's one little final verse in this section, verse 21. And it says, "And when eight days were completed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

Ah, this is good. This is good. Jewish law in the Old Testament was very explicit. According to Genesis 17:11 and 12, Leviticus 12: A boy baby born in Israel needed to be circumcised. That's what the law of God required. And we already studied that in detail back in chapter 1 verse 59 where we looked at the circumcision of John. By this time in the Jewish tradition — circumcision occurred always on the eighth day — but by this time circumcision was accompanied by the official naming of the child on the eighth day. They may have known the name before then but that was the official naming of the child on the eighth day. And so when eight days were completed, they came together for the circumcision and they named Him Jesus.

Why? Because it was the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. In Matthew 1:21 the angel said to Joseph, "When He's born you call Him Jesus cause He'll save His people from their sins." And when He was born that's exactly what they did. And that I think illustrates another component of the Christian life and that's obedience, isn't it?

You know if you could sum up our lives you could sum them up in the pattern that you've seen illustrated here. We heard the revelation of the gospel, we believed it. We pursued Christ and embraced Him. We became witnesses to that glorious transformation and we began to tell others

about it. And as Christians we began to think deeply about the great truth. We became students of the Word. We loved the truth. We loved the Word. We ponder the truth. And we also are characterized by exuberant joy and praise and gratitude to God which is expressed in our worship, both singular and corporate. And our lives are marked by a desire to obey what God tells us to do.

That's just a simple little look at the very human side of the story, the shepherds. But it does provide, I think, a good analogy or illustration of the patterns that occur in the life of one who comes to Christ. Revelation, faith, action, witness, thought, deep thought, praise, and obedience.

We're not surprised, are we, that Joseph and Mary circumcised Jesus and called Him Jesus? That's what the law of God said, He needs to be circumcised the eighth day. And the angel of God said name Him Jesus. That's the name He was given by the angel before He was conceived in Mary's womb. We know that name then was even before the conception, from the very beginning a Savior was designated by His name, Jesus.

Why was Jesus circumcised? Somebody might wonder about that. Well, because He would obey the law of God. He would fulfill all righteousness. He would be a man in every sense and so He would fulfill all those prescriptions that are human and in Israel this was required by the law of God on all male children, and so it was done. That's again another remarkable indication of Jesus fulfilling all righteousness. Even before He could consciously do it God made sure that all Old Testament requirements were fulfilled in His life, and as He grew in wisdom, and favor, and stature...wisdom, and stature, and favor with God and man, He personally fulfilled the law of God in its completion.

And again I remind you that He lived a perfect life. Even from His circumcision He fulfilled every aspect of God's law so that His perfect life could be credited to your account. That's what justification does. It puts your sin on Him and takes His perfect life and puts it on you.

So at first the shepherds were afraid, but at last they were filled with overwhelming joy, overwhelming joy. Let me tell you something, folks, I mean this, there's only one reason that a person should live a fearless life, there's only one reason that a person should live a life of absolute joy and that is because they know Jesus Christ, because if you don't know Jesus Christ, you better fear God. You better be terrified of God. For you're imminently on the brink of eternal wrath. You see, Jesus Christ is still the only foundation upon which real fearlessness can be built. You ought to fear the invisible. You ought to fear the supernatural God, the unknown, unless you know Christ, and then your fear turns to joy, turns to, according to verse 10, great joy, great joy. You see, for the child of God, the invisible and eternal no longer has any terror because Christ has come out of the invisible and eternal world and dwelt among us, provided our salvation and then returned to the invisible and eternal world to prepare a place for us. That's the good news.

Father, we thank You for this morning and the time to worship and praise You. Thank You for the picture that we see of the response to the gospel in these shepherds and Mary and even the obedience of Joseph and Mary in the circumcision. All these features give us an illustration of what it is to come to You, to believe the gospel, having heard it, to take action and go to Christ, embracing Him as true Lord and Savior. And then to witness and to ponder deeply the great theologies of Your revelation and then to praise and then to obey. And we thank You, Lord, for this great joy that is ours because of this good news. Be Savior to any here who still need to be rescued from the wrath to come, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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