

XV. Gospel Worship in Biblical Perspective

Worship God!

“The Shepherds Worship the King”

Luke 2:1-20

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December 22, 2013 – Morning Sermon

We will be looking at this third narrative of visitation to the birth site of Christ and this time we'll be looking at the shepherds in Luke 2. I'll start by reading the part that will give us context into the part we'll be focusing on in Luke 2:15-20. Luke 2:1-14 says *[1] In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. [2] This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. [3] And all went to be registered, each to his own town. [4] And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, [5] to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. [6] And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. [7] And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

[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!”

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

This year we've had a ministry theme of *Worship God* and that is exploring from God's Word what God-centered, Bible-shaped, Christ-centered, God-glorifying, Spirit-filled worship that is acceptable to Him is and we finished this year by worshipping the King specifically with five encounters. We have looked at the angels, the wise men, today the shepherds and Christmas Eve night we'll take a brief look at Simeon and Anna. In those encounters we have noted three features.

Before I get to that I want to answer a question that comes to me with increasing regularity and almost like an avalanche this year. The question I get is “Pastor do you believe there is a war on Christmas in our culture?” In one way my answer probably won't surprise you but in another way it may surprise you a little bit. My answer is usually “Certainly I believe there is a war on Christmas and there is nothing new about it.” Ask the parents of the innocents in Bethlehem if there was a war on Christmas. There has always been a war on Christmas but here is what maybe more surprising to you.

There is a war on Christmas and in a sense I understand it because it is God declaring war. Christmas is war. We have one time in the Bible where Jesus Himself

through John and the Holy Spirit gives his commentary on His incarnation and its purpose. This is found in Revelation 12. This is Jesus in the Revelation through John by the Holy Spirit giving us an understanding of His birth. Notice the language that he uses here.

Revelation 12:1-6 says *[1] And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. [2] She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. [3] And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon (Satan), with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. [4] His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven (those angels who fell originally in Satan's deception) and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. [5] She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, [6] and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.*

The woman represents the bride of Christ, covenant people of God, focused through the Virgin Mary as she gives birth and Christ is the one who comes. Ever since the promise and an inkling that He is coming Satan has attempted to devour Him before He can get to that atoning death on the cross. So whether it was a Herod upon the innocence in Bethlehem or other accounts in the Old Testament, not the least of which was Pharaoh in the days when there was a stirring among God's covenant people and He brought forth a Moses who was a type of Christ with the attempt to kill those children at that time. Anything that would stop Christ's coming is Satan at work. There is a war going on here. The war is also in heaven.

Revelation 12:7-12 says *[7] Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, [8] but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. [9] And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. [10] And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. [11] And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. [12] Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"*

Through the very bride of God that is His covenant people, focused in Mary, is the birth of Christ, who goes from the manger to the cross. He sheds His blood. He overcomes and wins the victory. He ascends to heaven and Satan the accuser of the brethren is thrown down. The Bible says who will bring a charge against God's elect? Who is the one to condemn? Christ is He who died, that is God's Son has come into this world and won the victory over our accusations, our condemnation and all of our charges, therefore we stand forgiven in Christ and overcomers in Christ through Him who has ascended. Yet with Satan thrown down, now will pursue this bride of the Lord until He

comes again and he continues to wage war, not so much against Christmas, but against Christ.

What was Christmas? It was God's declaration of war. He sent His Son, heaven's champion, into the world to defeat all of His enemies – Satan, sin, death, hell and the grave and you. We were His enemies but in His defeat of you He now has led you captive into the heavens, a host of captives. We who were His enemies are now His footstool. We have been saved by His grace. We who were at war with Him now are with Him because Immanuel came to be with us.

Let me use the illustration of the invasion of Normandy since it was not too long ago to give you a sense of Christ's coming and His coming again. In Normandy the generals knew if they could get on that beach and get up those cliffs the war would be done and won. When they got on that beach and up those cliffs Hitler was done. Berlin would be occupied. That would win it right there but that didn't mean you had to go hedgerow by hedgerow all the way across Europe until they got there and there would be casualties and battles but that war was won when they got there.

It was very much like Iwo Jima at the South Pacific. On that third day when they cut everything off, got up on Mount Suribachi and raised that flag, Iwo Jima had been won over. It was won that day for they got to the high ground and won the victory but it was two more months of fighting and 22,000 lives that would take place fox hole by fox hole by fox hole.

Christ has won the victory. The manger went to the cross and there He won the victory announced with an empty tomb. He has ascended and the battles continue but the war has been won. So yes, Christmas was a declaration of war and He has won the victory. When the King comes back it will be consummated. Until then it is nation by nation with the weapons of the Spirit and the Gospel of grace and mercy to capture enemies to bring them to Christ. Sure there is a war on Christmas for Christmas announced war and He has won it. Therefore the evil empire will always strike back.

What is our response? Our response is that He has come for you who would fight Him now. We also would fight Him but He has captured our hearts by His grace. We would like to announce Him to you that there would be no war against Him but that you would come to the One who won the war for you. That's what they are doing when they are coming to this manger. Angels are announcing it and wise men are coming. Now the shepherds, and they are coming to look at heaven's Champion who has come to win the war for our salvation and the glory of His Father.

That's why we have said there are three features in each of these encounters. Feature number one is proclamation. When they come to the place of His birth there is a proclamation of Christ. This is the King. This is the Anointed One and they proclaim it. That brings them to the response of worship, celebration and adoration. They worship the King. Wise men open up their treasures and bring gold, frankincense and myrrh. The angels declare glory to God in the highest. Now the shepherds will come to Him. They come and worship. The third feature is anticipation. In each of these narratives is embedded the anticipation of the purpose of the manger which is the cross. He came in that manger to go to the cross to die for our sins and that was anticipated.

In the wise men it's embedded because they not only bring in fulfillment of prophecy frankincense which affirms His deity and gold which affirms His royalty but they bring myrrh which hadn't been foretold in the Old Testament. Myrrh was a death

spice and they brought the death spice to the One who had been laid in a stone, cold trough and 33 years later, six miles away, He'll be embalmed with that death spice, myrrh, and laid in a stone, cold tomb, but He will come forth in victory as our Redeemer. They are anticipating it with that death spice.

Angels will announce "You'll see this Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger (that trough)." As they will come and look at Him remember what the angels would say they would look upon One wrapped in these linen cloths. Then 33 years later not in a trough but a tomb He will be wrapped in linen cloth yet He will rise victorious from the grave. Will those three features show up with the shepherds as well? Let's look at our text for this study and find out.

As we look at Luke 2, these angels have announced the birth of Christ. Silent Night is a great and glorious song to sing and my guess is at the beginning of that night it was probably true that it was a silent night, except for some bleating sheep. So here is how it probably started off for hundreds of years in the valley outside of Bethlehem. There would have been a lot of shepherds and a lot of sheep because they were raising a lot of sheep in Bethlehem for six miles away they would sell them regularly at a place called Mount Zion where the temple was. It is there that they would sell the sheep for the purposes of sacrifice which had been going on for hundreds and hundreds of years.

Most of them were probably from the tribe of Judah, the sons of David, that were in these fields on this night but it was probably somewhat quiet because this would have been their habit. The Bible doesn't say exactly this but indicates this as their regular habit by the language. At night there would be a number of flocks and shepherds and these shepherds needed some time to sleep so they would take some rocks and build a small wall, called a fold, around the sheep. Then with one opening it would only take one shepherd to guard the flocks, so the rest could get some sleep. The next morning each shepherd would come to the gate or the door of the sheep fold and would call his sheep by name. His sheep would know his voice and they would follow him. This night that is very likely what is taking place.

Now it's not all that quiet because all these people have come to town because of the Roman Revenue Service. There has been an edict sent out that all the people have to register at their own town. This is the first registration and there will be others as well. Quirinius the governor is enforcing this registration and they all have to come and do this in order to move forward. They were running out of room for all these people so this was a silent night and somewhat quiet night but as the shepherds are settling into their normal format, all of a sudden there is an announcement.

Augustus and Quirinius may have made an announcement but this is another decree from another King with another announcement. You know in a sin sick, broken world that everyone is looking for a savior. The number one place people like to look is the state and that's why tyrants have risen throughout the ages. When you look to the state as your savior they will tax you and it's their mechanism to control you. Many times we so want the state to be our savior that we're willing to give up any liberties and we're willing to submit to any taxation. That's why so many of our forefathers said things like, 'in God we trust' and 'one nation under God' because they knew any nation that wasn't under God would soon try to be God. Here is Pops Romana, peace of Rome, where we'll give you peace, take care of you and we'll also take your money. So this is a taxation to take.

There is another King with another announcement. This Messiah, this King doesn't register people for a taxation, this King comes Himself for an incarnation and a crucifixion. He doesn't take for this Savior, this King gives. He gives Himself in the manger all the way to the cross. Now this moment has arrived. These shepherds hear and they go and look. They find it just as He said. These shepherds of Bethlehem leave the valley and arrive there in the city of Bethlehem and see He has been born in their city, to them. It says He was born to us, not to Mary and Joseph but through Mary and Joseph. He is not in Jerusalem or Rome but born in Bethlehem to us that we might give glory to God in the highest. They see it just as He said and so what do they do?

Luke 2:15-20 says [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.

We see the three features again. There is proclamation. They are proclaiming "Here is the Christ, just as He said. The Lord has come!" There is proclamation and praise to God of what has happened. The One who always has been (Son of God) came down to save His people from their sins and became what He never was (Son of Man) yet now and forever will (fully God-fully Man). When He leaves that manger to go to that cross and rises from that tomb in a glorified body, He will be that fully God and fully Man for all eternity and one day I shall see Him. The shepherds see this and proclaim it also.

The second thing is Jesus Christ made His entrance into this world by way of a manger in humility to make His exodus by way of the cross in triumph to the praise of His Father. Why did He come? It was to go to that cross. When He came there was no place, no room but when He left there He went to the cross to take my place and now has ascended to heaven where He is preparing a place for me, in His Father's House and there are many rooms for His people. The shepherds are affirming what the wise men have seen and what the angels have said.

Thirdly, the manger is only explained by the cross and the cross is meaningless without the manger. Why did Jesus come and humble Himself? Why did He take upon Himself humanity? He did it for one reason. By a man came death, by this Man, the Second Adam, the Christ, will come the resurrection of the dead. Many people have died on crosses and many have said they have died for other people but this One who is sinless and had no wages of sin against Him, who took our place and our sin and is the Son of God come in the flesh. He makes the cross meaningful because this is not just anyone on the cross or someone who needs their own savior but this is the One who is qualified to qualify me for salvation. He is the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us.

Will the shepherds see the same thing? Hear them cry out "Here is the King, the Lord!" See them worship Him, adore Him and glorify Him. Do they also allow us to anticipate the cross as well? I would say so and here is your takeaway. The shepherds of Bethlehem having seen the Christ 'as it has been told to them' made Him the object of their celebration and the subject of their proclamation. They went away proclaiming Him

and while they were there they worshipped Him. Their worship led them away to proclaim Him. Why? It was because of the One they had seen in that manger.

Think through it this way with me. What do these men do? They shepherd sheep because they have an industry. That industry is the God designed means to teach people that the wages of sin is death and you need a substitutionary sacrifice. It was a sacrificial system that had been in place for hundreds of years. It was done right above them on the Mount of Zion. Mount Zion was the place where their forefather Abraham had brought by God's decree his only son to be killed on that same spot where now stood the temple. Then Jehovah Jireh, God provides, told Abraham not to kill his only son and then He provides the ram, a lamb, caught in a thicket to be the sacrifice. Abraham did not have to kill his own son because God put a lamb who would point to His only Son that we could have everlasting and eternal life.

Then through Moses four hundred plus years later this system of sacrifice is put into a regular repetition to remind them all the way to that significant day every year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, where hundreds and thousands of these sheep would be put to death continually throughout the year, in a cataclysmic way almost during Yom Kippur Day and it was constantly saying the wages of sin is death. We need a substitute but the blood of bulls and goats cannot do it and the ones bringing the sacrifice need their own sacrifice. We need the Lamb of God. These who tended the lambs looked into a manger and saw the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. They were gazing upon what would end their industry. They were gazing upon the One who would be the sacrifice that is satisfactory to save us. What the blood of lambs and sheep could not do, He would do.

Not only that these are shepherds, not only of sheep but they are sons of David, the Shepherd that they all looked to, who rose to be a King, the Shepherd who would defend His flock and keep His flock safe from the bear and lion and if necessary will go and fight the champions of the enemies of God, even a goliath. Here is the Shepherd King that many of them were likely descended from and they were looking upon the One who was The Son of David. They were looking at One who was greater than David and that is Christ, the Lion of Judah, who has come in the line of David. He is not simply a Shepherd King but He is the Great Shepherd. The Great Shepherd will lay down His life for His sheep. He is the Good Shepherd who will keep His flock. He will defend and tend His flock with His rod and staff.

When they are ready to meet Him in the place He has prepared for them, because He took their place, even though when He came there was no place for Him, they then because of their Shepherd King will walk not through death, but will walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Dr. Barnhouse explained it this way. On his way back from a funeral at a stoplight a big truck stopped beside them and the shadow enveloped their car and he said to his grandson, "Son, the shadow of that big truck has come upon us. Did it hurt?" His grandson said "No." He said "If the truck had hit us instead of its shadow what do you think would have happened?" His grandson said "That would have hurt." He said "One day if you know Jesus you will come to a time when you go to meet Him, if it's before He has come for you, you will go through the valley of the shadow of death because He was hit by death for you and won the victory."

Now you will go through the valley of the shadow of death and Immanuel continues. What does the Great Good Shepherd do? [4] *Even though I walk through the*

valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23:4). You have not only won the victory, but you will go through that valley with Me until I go to be with you.

These shepherds are looking at the One who is the Lamb of God and their business need not continue. It has no teaching need any longer for now the Lamb of God has come, anticipated by all of those sacrifices. They look now upon a Shepherd that is even greater than their forefather David. Here is the Good Shepherd that will lay down His life for the sheep and will walk with the sheep through the valley of the shadow of death. Here is the Shepherd who has won the victory over all of the enemies. Here is a Shepherd King as the Lamb who has won the victory over sin, death, hell and the grave and that is what they are looking at. They are looking at their Champion who has come to win the war that we might have Him forever.

Is there a war on Christmas? Yes and I understand why there is such angst when you are in a culture that has previously affirmed and welcomed the Christmas season with free movements and liberties thereof and you sense that is being attacked. The attack didn't start with the cultural demise in the last fifty years. It started from the very first time God made a promise to Eve when He said "I'll give you a Seed and He will crush the head of the serpent." When Jesus comes you can hear the serpent's head crunching and he will strike back and he does.

When he does strike back you remember this. One, Christmas is war and secondly, the war on Christmas is ultimately the war on Christ. Thirdly, the war on Christmas simply reminds you why there is Christmas. He came because the war on Christmas reveals to you those whom Christ came for so we won't get angry for we will bring to them the same thing that came to the shepherds. Look at this unbelievable expanse. There were wise men, shepherds, Gentiles, Jews, powerful, marginalized, up and inners, down and outers and Christ came for sinners. When there is war on Christmas that just reminds you why He came. He came for all of us because we were at one time at war against Christ but He saved us. So when you see this war don't get angry at people but say "O Lord, You just reminded me why You came. You just showed me some people You came for. I will go to them with the humility knowing that I too was there but You came for me and somebody came to me."

The shepherds are merely reminding us that this Savior came and that a victory would be won. The Shepherd King is enthroned and now He is giving gifts. You are the gift who have received the gift of salvation to go and give it away to others. Their enmity is only a reminder of why He came and who He came for and praise the Lord He has registered us not with taxation but with an incarnation, a crucifixion and a resurrection and we are His. Immanuel, God with us! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the work of grace that You have done and are already doing in the lives of men and women and what You have done in us. Father, we simply associate the attacks of "Christmas" with political, legal and cultural actions. Actually the demeaning of what we celebrate is much more profound than that and we at one time were numbered against You but You came for us. Immanuel, God with us, therefore we are now with You but we're not with You to look down on those who are against You but to go to them with

the resounding voice of the angels, “We bring you Good News! Christ has come for you, a Savior to Gentiles, Jews, rich, poor, powerful and powerless. Good News, a Savior has been born. God has come, Immanuel!” I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.