

XVI. Gospel Worship in Biblical Perspective

Worship God!

“Simeon and Anna Worship the King”

Luke 2:21-38

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December 24, 2013 – Christmas Eve Sermon 5pm

Luke 2:21-24 says [21] *And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.* [22] *And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord* [23] *(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”)* [24] *and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”*

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

We are wrapping our theme for the year of *Worship God*, where we are learning Bible-shaped, Gospel-driven, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled worship that is pleasing to the Lord. We have come to the conclusion in our Advent Season of Worship the King and as we have been looking at it we have gone to the narratives of the birth of Christ to learn from them. Here is what we have learned in the three narratives we have examined thus far.

There are three features in every narrative. We have seen the wise men come to the house. We have seen the shepherds come to the manger and the angels announcing the birth at the manger. We have noticed in each of the birth narratives of Jesus three features that are astoundingly, consistently but yet maybe not so amazingly included in each one of those narratives.

The first feature is proclamation. The angels, wise men and shepherds proclaim that this is the King. This is the Christ. This is the Anointed One, the Prophet, the Priest and the King for whom we have waited. Then in response to that have worshipped Him by giving Him praise, glory, honor and adoration as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords which is their celebration. The third feature which is embedded in each of the narratives is the anticipation that the manger is headed to the cross with the wise men as they come in fulfillment of prophecy they bring Gentile king representatives. They bring frankincense and gold which have been prophesied but they add also from their treasures myrrh. That is the death spice they bring to the Babe in the stone trough and that same death spice will wrap Him in a stone tomb and embalm Him. This is the anticipation of His crucifixion and His atoning death with the wise men.

The angels not only proclaim (worship) and celebrate Him but the angels anticipated by telling them that when they find the Babe He is wrapped in linen cloths lying in a manger, very likely a stone, cold trough. Thirty three years later and six miles away from Mount Calvary having given Himself in an atoning death, He’ll be buried in a stone tomb and wrapped in linen cloths again. He will leave those linen cloths in the triumph of His resurrection.

The shepherds come not only celebrating (worshipping) and proclaiming Him but they who are raising the sheep who are going up to the sacrifice from the valleys of

Bethlehem to the mountains of Zion, now behold the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. These shepherds who stand in the field of the great shepherd David are now looking upon the Great Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who will lay down His life for the sheep, anticipating the cross. They who look upon the One who will lay down His life for the sheep are also looking at the Great Shepherd who will be the Lamb of God who will bring the sacrifice as a Good Shepherd lays down His life and will go with us through the valley of the shadow of death, for He has conquered sin, death, hell and the grave at the cross.

Now we come to the last two narratives to punctuate our series and it's Simeon and Anna. I have introduced this by the text I read at the beginning in Luke 2. I want to look at three things from this passage and then I will draw out one thought at the conclusion.

The first thing is that we have a Godly family. I will be starting a series on Biblical parenting starting January 6, 2014 that is illustrated in the lives of Mary and Joseph. In my preparation for this Advent Season I came across this in my study of Luke 2 and I saw the many times the Bible is emphasizing their faithfulness as parents. It says many times 'according to the Word,' 'according to the Law,' 'as was their custom' and you can see this Godly family that is raising the King of Kings and other children as well in a very specific format that is shaped by the Word of God. Mary and Joseph are those who are guided by the Word of God. You don't have to look far because they had to walk six miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem on the eighth day after Jesus is born and according to the Word of God they have Him circumcised and named. They come up to the temple eight days later to do what the Law called for which was to have Him circumcised which was the sign of the Old Covenant, replaced in the New Covenant by baptism which is the way the Lord's Supper replaces the Passover. Always with circumcision which is with baptism, you name the child. The father names the child and as the text says they named Him as God directed them through the angel, Jesus, that is Jehovah, God saves.

They are not through for a number of days later on the fortieth day they come back to do two more things required in the Word of God. That is the presentation of the first born of the family and secondly the purification of the mother. In other words, according to the Bible they would have Mary, the mother, go through a baptismal service where she would kneel in the water and the water would be poured over her in purification of the one who had delivered this child. Then secondly would be the presentation of the Child with an appropriate offering. Here is the first born declaring all of our children belong to You, by declaring the first born as being unto the Lord.

The irony of all of this is that the first born in this case is the Son of the Father to whom they are committing Him, the one who is His legal stepfather is doing according to God's Word so they are being faithful to God's Word. You see this family being shaped by the Word of God. As they are doing the purification and the presentation they meet two people.

They meet a Godly man and a Godly woman. Let's now meet the Godly man, Simeon, in Luke 2. Luke 2:25-35 says [25] *Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. [26] And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. [27] And he*

came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, [28] he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, (This is the fourth song that Luke has recorded in the opening two chapters.)

*[29] "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;*

[30] for my eyes have seen your salvation

[31] that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

[32] a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and for glory to your people Israel."

[33] And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

[34] And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed

[35] (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Here is the man Simeon. We don't know what tribe he is from but we just know he is an older man. Number two, we know he is filled with the Holy Spirit. Number three, out of love to God he pursues righteousness. Number four, is that he has been given a promise. The promise is that he would not die until the Promised One has been revealed to him. That day he is led by the Spirit of God to the temple and I don't know what he was expecting when the Promised One would be shown to Him in the fulfillment of God to him but what he met was the King of Kings, a Baby in the arms of His mother.

He takes Him into his arms and immediately we see the three features. He proclaims Him as the Christ. He worships, celebrates. He writes, sings and declares a song of praise to this King. As he does it he anticipates the atoning death of Christ by telling Mary that there will come a time that a sword will pierce her heart. Here is One who is raised up to save His people to the Gentiles and Israel, His people will be called. We see all three features of proclamation, celebration and anticipation of the atoning death of Christ.

Then we find another person who comes by and that is a Godly woman. Luke 2:36-38 says *[36] And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, [37] and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. [38] And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Now some other arms are ready to receive Him, this Godly woman. She is an older woman, 84 years of age. She had been married for seven years and after the death of her husband for sixty plus years she has been a widow and has served the Lord with worship, fasting and ministry there in the temple. Then she sees Him and proclaims. Here is the redemption of Israel and she worships Him, celebrates Him, even the One that she would take into her arms.

I love the celebrations in the Advent Season at Christmas. There is one that my professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary put me onto and gave me the back story behind it. The BBC televises it and it's from Oxford University, specifically King College where their male choir ever since 1918 presents the nine lessons of carols

in song. It is unbelievable music as the Scripture is read that leads all the way to the birth of the redeeming work of Christ. The nine Scripture lessons are each accompanied by hymns and carols. The music is phenomenal and the message is glorious and it has not changed since 1918.

The program always begins with the song “Once in Royal David’s City” and it is sung as a solo. What I didn’t know is that no one in that choir knows who is going to sing that solo until they walk out. Then the director will point and that’s the one who will declare what Christmas is. So when someone out there tomorrow points to you what will you say? I know what I hope you will say. I hope you will say that we are celebrating the birth of the One who always was, the Son of God, who became what He never was, the Son of Man, who went to the cross and rose again and in that glorified body He is what He never was and always will be and one day I will see Him as fully God, fully Man, my Savior and my Redeemer.

I hope and pray by God’s grace you will be able to give voice and that you will be able to tell them that Christmas for you is a celebration of the birth of Christ, the Son of God who became Man and He became Man for one reason which is the manger is explained only by the cross but the cross is meaningless without the manger. That’s why we have a communion service, to conclude a Christmas celebration as we remember the body and blood of the Lord. That’s why you see the color red all over Christmas and the first drop of His redeeming blood was not shed at Calvary but it was shed under the knife of circumcision, anticipating what He would do at Calvary when He would cut away the record of our sin.

I pray you with Simeon, Anna, Wise Men and Shepherds will be able to declare that Christmas for you is that celebration of the One when He arrived at Bethlehem there was no place because there was no room but He’s the One who would go to Calvary and take your place to make room for you in eternity. He has gone away to prepare a place for you in His Father’s house where there are many rooms and that you would declare that this Savior whom you celebrate came to the manger in humility and as He made His entrance into this world in that manger His exodus would be by way of the cross. It would be in triumph to the praise of the Father. We celebrate the gift of God, His only Son, who came to us, who came for us, who came among us, Immanuel with us in order to save us but you like me along with Simeon, Anna, Wise Men and Shepherds, the One who came for you, you must come to Him and He doesn’t negotiate. You surrender. Here is Christ the Lord who has come.

You may be thinking “Can I come?” Yes! See the birth narratives. Here is the rich and famous coming from the East. Here are the poor, the shepherds. Here are the Gentiles, the Jews royalty, the off scouring of society, the powerful, the marginalized, a man, a woman, male, female, young, old and see them all come. There is one way but that way is open to all who come to Him for He came to save sinners from their sins. So you must come to Him. Just as Simeon, you must receive Him in your arms but you receive in your arms the One who holds you in His. You embrace Him who at the cross embraced your sin that you might be saved and He can embrace you forever but you must come to Him personally. Then like Simeon, life has broken into death. Now I am ready to meet my God because my Savior has met me. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. Would You bless our assembly as we assemble to give praise to You? Angels assemble, wise men assemble, shepherds assemble and then Simeon individually, Anna individually. We see that personally we must come and together we praise Your holy Name. If there is one reading this who has not received Christ, may they this day embrace Him alone who was born in that manger to go to that cross in order that we might be embraced for all eternity. Now we are ready for life, death and forever for Christ the Lord has come and we have come to Him.
Amen.