

Title: How Should We Then Respond?

Text: Luke 2:15-20

Introduction

Well – friends – **what do you think?**

- **A man had two sons.**
- **He went to the first – and said – “My son – go work in the vineyard today.”**
- **The son answered – “I don’t want to!” – but later – changed his mind – and went.**
- **The man then went to his other son – and said the same thing.**
- **The son answered – “I will!” – but he didn’t go.**

Now – **which of the two sons did his father’s will?**¹

Well – friends – **this** should probably **ring a bell** in your head.

This is a parable – and question – that Jesus posed to the Jewish leaders in Matthew 21 – a parable that is a veiled – or *perhaps* – not so veiled! – indictment of their hard-hearted unbelief.

It’s a parable that **reminds us:**

- That it is ***not* what we say** that **matters – *but* what we do.**
- That **our actions – speak louder – than our words.**

It’s a parable that **reminds us** of the **importance** of a ***proper* response to God and his Word.**

¹ Matt 21:28-31

And – **that** – I believe – is **what Luke wants his readers – and us!** – to see from **our passage today**.

He wants us to see that:

The good news of Christmas demands an appropriate response.

And **Luke does this** by **setting up** the **shepherds** as **exemplary characters** – or *at least* – **their responses** as **exemplary responses** – that we are **meant to identify with** – and **follow** – *in response* to the **divine revelation** that **they had received** about **Christ**.

So – *how* did the **shepherds respond** *after* **witnessing** such a **glorious sight** – and **receiving** such a **glorious news**?

Or – **more specifically:**

- **How** should *we* **respond** to the **greatest news** ever told?
- *What* should a **proper response** *be* to such a **news**?
- **What responses** does the **gospel call forth** from us?

Well – in **our passage** today – I want to **highlight three responses** that **the gospel** ought to **evoke from us** – namely – the **responses** of:

- **Faith** (vv.15-16)
- **Witness** (vv.17-19)
- **Worship** (v.20)

We'll **take each** of these **in turn**.

Firstly – *faith* – the shepherds *acted upon* the word ...

1. Faith (vv.15-16)

Now – **before** we look at verse 15 – and to **help us set the scene** – I want you to **put yourself in the shepherds’ shoes** – or sandals! – for a moment.

Imagine with me:

- It is a **cold** – **dark** – and **wintery** – **night**.
- **You** are – **out** in a **remote field** – **not too far away** from **Bethlehem**.
- And **you** are **there** with **your mates** – your **fellow shepherds** – **going about** your **usual business** of **tending** – and **keeping watch over** – **the flock**.

When – all of a sudden – out of nowhere:

- **An angel of the Lord** appears.
- And a **bright** – **glorious** – and **resplendent** – **light pierces** through **the darkness** of **the night**.

It surrounds you. It encircles you. It envelops you.

And **this** – friends – *as we saw last week* – is **nothing less** than:

- **The blazing glory** of the Lord!
- **The very presence** of **God himself!**

Can you imagine? The **bright** and **penetrating light** of **God’s glory**:

- **Shining upon** the souls of **sinful men**.
- **Exposing sin** – and **laying the soul bare**.

There's **nowhere to hide** – in the **presence of a holy God**.

And so – **fear** immediately **grips your heart**. You are:

- **Terrified.**
- **Horrified.**
- **Petrified.**

You are **quaking** – and **would probably die** – from **fear** – *were it not* for the fact that the **angel** had *not* come in **judgment** – *but* in **grace**.

For **the angel** says – **verse 10**:

“Don’t be afraid – for look – I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David a Saviour was born for you – who is the Messiah – the Lord. This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”

And *just as* you are **trying** to **catch your breath** – *just as* you are **trying** to **process it all**.

Suddenly – **out of nowhere** – and – as a **fitting crescendo** – a **whole host** of **angels** appear – **filling** the **night sky** – and **extolling** and **praising God** – **singing** – **verse 14**:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven – and peace on earth to people he favours.”

And **having done so** – **having ascribed** the **highest praise** – **honour** – and **glory** – to **God** – we are told – in **verse 15** – that **the angels** left the scene – and **returned to heaven**.

And **everything** returns to **normal** – **back to the way it was**.

Now – **let me ask**:

If you were one of the shepherds – having *seen* all that you’ve seen – and having *heard* all that you’ve heard – what would *you* do? *What* would your response be?

Now – *of course* – there are many ways in which we could have responded:

- Perhaps we might **stand** there **dumbfounded** – **rubbing our eyes** and **ears** in **disbelief** – at **what we had just seen** and **heard**.
- Perhaps we might **stare** at **one another** – with **jaws** to **the ground** – and **asking**: “**What in the world had just happened?!**”
- Or – perhaps – **after** having **pinched ourselves** – we might **open** a **dialogue session** – **discussing** with **one another** **what we had seen** and **heard** – and maybe even **questioning** if it was something that we ate!

But – friends – **I want you** to **notice** the **response** of the **shepherds**.

For **I** believe it is an *exemplary* response – a response that **Luke** *wants* his readers – and **us!** – to **emulate**.

And **it is this**:

- The **shepherds** – **trusted**.
- They – **had faith**.
- They – **believed**.

Look at verse 15:

“When the angels had left them and returned to heaven – the shepherds said to one another – ‘Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened – which the Lord has made known to us.’”

Now – **I know** that **the text does *not* explicitly state that the shepherds *believed*** – but **I think this can be reasonably *inferred* from their actions.**

In other words:

- **What they do *springs* from what they believe.**
- It was **faith *expressing itself* through work.**
- **They *acted upon* what they believed.**

A commentator puts it **this way** – he says that:

“**[The shepherds *do not* go] in order to believe – *but* because they believe.**”²

So – **we can say** that:

- **The shepherds *heard* the angelic announcement of the Saviour’s birth.**
- **They *believed* the announcement.**
- **And they *acted upon* that announcement.**

And **they did so** – by **deciding to go to Bethlehem – *not* to see if what the angel said was true – *but* to see “what” has happened – or *more literally* – the “word” that has happened.**

Now – **assuming that these shepherds were Jews – which they *most likely* were!** – the **announcement of the birth of the long-awaited Messiah – in such humble and lowly circumstances – must have seemed utterly incredulous to them!**

“***What? The long-awaited royal Messiah – born in a lowly manger?!***”

But the shepherds were unperturbed. They *believed* the angel’s message.

² Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1–2*, JSNTS 88 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 146.

In fact – notice *how* they framed the angelic message in verse 15 – they said:

“Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened – [and notice this] – which – [not the ANGEL – but which] – the LORD has made known to us.”

In other words:

- They put the angel’s words *on par* with God’s words.
- They *equated* the angel’s words with God’s words.
- They *attributed* the angel’s words to God’s words.

And the reason for this is because the shepherds *knew* that the angel *was but* – an ambassador – a messenger – a mouthpiece – of God.

And so – hearing from God’s messenger is *akin* to hearing God himself.

As someone once said:

“When God’s Word is truly preached – God’s voice is truly heard.”

So:

- The shepherds *believe* what they had heard from the angel.
- They *believe* the heavenly message.
- They *believe* that the long-awaited Messiah – the Saviour of the world – has been born to them – in Bethlehem.

And their faith was *not without* works. Rather – it was *accompanied* by works.

For notice what they next did – verse 16:

“They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph – and the baby who was lying in the manger.”

I like the phrase – *“they hurried off”*.

The underlying Greek verb is **σπεύδω**. It sounds like **“speedo”** to me!

The **ESV** translates it as **“they went with haste”**.

From this – we get **the idea** that there was **no trifling** – **stalling** – or **dallying** – on **their part**.

No! Instead – there was a **sense of urgency** – **excitement** – and **enthusiasm** – on **their part**.

They were eager – **desirous** – and **zealous** – to see **the Messiah** that was **born to them!**

And so – **off they went** – *without hesitation* – leaving **their flock** – *their livelihood!* – **behind**.

And **they made their way** to **Bethlehem**.

And – **once there** – I can imagine them **frenetically going** from **house-to-house** – looking for **“the sign”** that was **given them** – namely – **a baby**:

- **Wrapped tightly in cloth** – which was *pretty common!*
- And – **lying in a manger** – an **animal feeding trough** – *not too common!*

And **we are told** that **their labours paid off!**

Verse 16 – they:

“... found both Mary and Joseph – and the baby who was lying in the manger.”

It was *just as* they have been told:

- **The Messiah *born* unto them.**
- ***Wrapped* in swaddling cloth.**
- **And *lying* in a manger!**

Friends – **what we see from this episode** – is **the nature of true faith** – **biblical faith:**

- It is **taking God at his word.**
- And **acting upon that word.**

And **that's what the shepherds did:**

- They ***heard* the word.**
- They ***believed* the word.**
- They ***acted* upon the word.**

Now – **lest we think** that the shepherds were **different** – in that **they were direct recipients** of an **angelic announcement** – let's remember **Peter's words in 2 Peter 1:19:**

“We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed – [and – by this – is meant the Old Testament Scriptures – and – by extension – the New Testament Scriptures too] – and [we] do well to pay attention to it ...”

In other words – **we** – like **the shepherds** – have **the same thing to go on** – namely:

- **Divine revelation.**
- And – ***in our case*** – **revelation as given to us in the written Word of God.**

And **our response** ought to be **like** that of **the shepherds** – one of ***faith*** and ***obedience***.

After all – as **James** reminds us:

- We are meant to be “*doers of the word*” – and not “*hearers only*”.³
- For “*faith without works is dead*”.⁴

And I believe the implied question that Luke is intending to leave with us is this:

- What will *our* response be?
- Will we – like the shepherds – respond with *faith*?
- Will we *take* God at his word – *act* upon it – and *come* to the Messiah?

But that’s *not* the only exemplary response of the shepherds to the Christmas message.

Notice *what else* they did ...

2. Witness (vv.17-19)

Verse 17:

“After seeing them – [that is – after seeing Mary, Joseph, and the baby in the manger] – they reported the message they were told about this child ...”

So – what did the shepherds *do* after seeing with their own eyes the things that have been revealed to them?

Well – they “reported” – they “related” – they “made known” – the message that they had been told about this child.

³ James 1:22

⁴ James 2:17, 20, 26

Simply put – **the shepherds** – “**witnessed**”. They “**spread the word**”.

By the way – **I think** it is **worth noting** that the word for “**reported**” in **this verse** is the **exact same Greek word** – γωφρίζω – that is **used** in **verse 15** for “**made known**”.

A more literal version like the **ESV** translates **these two verses** as follows:

Verse 15:

*“... 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** (γωφρίζω) to us.’”*

And **verse 17:**

*“And when they saw it – they **made known** (γωφρίζω) – [**same word!**] – the saying that had been told them concerning this child.”*

Now – **I think this** is *significant* – for what **Luke intends** for us to see is that:

- **Just as the Lord** – through **the angel** – “**made known**” to **the shepherds** – the **birth of the Messiah**.
- **So too** – and – *in like manner* – **the shepherds** were “**making known**” the news of **the Saviour’s birth** to those around them.

In other words – **the shepherds took on** the role of **the angel** in being *messengers of God*.

They **announced** – they **heralded** – they **proclaimed** – the **good news of the Saviour’s birth**.

And – *by the way* – *in so doing* – they **became** – the **first human evangelists** – the **first human witnesses**.

The **lowly shepherds** were the **first** to **proclaim** the **good news** of the **arrival of the Messiah**.

And I believe **what we can learn from this sequence of events** is that:

Divine revelation calls for human propagation.

Now – **I want you to recall what the shepherds had just seen and experienced:**

- ***Imagine* the suddenness of an angel’s appearance out of nowhere.**
- ***Imagine* the stunning glory of God shining forth in all its radiance.**
- ***Imagine* the awe-inspiring sight of multitudes upon multitudes of angels filling the night sky – and breaking forth in spontaneous praise to God.**

What an experience! – what a sight! – this must have been for the shepherds to behold!

An experience – and sight – that *not many* can claim to have.

And – *yet!* – *in spite of* this spectacular and jaw-dropping – experience – notice *what* is it that these shepherds focused on in their proclamation.

What they proclaimed:

- Was *not* the *drama* of the experience.
- ***But* the message of the Saviour’s birth.**

They kept the main thing – the main thing – so to speak.

So – **the pattern** that we see here is as follows:

- They *heard* the **Word**.
- They *saw* the **Word**.
- They *spread* the **Word**.

Now – **I don't think** it was *only* to **Joseph and Mary** that **they reported the news of what they had heard about the baby Jesus** – for – in verse 18 – we read that – “*all* who heard it were amazed”.

By this – I think it can be implied that the **shepherds** – in their **zeal and excitement** – went around – perhaps re-tracing their steps to the houses they had visited while searching for the baby – and reporting what they had heard from the angel concerning **this child**.

Now – friends – *remember!* – these were – **shepherds!**

- **Lowly** – despised – shepherds!
- The **outcasts** of society!
- At the **bottom** of the social ladder!

And – *as we saw last week* – so **untrustworthy** were **shepherds viewed** – that they were *not* allowed to testify in court!

And – *yet!* – *in spite of* this **deeply-ingrained social stigma**:

- The **shepherds** were **unfazed**.
- They were **undaunted**.
- They were **undeterred**.

The news of the Saviour's birth was *too great* – *too wonderful* – *too glorious* – to keep it to themselves!

It *had* to be **announced!** It *had* to be **heralded!** It *had* to be **proclaimed!**

And so:

- These **shepherds** did *not* let anything hold them back!
- They were **unrestrained!**
- They were **unashamed!**

They went around proclaiming the “good news of great joy” of the Saviour’s birth to whomever they met!

***Such* was their zeal – excitement – and joy – of what they have seen and heard!**

It’s like what Rhoi preached about the Samaritan woman in John 4 – who – having found the Messiah:

- **Left her water jar.**
- **Went into town.**
- **And boldly – and joyfully – proclaimed Christ!**

And all this – *in spite of* the social stigma that was attached to her being a prostitute.

But she couldn’t care less!

She had *seen* the Messiah – and she *had* to testify – she *had* to proclaim – she *had* to tell it to others!

Well – friends – I think the lesson – the application – for us is obvious:

If divine revelation calls for human propagation – then a right response – an appropriate response – from those of us who have come to faith in Christ through the gospel – is that of witness.

Simply put:

- **We** who have *heard* the **Word**.
- And *believed* the **Word**.
- **Should** also *spread* the **Word**!

After all – *isn't* that what we do with good news – or when we have discovered something good?

How many of us – when we have discovered great food – especially at a cheap price! – in a restaurant – would keep it all to ourselves?

No! Far from it!

Instead – what do we do?

- We *share* it with others!
- We *tell* others about it!
- We *spread* the word!

And *why* do we do so?

Well – because as John Piper once said:

“Our joy *doubles* when shared.”

I think we all understand what he means by that!

And think about it:

- *If* that's what we do when we come across good food – good coffee – good books – or good movies.
- *How much more* should we do so having heard – and embraced – the “good news of great joy that will be for *all the people*”?

I mean – this is the *greatest* news there ever *is* – or ever *will be*! – in the history of the world!

Having tasted and seen for ourselves that the Lord is good – we *cannot* – but share it with others – desiring others to come to share in the fullness of life that we have in Christ!

And so – friends – we – *of all people* – should be **most excited** – and **zealous** – to **proclaim** this **glorious news** – to **those around us!**

It is **only *natural*** that we do so!

After all – as **Paul** puts it in **2 Corinthians 4:13**:

“I believed – therefore I spoke.”

Do you see the *logical* sequence? Paul *believes* – therefore – he *speaks!*

Or – as he puts it in **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**:

“Everything is from God – who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is – in Christ – God was reconciling the world to himself – not counting their trespasses against them – and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore – we are ambassadors for Christ – since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf – ‘Be reconciled to God.’”

That – friends – *should be* our **passion** and **desire** as **Christians** – *namely* – to be **ambassadors** – to be **messengers** – to be **mouthpieces** for **God**:

- **Proclaiming** the wonderful news of the gospel to **all who would hear**.
- And **pleading** with them to be reconciled to **God**.

As **Christians** – we ought *not* to be **ashamed** of the gospel – *for* – as **Paul** puts it in **Romans 1:16**:

“... it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”.

So – friends – **let's ask ourselves:**

- ***What* is our zeal – and fervour – like **this day?****
- **Are we *still* as zealous – and fervent – in sharing the gospel with those around us – as when we first believed?**

May we **seize every opportunity** we can to **share this *good* news – this *glorious* news** – of our Saviour's birth – life – death – and resurrection – with those around us!

And Christmas is a ***wonderful* time – an *opportune* time!** – to **do that!**

- **We can get into spiritual conversations with them.**
- **We can salt their thinking.**
- **We can invite our friends to church – and get them to sit under the preaching of the Word – the proclamation of the gospel.**

And ***who knows*** what may happen?

Now – **for those of us** who may feel inadequate – let's remember that:

- ***If God can* use the shepherds – these *lowly* and *despised* shepherds – to spread the word.**
- ***Then* – I'm sure that he – *too* – can use us to be his ambassadors – his messengers – his mouthpieces – to bring the good news of salvation to anyone we meet.**

Let these words of Joni Eareckson Tada – ***encourage* – *inspire* – and *challenge* – our hearts.**

She writes:

“The banquet of God’s blessings will taste sweeter if you invite someone to take a seat next to you. What aspect of the gospel can you share with someone today? Pass the platter to a person who’s hungry ... and experience the joy!”⁵

Now – *as an aside* – I want you to **notice the two different responses** that we see in **our passage to the shepherds’ message**.

How did those who **heard the shepherds respond** to the message?

The People’s Wondering

First – in **verse 18** – we see the **first response** – the *wondering* of people.

Look at verse 18:

“... and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”

The people were **“amazed”** – the **Greek word** is θαυμάζω.

That is – they **“marvelled”** – they **“wondered”** – at **what the shepherds told them**.

Now – there is **debate** as to whether **this** was a *positive* – or a *negative* – kind of **“amazement”**.

We can’t be sure – but **perhaps one of the reasons** for their **“amazement”** is because of *who* **it was** that were **bringing them this message** – *namely* – **the shepherds**.

Yes! The **lowly** – and **despised** – **shepherds!**

⁵ Source: <https://www.ioniandfriends.org/a-banquet-for-all/>

These ones with notoriously questionable character were bringing them the *incredible* – or perhaps to them – *incredulous!* – news of the long-awaited Messiah’s birth – in a lowly manger!

So – we are *not* sure if the people’s “amazement” led them to faith in Christ.

But – because of the conjunction – “*but*” – that follows in verse 19 – I believe that Luke is here *contrasting* the people’s *superficial* response with Mary’s *thoughtful* response.

And because of that – I think that the “amazement” here is *not* one that leads to saving faith – it is *not* a salvific kind of “amazement”.

Instead – it might *simply* be an arousal of curiosity. Or *maybe* even – a bewilderment of sorts – one that finds the news of *what they have heard* – *intriguing* at best – or *incredulous* at worst.

For the thing is this:

We don’t find them responding *the way* the shepherds *did* – namely – with faith.

These people – *unlike* the shepherds – did *not* make haste to go down to the manger to see the Messiah for themselves.

They simply responded with “amazement” – or *perhaps* – “amusement” – and *maybe even* – “bemusement”.

And **that’s** what we need to beware of!

It will **do us** *no* good if we are simply *fascinated* – *intrigued* – or *titillated* – by divine things – and with **nothing else to show**.

But – in *contrast* to the people’s response – namely – one of *wondering* – notice Mary’s response – namely – one of *pondering* ...

Mary's Pondering

Look at verse 19:

“But – [that is – in contrast to the people mentioned in verse 18] – Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart – and meditating on them.”

I love the words “treasuring” – and “meditating”!

Mary – having heard the shepherds’ report – as well as – what she and her husband – on separate occasions – had been told by the angel Gabriel regarding her miraculous virgin conception – *contemplated* – and *pondered over* – all these things in her heart.

She *continued* reflecting upon these events in her desire to understand its true significance.

And ***who* can blame Mary?** For ***who*** has experienced what she has experienced?

A teenage girl – who has never known a man – and *yet* – conceiving a baby from on high.

A baby who is none other than:

- The long-awaited Messiah.
- The Saviour of the world.
- The Lord of all.

And so – **Mary *pondered over* the significance of all that has happened.**

Perhaps **her mind raced – and ruminated – through the Scriptures – as she tried to piece it all together in God’s grand salvific plan:**

- Perhaps **her mind raced to Genesis 3:15 – to the *protoevangelium* – to the first gospel – in which God promised that the coming seed of a woman will crush the serpent’s head.**

- Perhaps **her mind raced** to **Genesis 12, 15, and 17** – to **the Abrahamic covenant** and **promise** – of **land** – **descendants** – and **blessing**.
- Perhaps **her mind raced** to **2 Samuel 7** – to **the Davidic covenant** – in which **God promised David** an everlasting dynasty.

And as **Mary gazed** upon **her baby** in the **manger** – perhaps **she wondered**:

- **If this** – *indeed* – was the **culmination** of **all the promises** of **God**.
- **If this** – *indeed* – was **the Messiah** – the **Saviour** of the world.

It was a *faith-filled* – *faith-fuelled* – and *faith-inspired* – **pondering**.

One that **contemplated** what **God is doing** *in* – and *through* – the **events** that **had taken place** – especially *in relation* to **his promises**.

Friends – **what about us?** *What* do we spend time *pondering* – or *meditating* – on?

Do we ponder – **do we contemplate** – **do we meditate** upon:

- The **wonderful works** of **God**?
- The **beauty** – and **significance** – of **the person** and **work** of **Christ**?
- The **glory** of **the salvation** that **we have in Christ**?

Or – **are we flippant** – *indifferent* – and *lackadaisical* – over **such matters**?

Friends – **I believe** we have **much to learn** from **Mary's response** here – *namely* – that of *treasuring* – *pondering* – and *meditating* upon **divine truths** – upon **spiritual realities**:

- With **the goal** of *understanding* – and *appreciating* – the **significance** of **it all**.
- And **the ultimate goal** of *growing* in our **affections** for **Christ**!

Or – to put it differently: ***How much – how often – do we allow such glorious divine truths and realities:***

- To ***fill our minds*** – and to ***thrill our hearts?***
- To ***inform our minds*** – and to ***inspire our hearts?***

Friends – **may our response** be like that:

- Of the **shepherds** – *namely* – **those who passionately – and spontaneously – spread the Word.**
- And of **Mary** – *namely* – **those who treasure – and ponder over – the glories of the gospel.**

And ***not*** like the **people** – *namely* – **those who are simply “amazed” at what they hear** – but does **not affect them** one bit.

Well – ***so far*** – we have **seen the shepherds’ exemplary response:**

- ***Not only*** in their **taking God at his Word** – and **acting upon it** – *namely* – **faith.**
- ***But also*** – in their **spreading the Word** – *namely* – **witness.**

Well – ***thirdly*** and ***finally*** – and ***much more briefly*** – we also see it in **their worship ...**

3. Worship (v.20)

Look at **verse 20:**

“The shepherds returned – glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen – which were just as they had been told.”

Now – **I think** it is **significant** that **Luke mentions** that **the shepherds “returned”** – that is – they **“went back”** to **where they came from** – *namely* – the **remote and open fields** *not too far* from **Bethlehem**.

What this tells us is that **our life** *doesn't* **end** after we become **Christians** – it *doesn't* **end** after we have come to know **Christ** – and the **glories of Christ**.

What this tells us is that **life goes on**. It is **‘business as usual’** – *albeit* with a **different attitude** – and **outlook** – for **those who are in Christ**.

So – we see **the shepherds go back** to **where they came from**.

They went back:

- **To the fields.**
- **To their occupation.**
- **Of tending the flock.**

But – with this **one big difference:**

Verse 20 tells us that **they went back:**

“... glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard – which were just as they had been told.”

What this tells us is that:

- **Whereas** – *before* they had met the **Messiah** – the **shepherds** were just **going through** the **daily grind** of their **daily existence**.
- **Now** – *after* they had met the **Messiah** – their **lives** have been **radically** – **drastically** – and **totally** – **changed**.

They now had a skip in their step – and a song in their heart – even as they went about their usual work of sheep tending.

We are told that they returned “glorifying” and “praising” God for all the things they had seen and heard.

Simply put – **they had a new disposition – a new orientation:**

- **They became worshippers!**
- **Worshippers of the one – true – and living God!**

The song that the angelic host sang in verse 14 – namely:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven – and peace on earth to people he favours.”

This song became the shepherds’ song. This attitude became the shepherds’ attitude.

Having heard the glorious news of the Saviour’s birth – and having seen it all for themselves – the shepherds were – *unsurprisingly!* – filled with exuberant joy!

- *Not only* could they *not* contain themselves in *spreading* the Word.
- They also could *not* restrain themselves from *singing praises* to God!

For **these events** are *not* just some **far-fetched story** – the **product** of one’s **fanciful imagination**.

No! These are events are *real – historical* events – the **product** of **divine revelation**.

It was **something** that the shepherds *heard* for themselves – and *saw* for themselves.

It was **something verifiable!** It was **real!** It was **true!**

And **they knew** the **significance** of it!

Therefore – **they rejoiced!**

They were filled with inexpressible joy!

And *that's* why they returned – “**glorifying**” and “**praising**” God.

And – friends – **in like manner:**

- **We who are in Christ.**
- **We who have experienced the great salvation that we have in Christ.**
- **We who know what Christ has done to redeem us.**

Ought to be the most joyful – grateful – and worshipful – of all people!

In fact – **John Calvin** – in **his commentary** – says that **this worshipful response on the part of believers is one of the evidences of true saving faith.**

And – **then** – he makes **this excellent – and thought-provoking – statement:**

“If the cradle of Christ had such an effect upon them – [that is – the shepherds] – as to make them rise from the stable and the manger to heaven – *how much more powerful* ought the death and resurrection of Christ to be in raising us to God?”⁶

How true!

We who are recipients of his saving grace – we who have been brought from death to life – we who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ:

⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King; Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), par. 67912.

- ***How* can we remain *untouched*?**
- ***How* can we remain *unmoved*?**
- ***How* can we *not* respond in *worship* – *wonder* – and *awe* – at the grace of God as shown to us in the person and work of Christ?**

For the thing is this:

The deeper we go in our understanding and appreciation of what God has done for us in Christ – the higher we will soar on wings of adoration and worship unto God!

We will be a worshipful people!

For that's the only *natural* – and *appropriate* – response to the wonder of God's grace as shown to us in Christ!

Conclusion

Well – friends – we've seen **three responses** – three *proper* responses – three *exemplary* responses – of the shepherds to the good news of the birth of the Messiah.

And – *if we think about it* – these are the *very* responses that ought to characterise our lives as well – that is – the lives of those who have been confronted with the gospel of Christ.

For the gospel is intended to lead us to saving faith in Christ – and this – in turn – leads to a lifestyle of witness – *and* – worship!

So – friends – for **those of us** who are **Christians** – let's **ask ourselves**:

Do we see these gospel effects in our lives?

- *Are we* – like the shepherds – *actively* and *enthusiastically* spreading the Word? Sharing our faith? Proclaiming Christ?
- *Are we* – like the shepherds – *glorifying* and *praising* God for all that he has done for us in Christ? For saving us? For the gift of salvation?

And for the **unbelievers** in our midst – I believe that **today's passage** also has a **special application** – and **challenge** – to **you** – and **it is this**:

- *Will you* – like the shepherds – **take God at his word**?
- *Will you* – like the shepherds – **respond in faith**?

For the **Christmas story** reminds us that **God has come** – in the **person of Christ** – to **rescue us** from our **sins** – and to **reconcile us back to God**.

So – **would you** – *if you haven't done so already* – **rest in** – and **receive** – **this good news of great joy**?

Why not we pray?