



**Part 4: Luke 2.8-20 | [Joy Came Down]
CHRISTMAS EVE! 12.24.2017**

Introduction

Merry Christmas! My name is Spence and I am one of the pastors here at Mercy Church. How many of you still have shopping to do today!? See you out there! Hey I want to get right into the message for today. Luke 2.8-20. If you have your bible take it there.

This story is probably my favorite Christmas story. We used to read it at my grandfather's house every year. I love it. You've got shepherds. The good old salt of the earth blue collar guys...actually below blue collar. Shepherds back then were like, well, shepherds today. No PhD's on their walls so they weren't highly respected. Simple people with a really good handle on the way life works. They do their job, pay their bills, and live a simple life.

And in this story, these simple shepherds encounter A sky full of angels, a message of prophecy fulfillment, a baby who is God, and this baby's virgin mother. All in 12 verses of scripture. It's pretty great.

Here's the question though: Why put this story in the bible? This story is in here for a reason right? If you pause for a second to think about all of the stories Luke had to pull from surrounding Jesus' birth. And God had him put this one in here.

I think the shepherds are in here because we can relate to them. And as we put ourselves into the story the shepherd's response to Christmas can serve as a model for how we are to respond to the promises available to us in Christmas. That's the big idea here on Christmas Eve. Christmas is something you must respond to. So let me read this story then show you real briefly how we are to respond to Christmas

[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

[14] "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with
whom he is pleased!"

[15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go

over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Luke 2.8-20

Ok I want to show you **four responses to Christmas** we see put forward in the story of Christmas Day:

1. Fear Not ¹

In verse 8 these shepherds are just on night shift. Some of you I know get 3rd shift at your work. Can u imagine this? Anyways they are out there and then verse 9 says [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.

An angel shows up. And it was so bright that it made the glory of the lord shine around the shepherds. And their initial reaction was FEAR. Why? Well at least at first reading this makes sense right? I mean if something that incredible, which you’ve never seen anything like before, shows up out of nowhere... you’d jump back. Like _____

But there is more meaning to that than just shock. See people in the bible up to this point always reacted to the presence of God with fear. It goes all the way back to the creation account in Genesis. When God created adam & eve he created them to know him and walk with him. They were in a perfect relationship with God, and that’s what they were created for. No fear, no anxiety, nothing. That’s what every human was created for. You and I included. And you can imagine that if you had God walking right there with you and you two were really close...you would have nothing really to fear. Think about it. What causes you to fear now?

For me - its that people will reject me. Or that I will fail. And when I fail, people will reject me. I’m a people pleaser. But if I was completely filled with God’s love... then I wouldn’t care what anyone else thought. Do you fear the future? Well if you could be completely confident God is both Good & in control, you wouldn’t fear anything. Even death. Because death would mean you could be with him forever.

No fear. So what happened? Well Genesis 3 the serpent comes in and puts doubt about God into the minds of Adam & Eve. Satans first word’s are: “Has God really said?” The lie he leads them to believe is that they, not God, need to be in control. The lie says “If I obey God I will be unhappy. If I do it my way I will be happy.” And that lie has been passed down to every single person. That lie creates fear and mistrust and anxiety towards God. You know why it is so deadly? Because it deceives you. It’s kind of like a drug. At first it feels good. It

¹ Great insight on this point came from Tim Keller’s book *Hidden Christmas* pp 111-112.

eases pain & gives a euphoric experience. But Have you ever known someone truly addicted to drugs? The thing that promised them freedom from pain...they need more and more of it yet it satisfies them less and less. And eventually they become a slave to it. They talk about it like they are prisoners. And that's why we call it breaking an addiction because its like breaking prison chains. This lie of satan...that you are a better master than God...it's the same way. Feels good at first...but when you realize you can't really control your life the thing that promised peace & control creates more and more fear.

And life goes by and we realize how little control we have no matter how hard we try to control it...and we find ourselves in an anxiety riddled reality. We've rejected God's control...and ours isn't working out. And Adam and Eve have the same reaction so in Genesis 3 when God shows up AFTER they've sinned what do they do? The HIDE. They are scared. They don't want to be exposed and they don't want to face God.

Every human since has a fear of God for two reasons. We fear what it will mean to hand control back over to him (because we believe we know whats best for our lives) Our soul song is Frank Sinatra's "I did it my way!" We fear anyone, but especially a God we can't see or touch, we fear giving him control and submitting to what he says our lives should be about. **EVEN THOUGH WE KNOW** we can't control the events of our lives. We think we are a better pilot than God.

And even deeper we fear being exposed and judged for the things we've done wrong. So throughout the bible people were terrified of God not because of his bigness but because of his holiness. They feared being rightfully judged by him. And there were times where he did judge sin. He sent angels to wipe cities and armies off the grid because they had rebelled against him. So it becomes a true surprise when the angel says to the shepherds in v.10...

[10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not...

These 2 words carry A LOT of significance. Because the angel is saying IF you will listen to this message. If you will receive it...you won't have to be afraid anymore. You wont have to fear the future, you wont have to fear death, you won't have to fear losing control, you won't have to fear judgment. That deep fear...the stuff waaaay down deep that makes you the angry person you are...that makes you the anxious person you are...that keeps you from trusting people...you can be released from that fear. The next words in verse 10 tell you how but I want you to hear this is a fruit of the gospel. So Christian, if you find fear winning the day I want you to look into Christmas like these shepherds and hear the promise of the angel: fear not!

How do you fear not? That's verse 10

[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.

Fear not...for BEHOLD. Behold! There is that word again. The idea behind our entire advent season this year. Behold!

We said it means to be overwhelmed with AWE...That something so captures your attention you can't look away from it because it is so SIGNIFICANT, beautiful, so majestic, so LIFE ALTERING that everything in you is fixed on it. And that our hope is that **Christmas ROUTINE would be replaced with Christmas WONDER this year.** That you would BEHOLD Christmas like these shepherds were called by the angel to do.

The second response to Christmas is to **2. Behold the Gospel**

And what were they called to behold? News. In fact, the angels literal words: *Do not be fearing, be perceiving, for I am telling you the gospel.* Peer into the gospel.

You hang around Mercy for a while you will hear us talk about 'the gospel.' That the gospel changes everything and the gospel is great and gospel this gospel that. Gospel is not just the front door to Christianity it's the whole house. Bunch of rooms in there. I mean one day we are going to have a gospel house t-shirt. I'm kidding. It's a big deal so you gotta be clear on what it is. It's not advice or a philosophy or a genre of Christian music...its news! It's good news. And this good news will evoke great joy in those who hear it. The kind of Joy that can only come from one whose fear is relieved. The news evokes an emotional response. The more weighty the news, the more emotional the response. Panthers in CLT..."happy dance"... "the scans came back clear"...

TEARS OF JOY. That deep fear you've been carrying around...that insecurity...the gospel can remove it.

Here is the good news, the gospel, the angel dropped on these fellas out in the pasture:

[11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The Good News is that a savior, who is God, has finally come. The one that the prophet Isaiah prophesied about 700 years ago...and said someone from David's line would sit on David's throne forever. The angel didn't say 'in bethlehem' he said in the city of David. Shepherds knew where that was we learn in verse 15 when they say "let's go to Bethlehem!"

The gospel is that if you want to be free of fear of rejection & failure, if you want to lay down that baggage you've been carrying around because of your past sins, if you want to be free of the pain from where you haven't been able to forgive others...you have to receive this savior. See your insecurities and fears are very well founded. You are right to think "I can't control everything." Some of you have experienced this truth in really painful ways this year. I know because I have friends here going through unexpected loss & pain. I know because a year ago my dad called me to tell me my younger cousin died. I know from sitting in the doc office 5 years ago just waiting to find out if I had a tumor in my leg. I didn't look at him and go...no I've decided it's not that. I had no control!

You cannot control your life and you cannot save yourself. And the more you try, the more fear of the future will overwhelm you. The gospel says you don't need help...you need a savior. That's Jesus. And the reason you can trust him enough to hand control of your life to him...he came down. Mighty God came into the helpless form of a baby. When you behold Christmas you are beholding a mystery. All powerful God in the form of powerless child. He didn't stop there, he humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. All powerful God...nailed helplessly to a tree. Why? To set you free from your sin. To free you from yourself. To bring you back to the relationship with God you were created to have! HE CAME TO SAVE YOU!

How do you receive this salvation? That's response #3 to Christmas: **3. Make Peace with God**

When the angel announced this news...a whole host of angels showed up behind him. That means a lot. And what did they say?

[14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Gotta read that closely because there is a chance Christmas is so familiar to you that you'll miss what it actually says and in your head you'll replace it with something you remember. There is an older version that became mainstream because it's a little easier to swallow. It says "peace on earth good will to men." That's a poor translation from 1611. The one we have here is better. Because it gets at the way to receive the

savior. I've met several people who've visited mercy because they are trying to figure out their lives, trying to 'get back on track' or even 'get right with God.' I want you to listen in right here.

The core of the Christian message is that the human heart is hostile to God. And the message of Christmas is not "general peace on earth" like the absence of warfare. No it's about peace with God. And the way to have peace with God goes like this: You admit you've not only done wrong, but even the right you've done has been for wrong reasons. You admit you cannot save yourself...because you need saving from yourself... and you need a savior. Making peace with God means surrendering to him. And when you get there...oh Christmas starts to be a miracle. Because you start to see that the love and justice of God meet in this manger.

God's justice says you deserve death for your sin. You rebelled against him and if God is just he must punish this treason right? But at the same time he loves you so much he can't do that to you. So he sends his own son who will never rebel against him and he sends him to die in your place. And that means you will be set free. You see Christmas is the message that peace with God is possible because the savior is here!! The savior is HERE! AND ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS SURRENDER AND BELIEVE! And he will save you! And if you will give your whole life to him...he will break the chains sin has on you. And the fear that has dominated your life...will finally be overcome.

Illustration: Stepping off a cliff. Will God catch me?
Reality: you are already falling. God is saying take my hand & let me carry you.

And that brings us to the last response to Christmas: **4. Celebrate**

Look at the shepherd's reaction to this message. Not only did they run to Bethlehem to see it..

. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child...
[20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them

They CELEBRATED! They made it known like you would make live saving news known. You'd celebrate! You'd go crazy. That's what they did. The savior is here! They told everybody and it was like a Worship Party broke out on the way back to their sheep. Glorifying God! They HAD ACTIVE JOY because they had met their savior. They weren't alone. Look at these reactions in this story.

The host of angels! CELEBRATING. GLORIFYING GOD!
Mary - treasures these things. Holds them close. And all you gotta do is read Luke 1 to see her SONG she sang about the joy she had at this news. The people the shepherds told about it...wondered. Better translation is "were amazed." We aren't told they believed. Which may be some of you. It's one thing to be impressed or even impacted by Jesus, its another thing entirely to be saved by him.

See the response to Christmas...by the one who truly beholds what is happening...is Joy. It's joy. Because we who were lost in darkness...we've seen a great light. We who were prisoners...we've been set free. We who were guilty have been forgiven. We who were dead...have been made alive. This is why we behold Christmas. We stare into it marveling because when God came down... hope came down...when God came down...joy came down.

So let me ask you something: Has Christmas become ordinary to you? Has God sending his own son to rescue you who could not save yourself...has that news of GREAT JOY become ordinary? Has it drifted into the background of your Christmas season?

We are all the way up to Christmas Eve. Is it possible that in the busyness or in whatever else...instead of WHOLE HEARTED CELEBRATION of the arrival of Jesus... you've just kind of overlooked him? I confess if it weren't for our Mercy Kids team putting that awesome advent calendar together I probably would be there. I've had time to behold Christmas each day in small moments thanks to that advent calendar. But ya'll I still feel a little like "is it really Christmas?" And what God is telling me and what he's telling you is STOP EVERYTHING. DROP IT ALL AND CELEBRATE!

The Shepherds just left their sheep and ran to go see this thing. Because when an army of angels says "go check this out" you don't go check in with your supervisor to see if you can take a break. You drop everything and RUN!

Shepherds. Can you get more ordinary in that day? Probably not. And here's the thing. They weren't expecting it that night. "Tonights the night guys...who is on angel watch?" Nope, just going through their routine. And some of you have been going through Christmas routine for a long time. And today God is interrupting your life. You've got all kinds of baggage and there is no way you were ready for an announcement like this about your life. That you need a savior but to receive him you have to give your whole life to him!?

And the lie you gotta fight against is...I need to go get my life in order before I can really believe this. No, you don't. Christmas isn't a fixer upper message. You don't need fixing. Your situation is far worse than that! You need a whole new life. And that is exactly what God offers you this Christmas.

[23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6.23

Its free in that you can't earn it. Just behold & believe. Receive his salvation today. **AND YOU WILL HAVE JOY!!** God offers you the greatest joy this Christmas because in Christ he meets your greatest need.

So how have you come to Christmas?

- In fear? - he gives you peace. Phil 4.7 says that in Christ you don't have to fear anything but you give that control over to him and the peace of Christ that passes all understanding will guard your heart and your mind in Christ. Come to Jesus, find peace and joy

- In pain? - Hebrews says the reason Jesus became human was so that you would have a God who knows pain. He felt the pain of loss, the pain of betrayal, the pain of torture, the pain of death, the pain of abandonment. And he says if you come to him he will take that pain and begin to heal you. The comfort of the savior can heal even the deepest pain in the heart. But you must give him everything
- In routine? - he says wake up! Christmas is anything but ordinary! Have you been overlooking the joy available to you? Christian wake up from your sleep and Celebrate! If Christmas is ordinary

BEHOLD Christmas and Rejoice!

There is a song we are going to sing together but I want you to hear it for a minute as you do business with God. It's a simple anthem. BEHOLD the lamb of God.

And one of the main lines is "Why you love me so I will never know." We aren't worthy of such love...but he gives it to us. And when we start to realize a little more what he's given us...we just behold. Come behold.