

Reacting to God's Perfect Gift

Luke 2:18-19

Intro: One of the things I like about Christmas is seeing a child's reaction when they see that special gift. You know what I mean when they open that box with their name on it and it well... just watch: **[play video]**

If only people reacted to God's perfect gift the way that little boy reacted to his new Nintendo 64. Today it might go something like this **[play Wii video]**

Our reaction to gifts is often a real window into our hearts; an insight into just who we are and what it is we really value in life. Today we are going to look at three ways Christians should **React to God's Perfect Gift**.

[Read Luke 2:1-19/Pray/dismiss Jr. church]

That night some shepherds were in the fields outside the village, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terribly frightened, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!" Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors."

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each

other, "Come on, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, this thing the Lord told us about."

They ran to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. Then the shepherds went out and told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. Everyone who heard the shepherds' story were astonished and wondered, but Mary quietly treasured these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their fields and flocks, glorifying and praising God for what the angels had told them, and because they had seen the child, just as the angel had said.

When it comes to ***Reacting To God's Perfect Gift*** I want to look at three groups of people...The people the shepherds told about what had happened and what they seen, Mary after she considered all that the shepherds told her about why they were there that night and the shepherds once they headed back to their jobs. We find in these three groups three ways we Christians should ***React to God's Perfect Gift...***

First, the people Wondered V. 18

- A. One interesting incident that came out of making the movie, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, was when they were filming the scene when Lucy first enters Narnia. The film crew took Georgie Henley, who plays the part of Lucy, blindfolded her and then led her onto to the set. They told her to close her eyes while they removed the blindfold. As the director called for the filming to begin, she was to open her eyes. She was literally seeing "Narnia" for the first time.

The effect was astounding. The awe and wonder in a

child's eyes was still there as she recounted the event.

[show short video]

Imagine that holy moment, when the shepherds gazed upon the Child Christ for the first time. I can imagine that their breath was taken away as their eyes beheld that wondrous sight. When everything was "just as the angel said."

- B. Verse 18 says that the shepherds, ***"made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds"***
- C. They *"wondered at those things"*
 - 1. They wondered
 - 2. The word **Wonder** carries with it the idea of *admire*; it also means to hold in admiration or be struck with admiration, marvel, wonder or astonishment.'
 - 3. What was it that caused the people to wonder?
- D. Let's not for one minute think that this was any ordinary night
 - 1. **They wondered because The Shepherds told them of the Wonder of a special night.**
 - a) These shepherds were out doing their job
 - (1) They were simple folk doing a simple job
 - (2) It would have been a night like a thousand before
 - (3) Max Lucado puts it this way, "An ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds. And were it not for a God who loves to hook an "extra" on the front of the ordinary, the night would have gone unnoticed. The sheep would have been forgotten, and the shepherds would have slept

the night away. But God dances amidst the common. And that night he did a waltz. The black sky exploded with brightness. ... Sheep that had been silent became a chorus of curiosity. One minute the shepherd was dead asleep, the next he was rubbing his eyes and staring into the face of an alien. The night was ordinary no more. The angel came in the night because that is when lights are best seen and that is when they are most needed. God comes into the common for the same reason."

- b) An angel of the Lord appears
 - (1) Suddenly, an angel is in their midst
 - (2) The glory of the Lord shone around them
 - (i) A brilliant light shown around them
 - (ii) Lighting up the night
 - (3) The Shepherds are afraid
 - (i) Shepherding was dangerous work – animals, cold
 - (ii) Fear wasn't something they often felt – but this night the angel terrifies them
 - (4) God had their attention
- 2. **They wondered because The Shepherds told them of the Wonder of the Angels words**
 - a) The angel said that their words would:
 - (1) ***"bring [them] good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people"***
 - (2) ***"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"***
 - (3) ***"this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger"***

- (4) Then there appeared a host of angels that sang: ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"***
- E. One of the problems I see in our churches today is there simply isn't enough ***Wonder about Jesus***
1. To few of us truly wake up every morning in awe of who He is and what He has done for us
 2. Those who knew Him all marveled at what He did and they were in wonder at what they saw in Him
 - a) They, ***marveled*** when He calmed the stormy sea
 - b) The ***wondered*** when he cast out demons for the possessed
 - c) It only makes perfect sense that we ***stand in awe and wonder*** when he saves a soul from the grips of death, hell and the grave and we can say as Paul said, ***"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"*** (1Cor 15:54-55)
- F. **ILL:** In Bill Moyers's book "A World of Ideas II," Jacob Needleman remembers, "I was an observer at the launch of Apollo 17 in 1975. It was a night launch, and there were hundreds of cynical reporters all over the lawn, drinking beer, wisecracking, and waiting for this 35-story-high rocket. "The countdown came, and then the launch. The first thing you see is this extraordinary orange light, which is just at the limit of what you can bear to look at. Everything is illuminated with this light. Then comes this thing slowly rising up in total silence, because it takes a few seconds for the sound to come across. You hear a 'WHOOOOOSH! HHHHMMMM!' It enters right into you. "You can practically hear jaws dropping. The sense of wonder fills everyone in the whole place, as this thing goes up and up. The first stage ignites this beautiful blue

- flame. It becomes like a star, but you realize there are humans on it. And then there's total silence. "People just get up quietly, helping each other up. They're kind. They open doors. They look at one another, speaking quietly and interestedly. These were suddenly moral people because the sense of wonder, the experience of wonder, had made them moral." When we have a sense of wonder toward God, we too have our lives changed for the better.-
- ALAN W. Steier; Linton, North Dakota
- G. Folks, this Christmas as you gather around your Christmas tree don't make it so "every day" take time to be in wonder and marvel at just what **God's perfect Gift** did for you.
- Second, Mary Pondered** V.19a
- A. It says she ***"kept all these things in her heart and pondered them in her heart"***
- B. Mary "pondered" (sumballo) meaning to consider, putting one thing with another in her mind while considering the circumstances and all that has been said and then holding them in her heart. What things do you suppose Mary Pondered in her heart?
- C. ***Mary Pondered These Things***
1. She had more to think about than the others
 2. How Gabriel had come to her
 3. What the shepherds had told her about the song the angels had sung
 4. She may have understood what it meant and yet she didn't - could anyone
 5. She had her baby at her side - the one who she would nurture
 6. Yet He did not belong to her - He belonged to his father God

7. She mulled over in her mind what happened and she held on to these things as a great treasure
 8. There was a depth to them that she needed to process
- D. **We have heard the story many times**
1. Take it in again and think about what it means
 2. Treasure it and hold on to it
 3. What has this child, this babe to do with you?
 4. Do you receive Him as God Himself who came to save you?
 5. Do you seek to know Him more?
 6. Do you want to worship Him?
 7. Oh, don't answer me now
 8. Just treasure up these things and think about them - not just today - but tomorrow and tomorrow and each day of your life
- Finally, the Shepherds Praised V. 20**
- A. The shepherds, those who had been the first to be told of the arrival of **God's Perfect Gift**, once they had made all that they had been told to everyone and anyone who would listen the shepherds went back to their same boring jobs but they weren't the same on the inside.
1. They returned to where they started and were again setting there paying attention to the sheep
 2. I have to believe that they were also paying much greater attention in light of what had just taken place
 3. Notice that they didn't write a book or go on a speaking tour or launch a ministry called "A Shepherd's Story."
 4. After Christmas we have to go back to the same routine but now we can do so with rejoicing
 5. We are to rejoice right where we are

6. Yes, it's possible to have joy in our jobs even if they're junky
 7. Look at Luke 2:20: "**the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.**"
 8. They don't just wonder about what they saw, they worship Him whom they saw...
- B. III: Think of the indescribable splendor of "The Glory of The Lord."

It was enough to bring fear to the humble shepherds.

Those men on the quiet slopes near Bethlehem were startled not only by the brilliant light but also by the announcement of a Saviour born in that little town.

The stunning proclamation was accompanied by a great number of the heavenly host praising God!

C.H. Spurgeon wrote: "*This little planet of ours was made to burn with a superior light among its sister stars while the Creator sojourned here in human form. If for the first time you had heard of the visit of the incarnate God to this world, you would be struck with a wonder which would last throughout all eternity. This is the heart of the gospel – the incomparable fact of the incarnation of the Son of God, His dwelling upon the earth, and His presentation of Himself as a sacrifice unto God for the sins of mankind.*"

This is cause for great rejoicing today and every day throughout the year.

John Hus said, *“Rejoice, that the immortal God is born, so that mortal men may live in eternity. Rejoice, because the rich Lord of the Universe became poor, that He may enrich us needy one.”*

- C. In v.10...The angels declare **“Don’t be afraid”** This is Good News of Great Joy.
1. What they had just witnessed was something to celebrate nor fear
 2. It was not a time to retreat in fear but to rise up in celebration
 3. The news of the birth of Christ is certainly “good tidings of great joy.”
- D. When God shows His goodness, He loves to see us celebrate and respond with joy.
- a) **ILL:** For example, when God brought the Israelites back from captivity, He told them to hold a festival to commemorate the completion of the new temple and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh.8). And celebrate they did!

Spurgeon said, *“Our days of feasting are very seldom days of sanctified enjoyment, but too frequently degenerate into unhallowed mirth. There is a way of joy as pure and sanctifying as though one bathed in the rivers of Eden: Holy gratitude should be quite a great element.”*

- b) If God wanted the Israelites to have a good time of feasting and sharing because of His goodness, would He condemn a festive spirit at Christmastime?
- c) Wasn't the angel's message to the shepherd's one of “good tidings of great joy?”

- E. **WHAT DOES THIS TELL US ABOUT OUR OWN CELEBRATIONS? ARE OUR TRADITIONS A FITTING WAY TO EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS?**
1. If our decorations and dressing up compete with Christ then they serve us no good, but if they can be a part of celebrating with heaven they serve us well.
 2. Rather than scorning traditions, let us sanctify them; allowing them to serve heaven in our hearts.