

Lessons From The Shepherds

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Introduction

READ - *Luke 2:8-20*

Here we have one of the most beloved passages at Christmas time. We all can recall Linus movingly quoting this scripture in the class "Charlie Brown Christmas" cartoon, and I have fond memories of my little daughter Amy memorizing it while in Christian school, and reciting it at Christmas time. It just wouldn't be Christmas without reading and hearing *Luke 2*.

I would like for us to consider this verse as a tutorial on the right response to the Christmas message. Consider the shepherds, and their response. It should be our response to Christmas.

QUESTION - Let's brainstorm for a minute. What words can you use to describe the response of the shepherds to this news? Try and use one word answers only.

They responded with FEAR

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. (Luke 2:9, KJV)

We sometimes tend to water this down when discussing it. The Greek word rendered "afraid" in this verse is PHOBOS, which means simply "fear, terror," and from which we get our many phobias today. (Brainstorm some examples of how this suffix is used in our society - arachnophobia, hydrophobia, claustrophobia, etc.)

QUESTION - Why were they afraid?

QUESTION - Was fear a normal response or reaction to seeing angels? cf. *Luke 1:12,29* for some other examples.

QUESTION - Would you have been afraid? Why?

QUESTION - What part should fear have in our response to the Christmas message?

1. Though we rejoice, let us also soberly acknowledge the greatness and holiness of God, and the sinfulness and worthlessness of mankind, that necessitated the Savior.
2. We are so far from deserving what Christ did for us.

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6, KJV)

There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. (Romans 3:11, KJV)

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (every...: or, the whole imagination: the Hebrew word signifieth not only the imagination, but also the purposes and desires) (continually: Heb. every day) (Genesis 6:5, KJV)

QUESTION - How do we as believers demonstrate this response to the Christmas message?

QUESTION - More specifically, how do we demonstrate this response in our homes and within the confines of our families?

They responded with INTEREST

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. (Luke 2:15, KJV)

QUESTION - Could the shepherds have experienced Jesus Christ without this response?

QUESTION - This is an area where Christians and churches are struggling today - getting the interest of people. How can we as believers pique the interest of non-believers in Christ?

QUESTION - More specifically, how do we demonstrate this response in our homes and within the confines of our families?

They responded with URGENCY

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. (Luke 2:16, KJV)

When a person sees the answer to their need, they cannot move fast enough to respond.

ILLUS - Bartimaeus demonstrated that great urgency - *Mark 10:46-50*.

ILLUS - I remember a dear friend, Tom Jones, being saved in the Randolph Methodist Church. We were teenagers, still in high school, and attending a revival meeting there. I was already saved, but Tom was not. He is the only person I've ever personally watched RUN down an aisle to be saved. He was a changed man, witnessing to everybody the next day at school, and is today a Methodist pastor in southern Ohio.

ILLUS - Zaccheus - And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. (Luke 19:6, KJV)

QUESTION - If URGENCY is a proper response to the Christmas message, how can we as believers demonstrate it?

QUESTION - More specifically, how do we demonstrate this response in our homes and within the confines of our families?

They responded with SHARING

And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. (Luke 2:17, KJV)

QUESTION - What is the purpose of the church?

QUOTE (Henry Thiessen's Lectures in Systematic Theology, pg. 332), "The great commission directs the church to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. The Scriptures do not direct us to convert the world, but to evangelize it. By this is meant... that the church is under obligation to give the whole world and opportunity to hear the gospel and to accept Christ. We know that not all the world will respond to the gospel call, but the church is duty bound to give the whole world an opportunity to know about him and to accept His salvation."

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... (Matthew 28:19, KJV)

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. (Mark 16:15, KJV)

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8, KJV)

QUESTION - How do we demonstrate this response at Christmas time, both as a church, and as individuals?

QUESTION - How do we demonstrate this response in our homes, marriages, and families?

QUOTE - If your Christianity is worth having, it should be worth sharing.

They responded with WORSHIP.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. (Luke 2:20, KJV)

This is the net effect of all the above responses. It normally does not happen without the other things also happening.

When we hear, we fear, and then we develop an interest, we respond with urgency, we share with others who repeat the process... and God is glorified. This is worship.

QUESTION - One last time for this question - how do we demonstrate this response in our homes and within the confines of our families?

Conclusion

If we would learn the lesson of the shepherds on that first Christmas night, it would cause us to develop these five simple responses in our own lives:

1. We would respond with FEAR.
2. We would respond with INTEREST.
3. We would respond with URGENCY.
4. We would respond with SHARING.
5. We would respond with WORSHIP.

May God help us to be as the shepherds, always ensuring the announcement of Christmas gets made over and over again, and ensuring that our response to that announcement continues to glorify our God.

