

The Worship Around Christ

Luke 2:13-14, 20, 28-30; Matthew 2:2, 11

With just 19 shopping days left before Christmas, we have been warned for weeks that there is a supply chain crisis and that there may be delays in getting your gifts in time. Economists indicate that with labor shortages and shipping delays we can expect companies to miss getting products into the hands of consumers.

You may remember the Cabbage Patch doll craze of the 1983. Parents went nuts trying to get the doll for a child. According to *Newsweek*, “it was as if an army had been turned loose on the nation’s shopping malls, ravaging the Ficus trees, sloshing through the fountains, searching for the legendary stockrooms said to be filled with those dough-faced, chinless, engagingly homely dolls.”

Marketing created a frenzy by customizing every doll so that no two dolls looked alike. Fights broke out between people to obtain the doll. Some bought the doll for \$25 and then resold them for \$150. One man even flew to England to purchase a doll for \$300 to give his 5-year-old daughter.

An article stated that “the Cabbage Patch frenzy would go down in history as one of the world’s most intense Black Friday sales.”

One thing there is not to be a shortage of is worship. That’s what we were created to do. **Worship has been defined as “the reverence that one shows toward something or someone; holding a person or object in high esteem; or giving a person or an object a place of importance or honor.”**

Hundreds of verses in Scripture talk about worship and provide a template of what it should look like. And while the definition indicates worship can be both given to a person or object, the Bible makes it clear that worship and honor should only be directed to the Lord. Anything else becomes an idol.

John Piper says worship “is an act that is designed not only to bring honor to Him who deserves it, but also to bring a spirit of obedience and submission to the worshippers.” True worship, he says, is a

valuing or a treasuring of God above all things.”

Before we clearly understand what true worship is, we need to understand that the Bible also talks about worship that is vain.

Matthew 15:8-9

Jesus is saying that the worship of the religious leaders amounted to nothing more than a big fat goose egg. It meant nothing. They had all the outward expressions and activities of worship, but in their heart, their worship was worthless. On a scale of 1-10, it was a zero. When they came into the synagogue they sang the songs, they prayed (even out loud), they gave their tithes and they listened to the message, even took notes, but it was meaningless because it wasn’t from the heart.

From that passage, we can deduce that the heart has everything to do with the right way to worship and we see in **John 4:23-24** what Jesus describes as true worship.

John 4:23-24

True worship, right worship, worship that pleases God depends on our understanding that He is truth. When we consider **Romans 12:1-2** along with **John 4:23-24** we see that our entire being – body, mind, and spirit – are all engaged in true worship.

Piper continues by saying that **“worship depends on a right spiritual or emotional or affectional heart-grasp of God’s supreme value, which is based on a right understanding of God’s nature, and it is a right valuing of God’s worth.”**

The literal meaning of worship is worth-ship. True worship is treasuring God above everything else. Piper adds **“the inner essence of worship is the response of the heart to the knowledge of the mind when the mind is rightly understanding God and the heart is rightly valuing God. You can use words like treasuring God or prizing God or delighting in God or reverencing God or being satisfied with God. All of these inner responses to God reflect his infinite worth and beauty. Worship is showing and displaying the worth or value of God.”**

When the heart is engaged in true worship, I believe

there are at least four reasons that we discover from four different sources about worship as we reflect on our passages about Christ's incarnation.

Today we will see the worship around Christ.

Next Sunday we will see the wonder about Christ.

The third Sunday we will see the witness of Christ.

Christmas weekend we will see the way to Christ.

On Christmas eve I want to talk on the words about Christ and the words of Christ.

Turn this morning to **Luke 2** where we consider first the angels who worshipped with God's glory.

I. THE ANGELS WHO WORSHIPPED WITH GOD'S GLORY – **Luke 2:8-14**

It's the familiar scene of the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem. We don't know how many shepherds there were. Some suggest they were tending the sheep destined to be sacrificial animals, but that's only speculation. According to the passage they lived out there with the sheep. It was night. I imagine them huddled around a fire to stave off the chill of the night.

One moment they are in a low conversation to pass the time and the next moment they were engulfed in a dazzling light. Our passage says it was the glory of the Lord that shone around them, referring to the shepherds. This glory was emanating from the angel. It was not his glory but the glory of God. It is the same glory that will light the new world as we see in **Revelation 21:23** "**The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light.**" It is the same glory that Moses knew when he spent time in God's presence as he received the 10 commandments from God. Scripture tells us that his face shone so brightly that he had to cover his face.

It is the same glory Peter, James and John would see when they stood with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration when the glory of Christ that had been veiled as a man was briefly revealed as He talked with Moses and Elijah.

The glory of God is the beauty of His spirit, his invisible qualities, character or attributes displayed

in a visible or knowable way. How can you define His beauty or glory? How do you define the color of a sunset to a blind person or define the rustle of leaves to someone who is deaf?

Isaiah 6:3 "**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.**"

Intrinsically there is a correlation between the holiness of God and the glory of God. We could then say that the glory of God is revealed in the beauty of His holiness. His glory is His holiness on display. When He puts His holiness on display for us to comprehend and understand, we see His glory. The better we understand His holiness, the clearer will be our ability to see the radiance of His glory.

The angel who had just come from God's presence where he saw the glory of God now stood before the shepherds radiating His glory. The more we spend time in God's presence, the more evident His glory will be seen around us. This angel now stood as a messenger of hope.

A. A Messenger of Hope – v. 9

The word angel literally means messenger. The verse describes him as an angel of the Lord. He came as a messenger from the Lord whose authority he obeyed.

With things like the continuing battle with COVID, school shootings, chaos in city streets, rising prices and inflation, many are filled with feelings of fear and despair. We turn on the news hoping to find something encouraging, but it is one bit of bad news after another. We scour social media hoping to find some feel good story that can lift our spirits from the doldrums of despondency.

A few weeks ago, I was talking with someone that Robyn and I had helped out and he was thanking us for what we had done. It wasn't really any big thing but to him it was huge. He said our actions gave him a bit of hope back into mankind.

Israel needed hope. The shepherds needed hope. Israel was under the oppressive rule of Rome. On top of that the governor, King Herod, put in charge of overseeing Israel as a puppet of the emperor, was

a suspicious, ruthless, murderous ruler. Perhaps they were clinging to the hope of the promise about a Messiah who would come with deliverance.

Galatians 4:4 says that God sent Jesus at just the right time. To announce His arrival, God sent a herald to proclaim the news. He was a messenger of hope. This messenger had a message of hope.

B. A Message of Hope – vs. 10-14

It was first a message of peace.

1. It was a message of peace – v. 10

There are lots of reasons people are filled with fear.

Acrophobia is the fear of heights

Anthrophobia is the fear of flowers

Arachnophobia is the fear of spiders

Arithmophobia is the fear of numbers

Barophobia is the fear of gravity

Bibliophobia is the fear of books

Chionophobia is the fear of snow

Podophobia is the fear of feet

You can only imagine what people are afraid of.

Perhaps the shepherds had angelophobia, the fear of angels, after all they had never seen one and when one showed up, they were terrified. It was not a common occurrence. He told them not to be afraid. He had brought them good news of great joy.

This past week a freshman basketball coach in Pontiac was sending out a group text to his team for practice. He accidentally dialed the wrong number and the team ended up on a video chat with Tampa Bay Buccaneer quarterback Tom Brady. You can imagine the great joy among the boys.

Now I get wrong numbers from time to time. There was the time I got a very early morning call from someone on Easter wondering if I did confessions over the phone.

I get text messages for someone named Nancy. I've even made some fat fingered phone calls myself. We all have.

On the other hand, there are people I call or who call me and I find joy in those calls.

We feel joy when we get a call from a friend we haven't heard from in a while. (Funeral – 45 years)

But if we are waiting for a call from a doctor, we have great joy when he tells us the biopsy was benign or when he says we are cancer free.

The angel had news of great joy. In the Greek it's the word mega joy. Tony the Tiger would say it's GRRRRREAT. The shepherds didn't need to fear this messenger or his message because it was a message of peace, a message for all people.

2. It was a message for all people – v. 10

It wasn't just for one nation.

It wasn't just for one group of people within a nation like a particular gender or age group or demographic.

This was a message for all people. There were no exclusions. It was a message with purpose.

3. It was a message with purpose – v. 11

Think about messages that you would like to hear that would bring you joy or even great joy. Put them next to the message from the angel and they pale. It was the message of a Savior, the anticipated Messiah, the deliverer, the promised one.

It was a message that this Savior was born to you, meaning He was born in your midst.

He was the Lord, the sovereign one, the one to whom Paul says every knee will bow and tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God.

John MacArthur writes “The ultimate purpose of the good news of salvation is to save sinners so they can join the angels in glorifying God.”

The message was full of purpose and it resulted in praise.

4. It was a message of praise – vs. 13-14

“**Suddenly**” means they weren't expecting it. The angel was joined by a host of angels praising God. It's the same message of praise we see in **Rev. 4, 5**

and 7 where angels and believers join together in singing an anthem of praise as we give God glory. Here it is just the angels praising God. Peace is not given to those who have good will, but to those who are the recipients of God's good will and favor.

The angels give praise to God for the peace He has sent to mankind. It's the same peace Paul describes

that we have with God through the Savior.

Romans 5:1-2 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

Paul says we rejoice in the hope of God’s glory because we have peace with Him through Jesus Christ. The angels praised God because He sent a great Savior to meet man’s greatest need which was news of greatest joy. It is peace that comes from God, peace that is given through Christ.

Rome believed in the Pax Romana, or the peace of Rome, but their peace came through bloodshed and an iron rule.

Stoic philosopher Epictetus said “While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns more than ever for outward peace.”

Napoleon said “if you want peace, prepare for war.”

Jesus said that He came to give a peace that is different from what the world offers. The angels declared peace with God through Christ, and they praised Him for it.

We worship God when we express His glory. Second, we see the shepherds who worshipped by going.

II. THE SHEPHERDS WHO WORSHIPPED BY GOING – vs. 15-20

Their response was met with eagerness around Christ.

A. Their Eagerness Around Christ – vs. 15-16

There is no reason to believe that the shepherds debated amongst themselves that what they had just seen was the result of the spicy wings they had for dinner or that they all somehow had the same dream. It wasn’t a hallucination. We know it because of their eagerness to go. Their statement

“let’s go” implies that it was an immediate departure. It was a once in a lifetime event they could witness firsthand. **Verse 12** implies that the angel gave them an invitation to go and seek out the baby by giving a description that would identify this child as the Messiah. Notice that it doesn’t say He would have a halo around His head or that angels would be standing around. They were simple, but unique characteristics to identify Him, so they hurried and found Mary, Joseph and the baby.

Those who diligently seek the Lord will find Him. **I Chronicles 28:9** “If you seek Him, He will be found by you.”

Jeremiah 29:13-14 “‘You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord.”

Some may remember the book series Where’s Waldo from the 1980’s. Waldo was a world traveler who found himself in the most unique places. The goal of the reader was to find Waldo.

Having been given the place – the city of David, which they knew was Bethlehem, and some other descriptors like a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth lying in a manger – they set out on their quest. The only thing missing was the address. Even though the town was teeming with people due to the census, they went and found the baby just as the angels had described it to them.

How eagerly have you sought after the Christ? Their eagerness around Christ is followed by their exclamation about Christ.

B. Their Exclamation About Christ – vs. 17

Going to find the baby announced by the angels was a way they worshipped. They found the baby and were filled with joy. So overwhelmed by what they had seen and heard about the birth of the Savior, they couldn’t help but share the good news with others becoming the very first evangelists.

What I find interesting is what remains absent in the text. While we are told that everyone who heard the news was amazed, we don’t know if they were

amazed thinking these guys, who had no credible witness in a court of law, must have had a loose screw, or that they truly found what they said to be good news because all Israel was looking for the Messiah to come someday, they just didn't think He would come as a baby. They assumed He would be grown. There is no record of whether anyone else went to see for themselves the Christ child. We are left to wonder.

Have you found the one who is the Savior of the world?

We see their exclamation about Christ as they told others and then we see their excitement about Christ as they gave praise and glory to God in worship.

C. Their Excitement About Christ – v. 20

Joyful hearts give glory.
There's a little chorus we sometimes sing.
We worship and adore You,
Bowing down before You,
Songs of praises singing,
Hallelujah's ringing.
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
Hallelujah, Amen!

Our purpose is to give praise, to worship the Lord.
Have we grown so old in our faith that we have lost the joy of finding Christ and worshipping Him?
Psalm 51:12 "Restore to me the joy of my salvation."

With all the angel choirs,
With all the saints on earth,
Pour out the strains of joy and bliss,
True rapture, noblest mirth!
Rejoice, rejoice,
Rejoice, give thanks and sing!

Let's not refrain from proclaiming the good news about Christ, nor cease to praise God about Christ.

We are to worship with the glory of God.
We are to worship by going because we believe the message about Christ.
We are to worship as Simeon did with gladness.

III. SIMEON WHO WORSHIPPED WITH GLADNESS – vs. 25-32

We know very little about Simeon. But what we read about him is telling. He lived in Jerusalem. More importantly, he was righteous and devout looking for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. He was a committed follower of the Lord and he knew enough of the Old Testament to understand the promises that pointed to the coming Messiah, the One who would bring comfort to Israel at His coming. He was looking for the Messianic hope, the Savior.

At some point in his walk with God, the Spirit had told Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. One day he was milling about the city perhaps in the market, perhaps talking with friends when the Spirit prompted him to stop what he was doing and go to the Temple. I imagine there were a lot of people at the Temple that day, but his eyes fell on a couple carrying a baby and the Spirit moved him to approach them. Somehow, he knew this child was the Christ. He greeted the couple who were there to fulfill what was required by the Law regarding a newborn baby boy. Scooping the baby in his arms, he began to give God praise. His praise is, first of all, fitting.

A. His Praise Is Fitting – vs. 28-29a

He appropriately addresses the Lord as Sovereign, the one who is in control of all things. How important it is when we call on God in prayer that we acknowledge Him for who He is. Because He is sovereign, He is worthy of all our praise.

Second, Simeon worshipped God because His promise is fulfilled.

B. His Promise Is Fulfilled – vs. 29b-30

God promised Simeon that he would see the Christ. The promise was fulfilled. What he longed to see became a reality. His faith had now become sight and he could leave this world in peace, knowing that not only had God kept His promise to him, but also to the world by sending Christ. In **verses 31-32** we see his proclamation is foretelling.

C. His Proclamation Is Foretelling – vs. 31-32

The Savior that was promised wasn't just for him, or just for Israel. He rightly stated that the salvation God sent in the person of Christ, this newborn child, was prepared for all people. This is fulfilled in the book of Acts as Peter goes to the house of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to the good news of salvation in Christ.

The same attitude of worship and praise evident in the lives of the shepherds and in Simeon should be evident in us as we come to Christ the Savior.

Psalm 22:26 “They who seek the Lord will praise Him.”

Psalm 33:1 “Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise Him.”

Hebrews 13:15 “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess His name.”

Simeon worshipped with gladness.

There is one more group who worship God that I would like to touch on. For that we turn to Matthew. In **chapter 2** we see the Magi who worshipped by giving.

IV. THE MAGI WHO WORSHIPPED BY GIVING – Matthew 2:2, 11

A. They Worshipped By Giving Their Time – v. 1

B. They Worshipped By Giving Their Testimony – v. 2

C. They Worshipped By Giving Their Treasures – v. 11

Some believe they were proselytes, Gentiles who had converted to Judaism.

Some believe they had met Jewish scholars who told them about the Messianic prophecy.

Some believe they were kings representing the three families of Noah – Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Most believe they were of high position who had been given special revelation from God, perhaps in fulfillment of the prediction Simeon gave that the

Messiah would be for all people.

Because they believed this was a king who was born, they obviously went to the capital city – Jerusalem. Notice that the passage doesn't say “where is the prince who was born”, but “where is the king”. That's why Herod and all the people were troubled. Herod was troubled because he was not the rightful heir to the throne. He was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. The promise of the Messiah was given to Jacob, not Esau. God was deposing Herod and would give the eternal throne to Christ as promised to David.

Their intent wasn't to anoint Him, but to worship Him. They worshipped God with their time because it took a considerable amount of it to travel from where they lived in the east.

They worshipped by giving their testimony because they announced to everyone they asked, where the child born king was at that they might worship Him.

They worshipped by giving their treasures – gifts worthy of a king. Gold for His deity, frankincense for His life and myrrh for His sacrifice.

John MacArthur writes “they were true worshippers of God, because when He spoke to them in whatever way it was, they heard and responded... They immediately recognized God's light when it shone on them. They had genuinely seeking hearts, hearts that the Lord promised will never fail to find Him.” He concludes by saying that “right worship is always, and must be the only basis for right giving.”

We are given some wonderful examples of hearts of true worship.

We worship with God's glory.

We worship by going.

We worship with gladness.

We worship by giving.

As we come to Christmas this year, are you ready and eager to worship the Christ?

Communion is a way to worship as we remember who Christ is and what He has done for us.