

The Witness For Christ
Luke 2:10-11, 17-18, 38

This past Tuesday, Pew Research came out with what should be an alarming statistic. According to their poll, 29% of US adults affiliate themselves as religious “nones”. They don’t mean the group of women within the Catholic church dressed in black robes and wearing habits. Pew Research coined the phrase in 2012 and is a catchall term that includes agnostics, atheists, those who claim to be spiritual but not religious, those who are nothing in particular or who identify as unaffiliated or people without a religious home. Studies by Gallup, UC Berkley, and Duke University confirm the rise of more people who are choosing not to identify with any particular religious affiliation. Millennials aged 18-29 comprise the largest percentage of nones.

ABC followed up the Pew Research poll by interviewing a 19-year-old who identifies as a religious none. She, like so many others in this category, had once attended church growing up but left because, as she puts it, the church wasn’t a “very nurturing environment for one’s faith.” Many have grown disillusioned with what they call “organized or institutionalized religion.” When you consider some of the things this person believes, you can understand why she may feel that way. She holds to issues the Bible teaches against. Her faith isn’t based on what the Bible clearly teaches, but a faith she has built around what she believes and so she left her church at age 16 identifying as an atheist then an agnostic before embracing a spiritual but not religious life. In her spiritual journey as a none, she blends rituals at an altar choosing to chant Buddhist, Taoist and Hindu mantras while paying tribute to her Haitian ancestors as she meditates and prays. Religion is by and large what you want it to be, if you want it to be anything. Their religion is fluid, meaning it can change from day to day. It’s the same as believing truth to be absolute or relative. Nones would argue that truth and religion should be relative or whatever you want it to be. There is no absolute truth and there is no absolute religion. Believe whatever you want or nothing at all.

It is a trend that we should be concerned about. If it were condensed into one reality about why this group is growing each year, it most likely has to do with their view that the church is legalistic. But what’s interesting is that many in the group of “nones” who say they don’t like the church also say they love Jesus. They claim they are spiritual but not religious. In its conclusion, Barna Research says “they might appear to be wandering, but they would never claim to have lost their faith.”

Regardless of how disillusioned this group may be, or which box they checked in a poll, one thing is abundantly clear from Scripture – we celebrate Christmas as God’s demonstration of love to the entire world when Jesus was born.

A person’s eternal destiny hinges on what he or she believes about Christ who was born and for whom we celebrate Christmas. **Is this baby Jesus, born over 2,000 years ago, just a feel-good story to get people’s hopes up about peace on earth good will to men? Or is this baby born in a manger really who the angels claimed He was – Christ the Lord who is the Savior, come to save people from their sin?**

As believers of what the angels announced regarding Christ, this time of year is again our opportunity to make Christmas count for eternity. It’s a time when non-believers seem to understand to some degree, about Jesus. They play Christmas hymns on secular radio stations and in stores to help put shoppers in the Christmas spirit. Some even reflect on Christmas traditions they participated in as children including attending services, a tradition they may continue to keep.

On the other hand, there are those who dread this time of year. They may be reminded of life’s emptiness or find no reason to celebrate out of an aversion to a religious ideology.

Given the joyful spirit of the season, many are more approachable to spiritual things. It may be a natural discussion point to raise with neighbors or family members who are not religious, but who display a nativity of some kind in their home as a decoration.

Asking their view of Jesus and why Christmas is celebrated can be a way to be a witness for Christ.

As we think about Christmas, we need to keep in mind that Christ came to die for people. Don't worry about trying to get to some store for their bargain sales. Focus on people, spend time with them. Maybe invite people over to help decorate and talk about the meaning of ornaments and why Christmas is special.

It's great to have friends over, but how about inviting some non-Christian friends as well. Keep in mind that when Jesus was here on earth, He spent a lot of time with the unsaved to show them they were lost and that He was the Messiah who came to be the way to God.

A passage we will be looking at Friday night, is **Luke 19:10 "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."**

Be both hopeful and prayerful for your non-Christian friends that you might have an opportunity to share the Christ of Christmas with them. He is the one who offers the eternal hope they so desperately need that can change their eternal destiny. With all that is going on in the world, your friends may be wondering if there is any hope in the midst of the chaos. No matter what they are going through, Christ offers hope. He is the answer.

Growing up in a small town in up state New York, my Mom recalls in her testimony attending Youth for Christ meetings as a teen. One day as she sat there her attention was drawn to the banner on the platform. It simply read "Christ is the answer". She rolled that over in her mind asking if Christ is the answer, what's the question?

Listen to these lyrics by Andre Crouch.

Jesus is the answer for the world today
Above Him there's no other Jesus is the way
Jesus is the answer for the world today
Above Him there's no other Jesus is the way

If you have some questions in the corners of your mind
And traces of discouragement and peace you cannot

find

Reflections of the old past, seem to face you everyday

There's one thing I know for sure that Jesus is the way.

Let me hear you now

Jesus is the answer for the world today
Above Him there's no other Jesus is the way
Jesus is the answer for the world today
Above Him there's no other Jesus is the way

I know you have mountains that you think you cannot climb

I know that your skies have been dark, you think the sun won't shine

In case you don't know, I'm here to tell you that the Word of God is true

And everything that He promised
I tell you He Will do it for you.

Let me tell you that

Jesus is the answer for the world today
Above Him there's no other Jesus is the way
Jesus is the answer for the world today
Above Him there's no other Jesus is the way.

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My Mom found that Christ was the answer for the question of salvation she was asking. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Him. From that day until her passing 11 years ago, she was a witness for Christ. That is our calling, especially around this time of year as we celebrate the birth of Christ.

As we look again at the Christmas story from **Luke 2**, we can discover ways to be a witness for Christ. We first see the witness of the angel in **vs. 10-11**.

I. THE WITNESS OF THE ANGEL – vs. 10-11

There are a lot of firsts in the Bible.

There is the first spoken word at creation.

The first day.

The first night.

The first man.

The first marriage.

The first command.

The first sin.

The first consequence for sin.

The first murder.

The first promise.

And here the first witness of the birth of Christ.

Others in the Old Testament spoke about His birth.

Micah 5:2 “But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

Isaiah 7:14 “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and you will call Him Immanuel.”

Isaiah 9:6-7 “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

These prophets spoke of the coming Messiah but died before seeing their prophecy fulfilled. **“But”,** as **Galatians 4:4** states, **“when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman.”**

Our text makes an important distinction. Boiling it all down, there are only two types of angels: those that follow Satan and those that follow God. The angel selected to make the first announcement and be a witness for Christ was an angel of the Lord. In other passages we are told that it was Gabriel who came with news. We are left to wonder if this was Gabriel or some other angel who had the honor of heralding the good news about Christ’s birth.

The Greek word which is translated **“good news”** means to preach or proclaim, but it also means more than just proclaiming something of notable worth. It is proclamation with full authority and power. The

angel didn’t speak on his own, but with the authority given him by God to proclaim this news.

A variation of the Greek word for good news is also translated Gospel. Paul says in **I Cor. 15:3-4** that the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. **Romans 1:16** adds that the gospel has the power to save. So then, the gospel, is good news.

The angel was proclaiming to the shepherds the good news of the gospel in Christ the Savior who was born that night.

Now, while we don’t know the angel’s name, we do know something about him. As an angel of the Lord he was obedient to share the good news.

A. He Was Obedient To Share The Good News - Psalm 103:20

These unfallen angels, committed to hearing the commands of God are ever mindful to always obey the voice of God who sends them on errands. They are never reluctant to obey.

They never alter the course of their obedience.

They never change the message given to them.

They are attentive to obey the command in every detail without hesitation.

I have to believe that when God beckoned this angel, he came instantly to the throne.

I have to believe that when God gave this angel the message, he delivered it verbatim.

I have to believe that when God sent this angel to earth, he went right away because it was a message of utmost importance.

The angel didn’t waiver in his obedience.

He didn’t say he would rather stay with the other angels around the throne giving glory to God.

He didn’t say he preferred staying in heaven, where everything was pure and holy, not wanting to go to earth where it’s smelly and wicked.

He came, he went, he spoke. It is a delight for angels to serve God and do so out of willful obedience.

He had good news to share that couldn’t wait.

We can learn from the angel’s example about sharing the good news out of obedience. When God

prompts us to go alongside someone to proclaim the good news about Christ, we best obey.
 When God prompts us to go talk with someone who is different from us, we need to obey.
 When God prompts us to get out of the four walls of our comfort zone and share the good news, we need to do it right away. This good news can't wait. It can't wait for a more convenient time. It can't wait till we have mastered the 4-spiritual laws or the Romans Road or have a course on apologetics under our belt. It can't wait till we feel that we won't be rejected. If they do, they're not rejecting you, they're rejecting God who sent you. A person's eternal destiny hangs in the balance. Let's be obedient to share the good news.

I also see in the angel that he was overjoyed to share the good news.

B. He Was Overjoyed To Share The Good News – Luke 15:10

If an angel finds joy when a sinner repents because of the good news, how overjoyed this angel must have been to share the good news of Christ's birth with the shepherds.

I Peter 1:10-12

Until we get to heaven, we will always wonder what the angels experience in heaven of the glory and holiness that is there. Yet conversely, this passage is telling us that angels wonder what it is like to experience the grace and glory that comes with salvation. They know nothing of forgiveness of sin or redemption. Peter says they look with fascination at such things. Yet here this angel is joyfully proclaiming the good news, something they know nothing about other than man was created without sin, he chose to sin, every person is a sinner in need of salvation and that Christ would become the sacrifice of God for sin so that people can be saved.

Think for a moment what it must be like for a team to win the world series. Everyone from the coaches and manager and players are all excited. In their joy they tell everyone. But equally excited are the fans who cheered them on even though they never put on

a uniform or stepped up to bat or threw a ball.

If angels are overjoyed at one person repenting and trusting Christ as Savior, this angel was just as overjoyed to share the news that the Savior was born.

Am I like the angel, overjoyed to share the good news? When was the last time you and I shared the gospel because we were so excited?

We can't wait to tell someone about a promotion.

We can't wait to tell someone about a new grandbaby.

We can't wait to tell someone about our new car.

We all have something we consider to be good news that we must share with someone, anyone. But here is good news in the gospel that is of great joy and we keep it to ourselves.

We find a great illustration of this in a story found in the Old Testament. It's in **II Kings 7**. One day four lepers were sitting outside the city contemplating where they were going to get their next meal. They couldn't go into town because they were just as likely to die in the city from the famine as they were to die outside the city. They decided to go to the Aramean army camp nearby and surrender. They figured it was worth a try since the worst thing that could happen was to be turned down and sent on their way or be killed. But when they got to the camp, the place was deserted. We read that they went from tent to tent eating and drinking their fill. They took silver and gold and clothes and hid them. After a while their conscience got the best of them and decided they weren't doing right by hoarding all this stuff when it was really a day of celebration, a day of good news. When the lepers went into town to tell the people and the king, they didn't believe them at first thinking it was a ruse by the enemy to get them out from behind the walled city so they could attack. There will be people who won't believe the goods, but keep sharing.

When we don't share the gospel, we aren't doing right. The good news has come, and we should be overjoyed to share it.

The good news is a message of celebration.

When we consider the witness of the angel, we should be obedient and overjoyed in sharing the good news.

Next, we turn our attention to the witness of the shepherds.

II. THE WITNESS OF THE SHEPHERDS – vs. 15, 17-18

We don't know much about these shepherds. We know from the text they were afraid because the angel told them in **verse 10** not to be afraid. We don't know if these were what we would call Old Testament saints, ones like whom Anna would speak to who looked forward to the redemption of Israel, referring to the coming Messiah. Old Testament saints are those who take to heart the teaching of **Habakkuk 2:4** that spawned Luther's reformation – **"The just shall live by faith."** They didn't believe keeping the law saved a person, but that a person had to believe that God would send the Messiah who would redeem or save from sin.

From their actions we assume that they were convinced of the truth the angel proclaimed that in **"the town of David, Bethlehem, a Savior was born who is the Christ the Lord."**

When the angel told them this news and then were joined by the angelic host glorifying God, they were convinced of the truth.

A. They Were Convinced Of The Truth

There will be people we witness to in sharing the good news of Christ that will be convinced of the truth, but just the same, there will be others who will thumb their noses at the truth and reject it.

One day Paul found himself sharing the good news in Athens among the many philosophers of the city. He acknowledged their religious fervor noting the many gods that were around the city, even one to an unknown god. Paul proceeded to explain to them who that unknown God was as he shared the gospel with them. We pick it up in **Acts 17:24-34**.

These shepherds heard the good news and were convinced it was true. Now people can hear the truth and can even believe the truth, but that doesn't mean they will act on the truth.

A rich man came to Jesus one day and asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him the truth, but the man went away having heard but choosing to reject the message that could give him what he asked. He wanted Jesus to validate his efforts, but Jesus said there is only one way to eternal life. The shepherds were convinced of the truth and acted on it as we see in our text, and that led them to be convicted by the truth.

B. They Were Convicted By The Truth – v. 15

If you are driving down the road and you hear over the radio that the bridge up ahead has been washed out by the surging river, you can be convinced it is true, but still keep on driving in that direction. Conviction is stopping the car and turning around to avoid certain destructive consequences.

"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." That's conviction, acting on information they were convinced was true.

When we witness to others about the good news of Christ, the reason we celebrate Christmas, we are to be obedient in only sharing the gospel. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces and convicts of the truth of the gospel and the person's responsibility to act on the information they have heard.

A person who is convinced of the truth and convicted by the truth is then courageous about the truth. That's where we find the shepherds.

C. They Were Courageous About The Truth – vs. 17-18

The Christmas message, the message of Christ the Savior, is a joyful message, a message we can't and shouldn't keep to ourselves. A message that we must courageously proclaim to others. That's what the shepherds did. That's who they were – bold messengers of the same truth that had been told to

them by the angel. They are now the first evangelists. It comes from the same word that means good news and speaks of someone who speaks the good news.

Romans 10:13-15

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.”

Let's be courageous in our effort to speak to others about the things we have seen and heard regarding Christ the Savior.

The angels teach us to be obedient and overjoyed at sharing the good news at Christmas.

The shepherds teach us to be convinced of, convicted by, and courageous about the truth.

There is one more example to consider who was a witness for Christ.

III. THE WITNESS OF ANNA – v. 38

From the text we learn that Anna was a prophetess and that she was a widow. One translation leads the reader to believe that she was 84 years old. Another translation makes it sound like she had been a widow for 84 years. I'm not going to debate that issue. All I am going to say on the matter is that she was old.

We read that she never left the temple, but worshipped there day and night by fasting and praying. Commentaries I read have two primary explanations about her living at the Temple. One is that as a widow, there was a charitable donation which made it possible for her to live at the Temple in a room provided for widows. Another indicates that as a prophetess and a widow she would have been well respected and given a place at the Temple to live. I'd like to think she spent her day milling around the Temple courtyard talking with people about the Lord, encouraging them in some way to look for Him.

It's my belief that as Simeon was making his proclamation about the infant Christ he was holding that Anna heard him, and came up at that moment and began to give thanks to God because here was

the very Messiah she had been waiting for.

- A. She Witnessed With Her Praise
- B. She Witnessed With Her Proclamation
- C. She Witnessed To All People

Had the hymn been written then, Anna might have been singing the chorus:

All that thrills my soul is Jesus;
He is more than life to me.
And the fairest of ten thousand
In my blessed Lord I see.

Her faith became sight.

She praised God for His redemption.

She proclaimed the good news to anyone who was looking forward to God's salvation. It is good news about Christ that is for all people. **II Peter 3:9** reminds us that **“God isn't willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”**

We have the privilege of being witnesses to the truth of the good news at Christmas.

Warren Wiersbe writes **“Telling others about the Savior is a solemn obligation as well as a great privilege, and we who are believers must be faithful.”**

At the heart of the good news is the Savior who came to save people from their sin. It is a message we should not keep to ourselves.

Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators ministry, once said **“Soulwinners are not soulwinners because of what they know, but because of Whom they and how well they know Him and how much they long for others to know Him.”**

During this Christmas season, who can we be a witness too that the Savior has been born?