

"Hurry and Find" (Luke 2:1–20)(12.24.19)

LET US PRAY.

Luke 2:1–20 (NIV84)

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to his own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: God's Gift of Wisdom

INTRODUCTION:

Have you ever seen searchlights scanning the sky? They are used to get your attention. It is a form of advertising to bring people to the source of light. And, they are pretty effective because we are drawn by the light.

In this morning's text, we have a cosmic intersection with human history – the very skies of heaven opened and the world was forever changed. An angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, and the glory of the Lord shone about them. Imagine this illumination, literally and metaphorically. The glory of God was so bright that it shone around the shepherds and they were terrified. Too many Christians have created a god in their minds that is little and more like their favorite uncle than the Creator of the universe. The truth is that God's glory, God's majesty, is so overwhelming that people are completely overcome when they experience Him.

The heavenly host is an army of angels. They looked over baby Jesus' birth and they were always available to Him. When he was being arrested, the night before his crucifixion, Jesus plainly stated his authority. Matthew 26:53 (NIV84) Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? From the beginning to the end of Jesus' life, the sovereignty of God was always in play.

BODY:

The angel of the Lord dispels the shepherds' fears. Listen, I have a special message for you; but, it is not only for you. It is for all people, all people. It is a message not only of joy but great joy. The good news is Jesus and Jesus is joy to those who know Him.

It seems natural that shepherds should celebrate the birth of the Lamb of God.

John 1:29 (NIV84) The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

1 Peter 1:18–19 (NIV84) 18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

But who is this baby? He is a Savior. He is the Christ, the long awaited Messiah. He is THE Lord. We need to be saved, by a Savior, from the power and penalty of sin. We need forgiveness. God the Father has established, and is establishing, His kingdom through the work of the Son. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Yes, our Lord has dignity, power, and authority. Our Lord is worthy of honor. This is the baby in the manger, Jesus.

In the terrible movie, Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby, Will Ferrell playing the lead role, likes to pray to baby Jesus. One scene starts with an aerial view of his huge house surrounded by cars, trucks, and boats. Family and friends gather around a table brimming over with Dominos, KFC, and Taco Bell. There is plenty of sugary soda and Wonder White Bread.

As Ricky Bobby says grace to Baby Jesus he is conveying his concept of God. When he is reminded that Jesus grew up, he replies, "I like baby Jesus. I like the Christmas Jesus." Ricky Bobby gives thanks for his "smokin' red hot wife," revealing his value of the superficial. He correctly thanks Jesus for His provision, but in a twisted way: "Lord, we love that money."

In the middle of grace, a family argument begins. Ricky Bobby defends his focus on baby Jesus. Ricky Bobby's friend likes to party so He likes to think of Jesus as Party Jesus. One of the sons likes to think of Ninja Jesus.

While the absurdity is obvious, there is an underlying truth. There is a natural, and may I say sinful, tendency for us to mold Jesus to our comfort level and lifestyle. We must diligently resist this self-justifying mindset. God the Holy Spirit and our Bibles reveal the real Jesus.

Our intentions may be good. There may be strong elements of truth. But, it is easy to go wrong. Today, some have politicized Jesus. We normally use the offertory prayer created by our denomination, but I had to rewrite the one for this service. Their version called Joseph, Mary, and Jesus refugees because of their escaping to Egypt to avoid Herod's killing of infants. This isn't quite true because Egypt was still part of the Roman Empire and refugees don't voluntarily return.

Another modern example is to call Jesus a revolutionary. Certainly, Jesus turned human thinking and behavior upside down. Love your enemies; give to those who ask; turn the other cheek; the first will be last; the last will be first; and, take up your cross and follow me; are revolutionary ways of behaving. BUT, Jesus did not advocate for a violent takeover. In fact, this was one reason Jesus didn't fit the misconception the people had for their Messiah.

The people of Israel had waited for hundreds of years for the Messiah that the Angel of the Lord announced. When God speaks, we are compelled to respond. The shepherds understand that the angel's message was from God. So, they go to Bethlehem to see this thing that has happened. They "hurried off and found" this blessed family. They hurried and found this new born infant who is Savior, Christ, and Lord. In this hurrying there are elements of eagerness and obedience.

Construct the cross as a headboard. There was an urgency in their efforts. This was a pivotal night in their lives. It was a pivotal night in human history. We have the advantage of two thousand years of hindsight

and the New Testament. As we learned over the last four weeks of sermons, we should not separate Jesus from His Cross. Baby Jesus, Christmas Jesus, must always be remembered as the beginning of the journey to Calvary.

The shepherds found Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, just as the Angel had said. They saw Jesus with their own eyes. They spread the word about what the Angel of the Lord had told them about Jesus. They didn't spread the word about their personal impressions. They didn't add or take away from the message. Jesus, this infant lowly, this infant holy, was the long awaited Savior, Christ the Lord.

Afterwards, the shepherds went back to shepherding; but, the world had changed. AND, their personal world had changed. They glorified and kept glorifying God. They praised and kept on praising God. Do not miss that Luke reminds us that all the things heard and seen had been prophesied.

The practical application is that whatever your work is can be an opportunity to live out your faith. When God calls you to faith, you can be used exactly where you are. You may be called into full time ministry or to become a missionary; but, that would be the exception. When I reflected on this, I thought about Sandi Green. She is certainly serving the Lord by teaching school in Newark! She not only models Jesus but proclaims His name.

Why do we celebrate Christmas every year? We need the reminder of what the Lord has done for us. We need our hearts refreshed in the birth of Jesus. For some people, it is what gets them to go back to church. We need to shore up the foundations of our faith. The culture sells a commercialized Christmas where Christ is marginalized and our fleshly appetites are encouraged. This is why I am being so adamant about connecting the cross with the crèche of Christ.

Ray Comfort is the founder of a ministry called Living Waters. He often takes a camera crew out and does street evangelism. Recently, I watched a video of an open air debate between Ray and the Catholic woman in California. She barely gave Ray a chance to speak. She spoke profanely. She admitted that she frequently sins including sexual sin, but there was no hint of remorse.

When he asked her if she was born again, she said, "I was born into a Catholic family. I was baptized. I went to Catholic school growing up." Her personal religion was that "God loved us. We are going to sin and he will forgive us. It all boils down to the Golden rule, treat others the way you want to be treated." She felt she was a good person. When Ray told her that Jesus said no one was good but God, she accused him of taking it out of context. When I heard her arguments, I thought of these verses from Romans 6:1-2 (NIV84) What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! [God forbid!] We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

This woman had developed a theology to justify her way of life. It is human. It is natural. But it is not from the God of the Universe that sent Jesus to be the Lamb of God. It is a theology that is dangerous.

I read an article two weeks ago that examined a study of husbands and spousal abuse. In the United States, men professing to be Protestant Christians, who don't participate in the life of a church had the highest rate of spousal abuse. Those with the lowest rate of spousal abuse were Protestant men who participated in the life of the local church.

When you have such a shallow faith; when you have a distorted faith; when you have a Jesus made in your own image; you would be better off with no religion whatsoever. It is dangerous to you and to others. The only time our faith is of effect is when it is IN the true Savior, Christ the Lord. There is obedience in this faith. There is eagerness in this faith. There is a sense of urgency in this faith, for without it, the people perish.

Too many people have a "flu shot faith." A flu shot has just a little sample of the flu in it. Your body starts fighting this miniscule flu allowing you to build up your resistance. You get a tiny bit of flu so you don't get a full blown case of the flu. So, "flu shot faith" is when you have been inoculated against a fully

realized faith in Jesus, our Savior, Christ the Lord.

CONCLUSION:

We are living in a culture that esteems the things of man over the things of God. There is a prolific darkness that needs the light of Jesus. There must be a sense of urgency for every generation. We know that if we have not reached a person for Jesus in their teen years, the chances are drastically reduced for them to ever come into a relationship with the Lord.

Jesus' parting words before his ascension was to go and make disciples. Let our lives be lived in obedience. The message of the Angel of the Lord was good news. It was a source of great joy. Our nation needs good news. Our nation needs true news instead of fake news. A child has been born in Bethlehem to the house and line of David, a Savior born to you, Christ the Lord.

Transform the cross to a star, a sign for the Magi.

We live in hurried times, but people are hurrying after the wrong things. Even when they grab hold of them they don't have the great joy that is promised through Jesus. The shepherds were given a sign. The Magi were given a star to lead them to Jesus. If you have found Jesus, then you are compelled to lead others to Jesus, our Savior, Christ the Lord.

There is no time to waste. Proceed in haste. Preach, Teach, and Model a Life-Giving Gospel. Let us be the city on the hill that shines its light brightly. Bring people to Emmaus to meet Jesus.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.