

**A Christmas to Treasure
What's Next?
Luke 2:15-20
January 1, 2012**

One thing we can count on this time of the year are predictions about what the next year will bring. We know it is anyone's guess and we ought to expect the unexpected. Like a story that caught my eye from ABC News about a 99 year old man in Italy who is divorcing his 96 year old wife because he just found out that 77 years ago she had a fling with another man. So even though it happened 77 years ago, he intends to divorce her. Who could have seen that one coming. We don't know what the future may hold. The only thing we can do is know what lies within us as we face the future. The scripture from Luke 2 is a good reminder of that truth.

Read Scripture

Verse 20 states that the shepherds **“returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”** I don't think the key word in that verse is the word glorifying or praising, but the word “return.” The shepherds witnessed the arrival of Jesus Christ and celebrated his birth. Now they were returning to their jobs, families, and back into the typical routine of life.

What I like about this passage of scripture for us is that Luke just says they “returned.” They were on their way back but we don't know how life turned out for these men.

We don't know any more about how things turned out for them than we know what's next for us in the coming year. The only thing we know is the spiritual condition they were in as returned to what they were doing before God interrupted them. Their spiritual

condition was one that had them praising and glorifying God. At least one question this scripture raises for us is how will we return to what we were doing before we celebrated the season of Christmas? **How we return to our typical routine indicates whether the Christmas season was just a busy celebrative time or spiritually meaningful.**

Greater Worship v. 16

The Bible states they were praising God as they were returning to life as usual. What does it mean anyway that they were praising God? After all we might immediately think praising means the same thing as worshipping God. However we know different people worship God in different ways. Some of us are more outward with expressing emotions and reasons for our admiration and honor of God. Yet others are more inward and quiet as they honor God. One thing appears from this story is that whatever the shepherds were thinking and feeling on the inside was spilling over to what they were saying and doing on the outside.

C.S. Lewis said one time, “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.”

The shepherds had to express what they thought and felt the birth of Jesus meant to them as they returned to life as usual.

The lack of praise is also of importance. If we lack a genuine desire to express to God our praise of him, then that says something about us. I don't mean we should immediately feel guilty. I'm just saying that if there is a lack of desire to praise God in various ways, if there is not a burning within our hearts to want to honor him, then we ought to be questioning what is going on inside our souls.

God doesn't want false praise and flattery. Instead praise for God

always comes after God has acted and his people see God's actions. The shepherds had praise for God because as Luke put it, "all they heard and seen."

So if we are not genuinely in the mood to praise God, don't immediately hit the guilt and shame button.

- But begin the new year clarifying have you seen God at work? If you're coming up blank then ask why is that?
- Is there a lack of praise for God because of our missed opportunities, our spiritual blindness, too busy to notice God at work, or our taking too much credit for what God has done etc?

But one thing is for certain the shepherds leave the celebration of Christ birth with greater praise of God.

On a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being weak and 10 being great what has the celebration of the birth of Jesus meant to you this year? Has the experiences of Christmas celebrations and activities strengthened you or left you moving into the new year unchanged maybe even discouraged.

Greater Sharing v. 17 & 20 (will use the clip of 21 year old Katie David)

The celebration of Jesus caused the shepherds to share. Verse 17 tells us the shepherds shared with Mary and Joseph what had been told to them by the angels. But I believe the birth of Jesus caused them to continue share about what God had done. I believe this because based on scripture, we know that none of these shepherds were disciples of Jesus. By the time Jesus began his ministry, these men would have been too old or perhaps even dead. There is no where in the scripture where any of these men are mentioned again. They are nameless. So Luke had to learn somehow about the shepherds response to night they saw Jesus, Mary and Joseph. So where does Luke get his information? We could say God told

him, maybe. Luke was not a disciple of Jesus. It's not like he had a chance at some point to say to Mary, the mother of Jesus, what was it like the night Jesus was born, and then Mary tells about the shepherds. My hunch is the shepherds shared their story and it was passed along to others and finally to Luke.

Sharing is part of what we do when God gets a hold of us. Take a look at this short video that is a reminder of that truth.

Play video

If Christmas has been spiritually meaningful then it has allowed God to get a hold of us. When God gets a hold of us, then we're going to be used to do some sharing. Watch for his leading. Stay alert to how and what may be the moment to share, but like the shepherds and like the story of that young lady, there is no way to experience Jesus Christ and not be moved to greater sharing.

Greater Inspiration v. 20

Luke said, the shepherds experience the glory of God. The Bible says they were praising God for all they had seen and heard. Those words mean they had had experienced first hand inspiration by God's power. The glory of God means God had been revealed to them through the birth of Jesus. One key teaching throughout scripture is that when God is revealed we become inspired or motivated toward him.

- God acts then we react.
- God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush and Moses became inspired to serve as a great leader.
- God revealed himself in visions to prophets like Isaiah and prophets were inspired to preach boldly.
- I heard a woman sharing on the radio how the Christian music she began to listen communicated truth and inspiration she needed to start taking steps overcoming a major health issue.

She didn't miss out on the inspiration God was sending to her.

The Bible is honest that not everyone wants to respond positively to God. There were those who saw the same Red Sea part that Moses saw; but later some eye witnesses chose to grumbled and distrust God. When new challenges came along and God provided food or turned back the threat of enemies, some people still chose to deny giving God credit. The reasons why they doubted are many **but the bottom line is they missed the opportunity of inspiration for all God wanted to do through them.**

The shepherds left the celebration of Jesus with greater inspiration. Whatever they returned to they were returning as inspired men because they didn't miss the moment.

My hope is that the celebration of Christ's birth has inspired you in such a way that inspiration will carry into the new year. My hope is the real meaning of Christmas has not been missed.

Pastor Kevin Higgins writes,

In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the big news--man had flown! (source, Pastor Kevin Higgins, Woodlawn Baptist Church)

I hope deep meaning in Christmas has not been missed. I hope celebrating his birth has inspired us, like the shepherds as we return to more normal schedules. I hope singing songs of Christmas and hearing the scripture about his birth has rekindled the truth that God is big news for our every day living no matter what comes next.

Conclusion

We never hear anymore about the shepherds from any book of the Bible. The only thing we know is they returned praising and glorifying God. Maybe that is fitting because we also don't know what lies ahead for us. All we do know as we leave the season of celebrating his birth is whether we return to daily routines with greater praise, sharing and inspiration in our hearts.