

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

## An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 2- Luke 2:15-21** **23- The Shepherds Go to Jesus**

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### **Luke 2:15-21**

What happened when you first met Jesus? What was going on internally- inside your heart when you were first saved? Do you remember the overwhelming joy of being washed and cleansed and forgiven? Do you remember the exhilaration of being a child of God? Do you remember how you prayed and how you rejoiced and how you completely abandoned yourself to the Love and Mercy and Grace and Kindness of God through Jesus Christ?

Who chose who? Did you choose to give your heart to Jesus or did God choose to save your soul? Was Salvation something you initiated based on your own free will or is Salvation something that God initiated to do for you?

In my case- I remember all too well how overwhelmed I was that Jesus would save my soul. I was in shock and kept repeating over and over, *"This is real, this is real, this is real!"* I remember just how exuberant I acted, how zealous I was, how passionate I was, and how I wanted to tell everybody, and how I wanted to win the world to Jesus- right now- today- before noon!

And that is what is going on in this passage with these shepherds. They had just seen an angel. They had just witnessed the host of Heaven. They had just seen a brilliant light and heard the Heavenly host cry out:

**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.**

So just what is the proper response to all of this? What would you have done? How would you have responded? The angels had just told them back in **Luke 2:10-12:**

**10 ... Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;**

**11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

**12 This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.**

The angel has just said that the Savior has been born, the One Who is going to forgive all their sins- He's alive, He has come; thousands of years of waiting and hoping and looking for the Messiah are over, it is time, He is here. And the angel tells you that He is in the city of David, He is in Bethlehem- the Savior is just a few miles down the road in Bethlehem, and then the angel says:

**... you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.**

So the angel actually tells you where to find Him! He's not in the Palace, He's not in the Temple, He's not at Herod's house, He's not with Caesar, He's not with the high priests, He's not out hobnobbing with the political big shots or having cocktails with the wealthy, but the Savior of the world is wrapped in swaddling clothes and He is lying in a horse trough.

Listen- I'm going. I don't know about you- but I'm dropping everything I have and I'm going. I'm leaving the sheep, I'm walking off the job- fire me if you want to- but I'm going. You see, I am a sinner, and my sins are dark and black and ugly, and I need forgiveness, I need Redemption, I need Salvation, and I have a chance to actually meet the Savior of the world, I have a chance to actually see God made flesh, I have an opportunity to touch Immanuel, and to be touched by Him; I have a chance to be saved and forgiven and washed and cleansed and I have an opportunity to go to Heaven- you betcha- I'm going!

You see, I have longed believed that those who have been forgiven from much will love much. Those who know they were dark and ugly and wicked in their hearts – for them to suddenly be forgiven and washed and saved- yea- they love God very much!

And the result of being forgiven from much is that they are enormously grateful. They have absolutely no problem following after God; they have no remorse about missing all the fun and all the parties

– they have no problem with the straight and narrow path; they don't complain about the weight of the cross that Christ has given for them to carry; they don't murmur about the cost of following Jesus; they don't grumble with what God has provided for them or what God has chosen to take from them- they have been forgiven! And they were headed for hell, and God Sovereignly and graciously rescued them- so yea, whatever God demands from them is just fine; whatever path the Lord wants me to walk on- that's okay by me; whatever suffering, whatever blessing, whatever persecution I must endure- it's all just fine- because I was once was lost and now I'm found; I was blind but now I see.

I received a phone call from a man this past week who took issue with me about preaching on the radio that Man is lost and sinful. He said that this turns people away from Jesus. He told me that people don't need to hear about how bad they are- they already know how bad they are. I disagreed with him and told him that unless the Spirit of God Sovereignly shows you how bad you really are- you are utterly blind about your own condition before God.

He told me that that was nonsense and then he spent the next forty minutes telling me how good he was. He told me how much he had given and how much he had done for other people and how much he had tried to be good and how much he had sacrificed in order to be a nice guy. And I responded to this man and told him that he was on his own and that Jesus didn't die for him and that Christ did not come to save him.

And you know he was insulted with me and he said- *"What do you mean, by that statement, Brother Blair?"* And I told him that the Bible says in **Luke 19:10:**

**For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.**

And that Jesus said in **Luke 5:31&32:**

**31 *It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.***

**32 *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.***

And I said, *"You have spent the last forty minutes telling me how good you are and what a nice person you are, and all I am saying is that since you're such a nice guy and since you're so good- you don't need*

*Jesus. Jesus didn't die for you- you're already good; you work real hard to be good and Jesus died for those who are **not** good, those who are lost, and those who are dirty and sinful and diseased with sin. And since you're already good- you should be happy because you don't need Jesus.*

*But I do need Jesus. I am a sinner, I am a wretch, I am filthy, and I deserve the eternal damnation of a holy and righteous God. I have no right to even look up to Heaven- but I beat my chest in agony over my sin and I have but one plea to bring to God- Mercy- "Have mercy on me, Jesus; have mercy on me Son of David; have mercy on me son of God."*

Unless God Sovereignly shows you how sinful you really are- human beings actually think they are good. Now they may think that they periodically do bad things- but the normal person really and truly believes that he is basically a nice person, basically a good person, and that he doesn't really need Salvation- all he really needs is to improve a few areas of his life and he will be just fine.

The result is that most people today are not looking for Salvation at all; most people do not come to God for Mercy and Grace to forgive them of their wicked evil sins- because most people don't really believe they are lost. Most people in their heart of hearts do not really believe that they are that bad that they would need Jesus to save them.

So what most people are looking for today from Jesus or from Church is how to improve their own good and nice condition before God- like how to get more money, or how to get more of this world's goods, or how to be more moral, or how to have a better marriage, or how to become more successful, or how to hit more home runs, or how to get your teeth whiter and brighter.

And that is why today the popular teachings are things like The Purpose Driven Life, and the The Prayer of Jabez, and Wild at Heart, and WWJD, and all these other programs and man-made fads and spiritual hobby horses that are designed to do nothing but make lost people feel better about their own lost condition. It's like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic five minutes before the iceberg. It's like winning the spelling bee contest in the public school of Sodom just before the Fire comes. It's like winning an all-expense paid trip to Paris France the day before the Nazi army invades.

But our problem is not a lack of money or a lack of good health or a lack of more of this world's goods. That's not the Bad News. The Bad News is that our problem is sin, and our sin has separated us from God,

and our sin has risen up to the Heavens, and our sin has come before God, and God is angry with our sin and God is right to be angry with our sin and God's fury against our sin is white hot. That is the Bad News.

And the unbelievable Fury of God's Wrath against us is certain and it is absolutely coming to us- it is like a freight train coming at us at 300 miles an hour and we are chained to the railroad tracks- and there is nothing we can do. We can't improve our own condition, we cannot forgive our own sin, we cannot save ourselves, and we cannot avoid the collision. Here is how Paul the Apostle phrased our condition in **Ephesians 2:12:**

**That you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.**

Listen to what he says here:

- ✓ Without Christ
- ✓ Excluded from the Commonwealth of Israel- the only nation God chose and sustained and you're an alien to that nation
- ✓ Strangers to the Covenants of Promise- none of the Promises of God are yours- zero
- ✓ Having no hope
- ✓ Without God

That's the Bad News. Not *some* hope- but no hope. Not hope as long as you try real hard; not hope if you put forth more human effort. No, the Bible says, "No hope." None. The Bible is clear, dear friends- outside of Jesus- outside of His Gracious and Merciful Salvation- there is no hope, no future, no peace, no eternal joy, no eternal satisfaction- no hope. And let me give you the rest of this bleak picture.

There is no hope because there is nothing inside of you, no inner power, no inner giant, no inner Truth, no inner goodness that can change anything; nothing that can improve your own condition before God based on anything that you do. There is no hope because there is no human goodness, no human righteousness, no internal intrinsic human morality that impresses God in the least.

So that's the Bad News- but here's the Good News. **Luke 2:11:**

**For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

Not a Moral Teacher- but a Savior. Not a Guide- but a Savior. Not a Prophet- but a Savior. Not a Leader- but a Savior. Those who are lost can now be saved; those who are evil can be saved; those who are sinful can be saved; those who are wicked can now be saved; those who are fallen can now be saved.

And that is what these shepherds understood. And that is what I pray that you understand here this morning. That no matter how clean you may be or how educated you may be or how wealthy you may be or how sophisticated you may be- that you are a sinner in God's eyes; that you have fallen short of bringing God the Glory that he is entitled to receive; you have failed to walk before God perfectly; you have transgressed His ways; You have rebelled against God; you have done contrary to the Truth.

And the result of that is that you have no personal claim to Heaven, you have no individual right to live eternally with Him, and you and I are going to Heaven because of Mercy, because of Grace, because He first loved us- because before the foundation of the world, before we were born, before we did anything good or bad- God chose to set His Love upon us, and after we were born God was faithful to that choosing and He called us to come, and God sent His Spirit to draw us- so we would come, and God Sovereignly gave us eyes to see, and ears to hear, and an heart to believe, and God was faithful to provide someone to preach the Gospel to us, and God gave us the ability and the desire to repent, and God gave us the faith to believe, and God brought us to Jesus and Jesus received us and Jesus washed us and Jesus forgave us, and God took the Righteousness of Jesus and He draped that Righteousness on us and He adopted us into His Family and He has given us the privilege and honor to know God and to love God and to live our lives for the Glory of God now and one day to praise and magnify God throughout the eons of time in Heaven.

And so the angel said to these shepherds, *"Do not be afraid for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you a*

*Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you, you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."*

Now this is a glorious portion of Scripture. And the heart of it is in verse 11, **"There has been born for you a Savior."** And as I tried to point out last week- it's not that Jesus saves you from your low expectations as Robert Schuller says; it's not that Jesus saves you from your anxiety or your poverty or your bad health as the prosperity preachers say; it's not that Jesus saves you from your lack of fulfillment or from your earthly troubles as the hirelings preach on the Hay, Wood, and Stubble Television Network.

Listen, there is no guarantee in this life that you're going to be rescued from *any* of those things- that's not what Jesus saves you from. Jesus saves you from God's Wrath against your many, many sins. Jesus saves you from the eternal fury of God Righteous anger against our sins- that's the issue- we need Forgiveness for our sins and we need Salvation from God's Wrath against our sins.

And people are working real hard in our day, dear friends, to hide that issue or change that issue or to slip by that issue- but that is the issue; make no mistake about it- God is angry with your sins and God is right to be angry with your sins; it is proper and correct for God to be angry with your sins and it is because God is Just and because God is Holy and because God is Righteous that He is angry with our sins. He would be wrong not to be angry with our sins. God would be sinning if He was not angry with our sins and because God cannot sin- He is angry with the multitude of our sins.

And since we *cannot* stop sinning- since no human being born of woman can stop sinning- God Himself had to make a way for us to be forgiven even before we stopped sinning. So Salvation is not a payment or a reward for our good works or behavior- Salvation is undeserved and unearned Mercy for nothing other than because God is a saving God by nature.

So it isn't that Jesus saves you from anything in this life in particular. God is very gracious and merciful, and God may heal your body or bless you or do any number of wonderful things in your life- but that is simply because God is good and those things have nothing to do

with the main purpose of Salvation. You may still struggle through all kinds of troubles and problems and weaknesses and unfairness and injustice, and you may still have a degree of unfulfillment in this life because Salvation is about God Sovereignly rescuing you from the consequences of our sin and of delivering us from the Fury of God, and of saving us from eternal damnation- not helping you get a two story house.

In fact- as a believer- you may even find this life to be less than you want it to be while you are in this world- in fact, being a Christian may actually cause enormous persecutions and it may actually cause your life to be more painful than you can bear. Many thousands of believers for many thousands of years can say, "Amen" to that.

But the angel told Joseph that Jesus came to save His people from their sins- from the penalty of their sins, first of all, which is eternal hell, the wrath of God, and Jesus came to give us the privilege and honor of having the Spirit of God dwell in us so that we can be victorious over many of our sins in this life. Please turn with me to **Galatians 5:16-26:**

**16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.**

**17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.**

**18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.**

**19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,**

**20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,**

**21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

**23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**

**24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**



**25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**

**26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.**

Now notice that nowhere in this passage does it teach that the Holy Spirit is going to reveal new truth to you or that the Holy Spirit is going to lead you to great and fantastic emotional experiences or ecstasies or great financial blessings. But this passage teaches that if we walk in the Spirit- that is- if we go about our daily lives moment by moment in humble submission to the Word of God- we will not fulfill the lusts of our flesh, we will not sin on an ongoing basis, and we will not sin as a matter of practice in our daily lives. And I suggest to you that- that is Good News indeed.

So this Child was born to save us from the Wrath of God. And we saw how that unfolded in these verses. The angels came and proclaimed the good news to the humblest of all people- the lowest people on the socio-economic ladder would be shepherds. They were unskilled, uneducated, and untrained. They weren't allowed to give testimony in a court of law because they were considered untrustworthy. They were the lowest of the low and it was specifically to them that the heavenly message came- completely ignoring all the great religious leaders and educators.

The Lord was thereby saying that He was coming to the humble. He always said He could come to the humble. Way back in **Isaiah** He said He would come to the poor. In **1Corinthians**, the Apostle Paul said there would not be many noble, not many mighty in the Church but that the Body of Jesus Christ would be made up of the poor and the base and the weak. And the shepherds illustrate that.

And we also saw the *extent* of this Good News. The Good News is for all the people- that's at the end of verse 10- it's for all the people. And that extends, first of all, to Israel who are THE people, the nation Israel. But beyond them- this Good News extends to the whole world. And that's the broadest definition of the extent of the Gospel, to all the people. The narrowest definition is in verse 11, "unto you" a Savior is born. So a Savior came for everybody and then for anybody, and for all the people and now for you.

And there's not Salvation in any other- there's no other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved...according to **The Acts 4:12**. There can't be Salvation in any other person or any

other method or any other religion or any other philosophy. People go to Heaven through Jesus or they don't go at all. And isn't it wonderful that the One Savior- the only Mediator between God and man, has made Salvation available to all the people and to anybody and to you?

And then we saw the *person* of the Good News. We saw this Child described by the angel who was talking to the shepherds. He said, "He is the Savior who is Christ the Lord." And in those descriptive terms and titles is all that needed to be said. Jesus is the Savior, first of all, and Jesus is the Christ- that is- Jesus is the Anointed One- the Messiah- Who will take up the throne of David and rule the world. And He, also, is anointed in the sense that He will be the great High Priest, and anointed in the sense that He will be the greatest Prophet to ever walk upon this earth. So Jesus is the Anointed One. And that's what the word "Christ" means- the Messiah.

And then He is Lord. And I told you that over 6,000 times the word "Lord" is used in the Old Testament to refer to God. And it becomes the most common name for Jesus in the New Testament, affirming that Jesus is indeed God. So here is a Child Who is God in human flesh. Here is a Child who is the anointed Prophet, Priest, and the great King- fulfilling the Davidic Promise. Here is a Child Who is the Savior of the world- the Sovereign God, the Sovereign Lord and Savior and King.

And we said last time that the purest and truest and most basic confession of the Christian faith is that Jesus is Lord. You can say a lot of other things about Jesus but none of them will save anybody other than that Jesus is Lord because if Jesus is not Lord- then he is not God and if he is not God- then he can't save anybody- because only God can save.

Now look again at **Luke 2:15:**

**When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."**

The shepherds said to one another, "*We've got to go see Him...we've got to go see Him!*"

Now this was literally a very rare glimpse of heavenly worship brought to earth- and you don't get too many of those. There is the more

familiar one in **The Revelation 4&5** where we're literally taken in to the throne of Heaven and we can see what real worship in Heaven is- because whatever worship we think we're doing down here, dear friends, it is nothing compared to the real worship that they are doing in Heaven, without any temptation to interrupt them, with absolutely no pull of the earth on them, with bodies that have been glorified and that are not tired or sick or failing, and without even the hint of sin in them, on them, or around them. Now that's real worship!

So this is another one of those very rare glimpses of real worship- only in this case we're not caught up in a vision of heaven- but in this case- heaven comes down to earth in the presence of these very lowly shepherds out in the evening in a hillside in the region near Bethlehem.

And a whole host of angels came down to do on earth what they do all the time in heaven. And what do they do? They praise God and say, *"Glory to God in the highest."*

And what were they praising God for? What kind of peace were they praising God for? Because there would be no more wars? No- because there would be hundreds of wars after this moment with hundreds of millions of casualties- all over the world. Well, were they praising God because disease and sickness and death would be removed from the earth- no- every single human who was alive then- including Joseph and Mary all died- and they died because they were either killed or their bodily functions stopped working or they died from disease- but they all died.

So were they praising God because now that Jesus came- poverty was removed from the earth and all men would live in financial security? No, a full 9/10 of the entire world lives in poverty today and 30,000,000 children are starving to death right now while we sit in this Church. Well, were the angels praising God for the peace that liberty and freedom brings? No because there are only a handful of nations that have freedom and liberty, and most people live their entire lives under oppressive regimes that care little or nothing for the welfare of their own people. And whatever freedoms and liberty we do have in this country is being eroded with every passing day.

So if this peace is not an economic peace or a peace that come from the elimination of war or famine or disease or poverty or the overthrow of tyranny- then what kind of peace is it? What kind of peace were the angels praising God for? Jesus brought to the earth a peace among men

with whom God is pleased. He brought to earth the peace that can only come from being rescued from the Wrath of God. The peace that comes from being reconciled with God and in right standing with God- whereby God's anger against our sins has been abated and God's Justice has been satisfied and God's Love has been set upon us. So this peace is a Salvation peace!

So this peace is not an absence of war or an elimination of poverty or an eradication of disease or an end of persecution or an end of tyranny and injustice here on this earth- but this peace is a peace that is everlasting- a peace that transcends this life and goes on to the next. This is a peace that never leaves and never changes and a peace that the world doesn't have and cannot ever have and knows nothing about.

When the Heavenly host told the shepherds in **Luke 2:14:**

**Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.**

That phrase is literally translated from the Greek as

**"on earth peace among men with whom God is pleased,"**

or

**"on earth peace among men of God's good pleasure."**

Or to put it another way,

**"peace to those to whom it pleases God to give peace."**

So this is a Salvation peace that will belong only to those whom God pleases to give it to. This is a great and gracious and eternal decree. This involves the great doctrine of election and predestination.

You see, the Bible teaches over and over again that before the creation of the universe- God chose to save some just because He was pleased to do it. He exercises His Sovereignty by having Mercy on whom He will have Mercy. And these angels are not rejoicing or glorifying God for what *men* have done or will do, but because of what God has done and what God will do.

So it's not that God's Salvation is a reward for those who have good will toward men- as the old translation says. But Salvation is a gracious gift to those on whom God chooses to place His good will. On earth, the Messiah, Savior, the Christ, the Lord will bring Salvation peace to those whom God pleases to save.

And so we've gone through that whole great divine scene. Now imagine you're in the situation of the shepherds. I mean, life has been pretty plain and mundane, pretty common place, pretty brown and vanilla. And all of a sudden all Heaven has broken loose. You've just had an angelic messenger- perhaps Gabriel- telling you that the Messiah has been born- the Christ- the Savior of the world- God in human flesh. And that this savior is just a few miles down the road. And then that angel has been accompanied by a whole heavenly host of angels who have come down and given you a taste of Heaven, and they are glorifying God and praising God for the Salvation that He's brought on earth through the birth of the Messiah. And this is all anything beyond anything imaginable to these men.

So the question at this point is how did they respond? How did they react? How would you react? And that's what I want you to look at. The reaction of these shepherds to all that they have seen and heard has been recorded for us by Luke in **Luke 2:15-21**.

And it's a very simple passage- a very simple narrative but it serves as a very good illustration. It's not an allegory- but it does serve as a good illustration of how people respond savingly to the Gospel.

Let me show you as it kind of unfolds. Look at **Luke 2:15**:

**When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."**

Now we don't know how long the heavenly host was there. We don't know how long that praise service went on. It doesn't tell us. It was probably a lot shorter than the shepherds would have liked it to be. They probably would have been very glad if it would have never stopped. But now it is over and all of that praise and glory to God was done. They were praising God in the highest, that is in heaven- and on earth they were realizing that God had finally brought eternal Salvation to those whom He was pleased to choose.

And then the angels went back to heaven to take up their place around the throne as described in **The Revelation 4&5** and keep doing what they're always doing- what they're doing right now even as I speak- doing right now in heaven exactly what they were doing there that day on earth in the shepherds' field- praising God for the Grace of Salvation.

And as traumatic as it was- and we know that it was very traumatic because back in verse 9 it says they were "terribly frightened". Every single shepherd was terrified when the one angel appeared- they were absolutely scared out of their wits. And if one angel could do that to them- we can only imagine how frightening it was when all the rest of Heaven showed up.

But apparently after the angels left- these shepherds were able to gather their senses and collect their thoughts because it says in verse 15,

**...the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.**

So spontaneously and mutually and collectively there was the same response from everybody- they said, "Let's go see". In fact, the Greek verb is what we call an imperfect tense which means that it is something that's not completed- that is a continuous action. It's imperfect because it's not complete. And Luke used that tense of the verb here to express the fact that this was an ongoing kind of discussion.

So in verse 15- they were all continuing to say over and over to one another, "*We've got to go, we've got to go.*" And there would be a little process involved here because they can't all leave at once because somebody has to take care of the sheep. So they've got to figure that problem out and just how they're going to get somebody to care for the sheep while we're gone because "*We've got to go!*" And they probably were talking with each other like, "*Well we need to do this and we've got to do that, and there's this task and that task....*" So no doubt- they were all embroiled in the fact that they had to get out of that place and get to Bethlehem. And there was spontaneity at this point. Nobody

needed to lead them, nobody needed to sort of get them to comply- everybody had the same exact response.

And by the way, Luke loves to record human responses to God. He recorded Zacharias' response to the message from Gabriel. You know- Zacharias didn't believe and so God struck him dumb and he couldn't speak and he couldn't hear. And then you remember Mary's response was one of faith as opposed to Zacharias'. And now we find the shepherds' response and the shepherds' response is immediate. They unanimously together, collectively, say, *"Let us go straight to Bethlehem!"* No hesitation, no arguing, no one wanting to stay behind- just, "we're going!" And there's a sense of urgency in the Greek construction of these words here. It's without delay, it is at once- "We're going to go!"

Now history and geography tell us that it's about two miles from the town of Bethlehem from where these shepherds were. So there would be a little bit of a walk involved in this. They were on foot- so it was going to take some time and they were anxious to get on the way immediately. And they were in full agreement. They said, *"Let's go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us!"*

And they would most likely have had to walk up hill since Bethlehem sort of sits on a ridge. So as soon as they could- they were on their way with a plan to see this great "thing".

Now let me talk about that word "thing" because I think you need a little more definition about why Luke wrote it like this. This word is literally the Greek word "rhema", and it means a word, or a reality. So the shepherds were saying, "Let's go see this reality!" They now understand that they have heard the Word from God and that there's a reality and the reality is that the Savior has been born. Now they can confirm it easy enough because the angel had said to them back in verse 12, **"This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."**

And that's just an unbelievable thing- this probably had never happened before because no mother would put a baby in an animal feed trough- in a stinking stable. So that would verify that this was all true. I mean, they had seen the angels and that was verification enough. But they were going to get even more verification when, in fact, they found the Child exactly where the angel said He would be which meant this

was not just an earthly situation going on- this was heaven and earth involved.

So they believed the angel. And I think that's indicated in verse 15. They said, "*Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened.*" This is not a statement that comes from doubt- so they believed. And that's the first thing I want you to notice. They had a revelation from God and they believed it. And that is how people come to Christ. They have a revelation from God and they believe it. The revelation from God is that the Savior has come and they believe it. That's step one- they believed that heavenly message. They believed that the Savior had come. And we know that they believed because they refer to the event as "the thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us", and that is Divine Revelation- and that is where anybody's faith in Christ begins; where everybody's Salvation begins- with a message from God. The Bible says that Faith comes by hearing, not by seeing- not by experience- not by any other means other than by hearing the word of God. Faith comes by hearing the Gospel. In **Romans 10**, Paul says how shall they hear if there's not a preacher?

And so it's critical that we understand that the first step in the process of someone being converted is they have to hear the Message. The Revelation comes first. And that is why great care must be taken so that the Message is preached and that it is preached rightly and fully and without hesitation and with no apology and without us being ashamed of it. They heard the Message and they believed it. So obviously before this moment- the Spirit of God had graciously and Sovereignly prepared their hearts prior to the Message being preached because they heard it and they believed it- so Sovereign regeneration had already occurred because dead, sinful, fallen Man cannot hear the Word of God until and unless God Sovereignly gives them ears to hear first. Nobody can believe until God Sovereignly gives them a heart to believe or gives them saving faith. So Regeneration precedes Justification. God has to Sovereignly choose and call and draw and regenerate people before they can see and hear and believe. We have always been taught that you have to believe to be born again- but the Bible teaches that you have to be born again before you can believe. That is what Theologians mean when they say "Regeneration must precede Justification".



Now I told you a week or so ago that all of this is an indication that these men were chosen to be the recipients of this Divine Message, and that they were probably true Jews- that is they were believing Jews- not just secular Jews. That they truly believed in the one true and living God, and that they were no doubt among those looking for the redemption of Israel- waiting earnestly for their Messiah and that they were no doubt people who had been genuine believers in the true God who had repented of their sins and had come to God and sought His Mercy and Grace.

All of that had to be true because their hearts were so ready and their responses were so right. And they heard the heavenly revelation and they believed it. They believed the fact that Messiah, the Savior, the Christ, the Lord had come.

So their faith in the Word of God then caused them to pursue Christ. And that's the third step in anybody's life in coming to Christ. First you must hear and understand the Word- the Revelation, and Secondly- you must believe the revelation, and Thirdly- you respond to that revelation with the belief that God has given you and you come to Christ. You ascend to that, You embrace Christ.

Now keep in mind that God has to choose to set His Love on you before the foundation of the world. God chooses to show you Grace and Mercy that you do not deserve by choosing or electing you for Salvation way before you are born and do anything good or evil. That's what is called Sovereign Election, or Predestination, or Sovereign Mercy- God said, **"I will have Mercy on whom I will have Mercy!"**

And after God has chosen you- way back before He even created the Universe- He allowed this sinful world with all of its troubles and injustices and wars and diseases and sufferings to go on and on- many times for centuries- until you could be born.

And once you are born- God the Holy Spirit goes out into the sinful World to draw you, or drag you, or compel you, or move upon you so that you will come to Jesus. And God the Holy Spirit goes inside your body- while you are still lost- and God gives you eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to believe. He takes out of you a stony heart and puts in you a heart of flesh, and God takes away from you the fallen sinful rebellious nature of Adam and replaces that sinful nature with a Divine Nature.

Then God Providentially moves to cause your path to cross the path of another believer, and that believer sows the seed of the Gospel into your heart and another believer waters that seed, and then with those eyes that God Sovereignly gave you- you see the Truth, and with those ears that God Sovereignly gave you- you hear the Truth, and with that heart that God Sovereignly gave you- you believe the Gospel, and you are convicted of your sin and you repent and believe, and God gets the increase of all that sowing by saving your soul. Turn with me to read what Jesus Himself said about this in **John 6:37-40**:

**37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.**

**38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.**

**39 This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.**

**40 For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.**”

Now skip on down to verses **44&45**:

**44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.**

**45 It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.**

This is exactly what happened to these shepherds back in **Luke 2:16**- because it says there- "**So they came in a hurry.**" And again this gives us the idea of enthusiasm and eagerness that these shepherds are in a hurry and their enthusiasm is great. And they came with haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph.

And we don't know how they did that but they probably rushed into the village and said, "*Does anybody know about a baby being born? Anybody heard about a birth in the last few hours?*" And they may have knocked on some doors and found some babies. And it's possible that there may have been several babies born that night or in recent hours.

But these shepherds were looking for one particular baby- who would be placed in a feed trough.

And we don't know the details- but word of mouth about a newborn baby spreads pretty rapidly and so they continued to look. And verse 16 says:

**... and [they] found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.**

And as soon as they saw Mary and Joseph and that baby lying in that horse trough- they knew immediately, instantaneously, with great certainty that they had a Word from God. Their search ended with the right find. First there was the Divine Revelation, then the Faith, and then the Action to pursue Christ.

Now what followed after that with the shepherds is also what happens when someone is saved- they witnessed. Someone who has heard the Truth of the Gospel, someone who has believed and put their trust in Jesus Christ then goes forth to tell others. Look at **Luke 2:17:**

**When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child**

Now listen up- because this is important.

I believe that there was some very powerful conversations going on with these shepherds between verses 16 and 17. I mean, here are these scruffy, grubby, lowlife shepherds coming in the middle of the night all excited into this stinking stable- finding Joseph and Mary and the baby lying in a manger. And they're all overwhelmed with what's happened. And Joseph and Mary must have had some response, saying something like, *"How can we help you?"* or *"Why are you here?"*

And then the shepherds tell all that has happened to them. And I can just hear them all falling all over each other trying to tell Joseph and Mary what had happened, and they are all out of breath because they went in haste and they're all excited and they're not educated- so they probably are having a hard time trying to explain what they had just seen as Joseph and Mary tried to sit quietly and listen.

And this must have been wonderful confirmation for Mary and Joseph and any lingering doubts about their Son that might have been

raised in their minds instantly vanished with the shepherds. Any concern about whether he had made a mistake taking his wife on this 90 mile journey with her nine months pregnant, any worry about whether or not the Lord was with them- instantly vanished.

And so here are these lowlife men- telling this fantastic story of how an angel came and an angel described one who had been born and all about the Good News of great joy and a Savior. And on and on, and they told the whole story. And a whole host of angels came and there were angels everywhere, and they were bright and they were shining and they were praising God and thanking God. And Mary and Joseph listening to all this- it really must have been quite a scene.

And as that story unfolded- I think Joseph and Mary probably began to talk about some of their side of the details. And Joseph may well have started talking about his perspective of coming home and his wife telling him that she was with child by the Holy Ghost, and she really had not been unfaithful because he had had a dream and the angel had told him this and that- even what to name the boy.

And Mary no doubt would have begun to relate her time with Gabriel and how she was frightened and what the angel told her. And they probably would have never even mentioned any of this- especially not with strangers- but these men had just burst into their lives and told them this fantastic story and it would be normal for Mary and Joseph to share with people that thought might could understand.

And at this particular point- it's still just Joseph and Mary and a handful of shepherds, and Zacharias and Elizabeth and they know about it, and nobody else has the kind of inside information that these people have.

And what is the immediate response of the shepherds? After the whole thing unfolds and they see and understand- they made known the statement which had been told them about this Christ. They went everywhere and said, "The Savior's been born! The Savior's been born! Christ the Lord has been born. Messiah has come! Immanuel is here!"

And everywhere they went- they told the story about the angel and the Heavenly Host and they would repeat what Joseph and Mary had told them!

And again this illustrates what happens in the life of a newborn soul. First comes the Divine Revelation, and then they understand the Gospel, and God gives them the faith to believe the Gospel, and then

that follows with the action to go to Jesus and pursue Jesus and embrace Jesus and worship Jesus. And then comes the immediate response of all that God has done and that is that they begin to tell the story and they tell it everywhere and they tell it to everybody.

I'll tell you right now, folks- the most aggressive and faithful people in proclaiming the Gospel are the newest Christians. Because their joy runs so high, their excitement is so great, and the enthusiasm is so profound.

And so these lowlife shepherds become the very first New Testament evangelists. And they repeated the astounding Revelation from God, as well as their own personal meeting of Joseph and Mary and the baby lying in the manger. And they couldn't restrain themselves. I mean, this was the greatest news the world would ever know. This was the greatest news they ever heard- far beyond anything they could have ever imagined. I mean, there isn't anything in their humdrum life that could equal this. And I suggest to you that true spiritual commitment is determined by the quality and the tenacity of one's long-term joy over Salvation.

You can say all day long that you're committed to Jesus and you can talk all about the commitment you have for Jesus Christ- but it really comes down to how much you realize how great your sin was to God, and how much God has forgiven you for, and how magnificent Grace really is, and all of that will determine how much joy you have in being saved, and it is your joy that determines the level of your commitment.

No joy- no commitment; no relief over being forgiven- no love for Jesus; no understanding of what God has done for you- no long term walk with God. If you really don't believe you were that bad- then Salvation is not that big a deal and Salvation is just one of many things that happen to you in your life.

But if you know that you were sinful, if you know that you were wretched, if you know that your sin was black and horrible and that God would have perfectly justified to send you to hell- then Salvation is the greatest and most amazing thing that can ever happen and you never get over it.

These shepherds were eye-witnesses to the good news; eye-witnesses to the Messiah being born and they spread it all over the

place. They spread it and they couldn't restrain themselves- they couldn't contain themselves.

And you know, the very minute, the very second that eternal Salvation no longer thrills our hearts- that's when we are already backslid. When we stop having that kind of zeal and that kind of passion and that kind of joy- when we betray a heart that is no longer overwhelmed by joy, when we betray a heart that is no longer unrestrained in its compulsion to tell others- we betray a sinful heart. Because indifference and ingratitude is a sin. And it frightens me to see people who call themselves Christians who are more excited about dancing with the stars than they are Jesus, to see men who scream and shout at the Super Bowl but who wouldn't be caught dead shouting for joy over having their sins washed away, to see women who would rather have a gift card from Dillard's than a home in Heaven. To see young people getting more excited over the seventh level of Halo than to be born from above.

People are more upset about President Obama's tax increases than they are about sin in their lives. They are more willing to sign petitions and join protest marches and have tea parties and march on Washington than they are to fast and pray and deny themselves and pick up their crosses and follow Jesus.

People today get a lot more excited about sports and restaurants and food and kids and grandkids and houses and cars and possessions and vacations, but rarely do you see anybody burst forth with exuberant joy toward others who know not Christ because of their sheer compulsion to talk about the One Who saved them from eternal Wrath.

God save us from our own agendas, save us from our own business, save us from our own lives that we live outside of You. Send us a revival of the Fear of the Lord, a genuine knowledge of how wicked we are, a clear comprehension that our sins has separated us from You. And let us pray along with David in **Psalms 51**:

**1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.**

**2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.**

**3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.**

**4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.**

**5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.**  
**6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part**  
**You will make me know wisdom.**  
**7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter**  
**than snow.**  
**8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken**  
**rejoice.**  
**9 Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities.**  
**10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.**  
**11 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit**  
**from me.**  
**12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing**  
**spirit.**  
**13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted**  
**to You.**

Let's come and pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.