

# The Secret to Christmas Joy!

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We are still in Luke 2. We continue with our exposition through the Gospel narrative of Luke pertaining to our Lord's coming. We are calling this "Rejoice, It's Christmas," because everything surrounding the Lord's coming, the Lord's birth, is filled with joy and with praise.

We come to this section today in Luke 2:15 through 20 and I'll read it in just a moment but the title is "The Secret to Christmas Joy!" Now, the world knows lot of joys and there are so very many people who have some type of joy during the Christmas holiday season, but it's not necessarily true Christmas joy. What is the secret to Christmas joy? It's one simple thing: adoring him. Adoring him. That's the secret to Christmas joy. Now to adore someone is to regard them with utmost esteem, with the greatest love, with respect and honor. All these are the idea of worship too. To adore Christ means we find ourselves at times losing ourselves in the glory and the wonder of his person and of his work.

You know, there has been only one time, one brief time when man could observe God's person and his work and that was during Jesus' brief pilgrimage here on this earth. When he first came, the shepherds first come to adore him. In Luke 2:15 through 20, it's this journey that I want us to journey on with the shepherds as they come from the dazzling mountain vista where the angel and the great host of angels proclaimed his birth down to the hamlet of Bethlehem, down to a livestock stable, a place of poverty and humility where Jesus was born. So let's go there this morning with these shepherds and come, let us adore him.

I want to point out some things in just a moment. We'll read the text first but let's look at it there together. Verse 15 of 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."  
16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her

heart. 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Now, five distinct thoughts as we think on the one broader theme of come, let us adore him. First, come, let us adore him, the revelation of God. The revelation of God. Now the word "revelation" has the idea of unfolding and that's what it means in the Scriptures. We have the book of Revelation and it means an unveiling; to peel back and let you see the reality. And this Christmas was the true unveiling of the one true God. Now throughout the ages, there have been religious teachings and doctrines, false churches, false professors, who have taught all kinds of revealings of God. The ancient Egyptians used to have their demigods, these images and these idols and sometimes it was the Pharaoh himself and they would say he is a god. He's not like the one true God but he's a god, he is above man. When we were in India, we ran across many who were called god-men. They were great gurus and teachers in the Hindu religion and they thought they had reincarnated to a god level, if you will, and people would go to them to get wealthy or to be healed. But none of those are the true revelations of God. Here is the true revelation of the one true God. Colossians 2:9 tells us, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Now that's to clarify and make a distinction between Jesus and all others who claim to be in any way some deity. On this day, this first Christmas, God put on humanity and dwelt among us in a human body. You see, he has no rival. His birth was unlike any other. Have you ever heard of anybody's birth being announced by an angelic band from heaven? That's because he is God come to earth.

Now the Bible says the shepherds believed the message of the angels. You know, if Jesus is going to be revealed to you, if Jesus is going to be known by anyone, they must believe the message God gives about him and here God uses these angels to announce his birth. They tell these shepherds all of this and then they say in verse 15 that the Lord has told them this. "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing that the Lord has made known to us." They believed God was speaking through these angels. They believed the message. If they did not believe the message, they would have missed Jesus. Today, you know, it's still the same. Jesus is found and salvation is found by those who believe the revelation. The revealing of Christ from the word of God.

Remember in Matthew 16 when Jesus said, "Who are people saying that I am?" And the disciples said, "There are some good things being said, Jesus. Some say you're John the Baptist. Some say you're like Elijah or one of the prophets." Well, that's a great compliment for most but that's not fitting for Christ. So he says, "Well, who do you say that I am?" Peter speaking for the group, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then in Matthew 16:17, "And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal,'" there is that word for revelation, "' did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'"

God reveals the truth of Christ and he reveals it through his word. Today God is revealing Christ to men everywhere, to women everywhere, young people, old people, whoever will believe the word. Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." The word preached that contains the message of Christ. Then Romans

10:14 gives us something of the primary means, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" And this is something that we need to reestablish in professing evangelicalism today that God has ordained not only the message to be believed – now listen to me – but also the primary means of extending that message, the preaching of the word of God. In every age if you study church history, and that's one of my hobbies, I guess you would say, but in every age and in every generation, there is the lust after new and never ending culturally relevant and modern means to reveal Christ but listen to me now, if it is the Holy Spirit who reveals Christ, he is not obligated to honor your creativity. He will only honor his Father's ordained means or God the Father's ordained means, and that's primarily an expression of the preaching or teaching or sharing of the word.

You see, the Scriptures are perfect and they are sufficient. Is it not interesting that Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead as recorded in Scripture yet many of those who knew Lazarus stayed in unbelief. I mean, what kind of creative, culturally relevant, unique thing can you give to people to help them believe on Jesus better than somebody rising from the dead? God has ordained his word, his priest word primarily, to reveal Christ. Today you can be saved and you can receive the life of Christ, you can be born again as Jesus said in John 3, but you will be saved through the ministry of the word, the revelation of the word, and you must believe that revelation as it comes from the word about him. God has ordained that salvation through his Son is found in those who will believe the word about him. The shepherds said after the angel's announcement, "the Lord has made this known." God is telling us this. He is revealing this. Let's remind ourselves that the revelation of Christ comes through a messenger but it always comes from the Master. The angelic choir announced. They were the messengers. They announced to these shepherds and they were announcing that this was no ordinary birth, this is no ordinary child, that he is indeed the Lord of heaven, he is the Savior of man. God has come to earth and revealed God to man so come, let us adore him, the, the one and only revelation of God.

Secondly, come, let us adore him urgently and exclusively. Urgently and exclusively. Notice what they say in verse 15, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." The first part of verse 16, "So they came in a hurry." These shepherds believed the angelic messengers, faith rises in their hearts and it is seen in their behavior. They go immediately and urgently.

Somebody said this was the first Christmas rush. Have you ever seen people, folks rush around anymore than what we are seeing folks rush around? They've got to rush to this, got to rush to that, got to rush to this and look, folks, we don't camp on legalism here, some of you do Santa Claus and some of you do Christmas trees and presents, and some of you are Scrooges about the whole thing, but nevertheless wherever you feel is right for you, praise the Lord for that. God bless you. The heart is what matters. I've seen people get rid of all the trappings but they were so proud in their heart of what they got rid of, the pride was the worst message than if they had a little Santa Claus show up.

And by the way, can I just get over here and ride this horse just a little bit? If all of our extra biblical rules and legalisms is effective, then the households where they have all the extra biblical rules and legalisms, well over all over generations have better kids who really love Jesus. I'm not seeing that. The proof is in the fruit of a humble genuine devotion to Christ in the next generation. Now again, your conviction is yours and I support you in it. We don't judge each other but, folks, let's say it for the 100,000<sup>th</sup> time: your rules, your extra convictions, your extra guidance, they can be good but that's not what converts your children's heart. The Gospel converts the heart. Amen? Wouldn't it be nice if we could just come and say, "Hey, if you follow these 18 rules, your children will love Jesus all their lives"? It doesn't work that way, does it? As a matter of fact, you'll make a rebel if you camp out on rules and miss the Gospel. That's the centerpiece of everything. Well, let me get off that horse. We're on the Incarnation. We are on the coming of Jesus.

These disciples urgently and exclusively go straight to Jesus. I mean, there is no delay. They are not saying to themselves, "Hey, let's take care of this and then let's go." There is no stopping at Walmart to pick up anything. They are going straight to Bethlehem and straight to Jesus. They are determined to go straight to Jesus and that's a model for all of us to follow. In fact, that's the only way you'll ever find Jesus. Every time you hear the Gospel, every time you are confronted with your sin and your need of a Savior, when you say, "Well, I will when," you're not coming then. I mean, you must come urgently and you must come exclusively to Jesus and that's what these men did on this day. They let lesser things go. They did not own the sheep they left but on this occasion when the choice was tending the sheep or seeing the Savior and coming to the Savior, they let lesser things go.

The Spirit was indeed revealing these things to the shepherds and at the bed of Jesus Christ, that little feed trough where he was laying, their faith found a resting place and peace flooded their souls. I can just see those shepherds as they rushed to the manger scene and as they are there before him. I can just see them kneeling and contemplating all that they had heard in a joyful silence because isn't it true no words could equal his worth and no words could equal a setting that they were a part of. I believe in the spirit and in silence they knelt and they adored him. They had a true testimony. The Bible says down in verse 20 they went around telling what they had seen and what they had heard. They really experienced all of this.

They had found the Christ but this text tells us something interesting, that there was a trial going on. "Pastor, what do you mean a trial?" There was a trial. The Bible says that, look at it there in verse 18, "And all who heard it," these are the shepherds talking evidently to those in the environs of Bethlehem, "all who heard it wondered," you could translate that, "people were amazed at the things which were told to them by the shepherds." Now this is a very interesting word because when it says they all were amazed or wondered, it means they are marveling over it – but listen – it doesn't mean that they were believing it. There are so many today that you tell them the story of a God with love beyond comprehension who is holy, his holiness and his righteousness is deeply offended by the sin of man, and in love what that man can't comprehend, he

comes to the earth born of a humble and meek baby and he grows and lives a sinless life, and then he goes to the cross and there becomes the vicarious atonement for the sins of his children and takes the wrath of God for the people in their place, dies to pay for their sin and rid the problem of death and hell, rises for their justification and ascends to heaven to intercede forever, there are people you can tell that story to and they will say, "That's an amazing story." That's a marvelous thought, but you understand something, to be amazed at a story is one thing, to trust in Christ is something else.

Our Baptist churches and our evangelical churches are filled with people who do marvel over the story but I wonder if a lot of them have really trusted in Jesus. Christ, my all is set on you, is resting on you, and that's the trial. That's the trial of these folks. All these folks in these environs, they were amazed about it. I can just see them. They are talking in the streets about them, "Have you heard what the shepherds said? Have you heard what they experienced? They are so believable. That's the most amazing story I've heard." But it doesn't mean they became believers. Remember the text out of Hebrews, Hebrews 6:4 through 6, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." There are those who the Spirit of God has dealt with. There are those who have been brought to a sense of spiritual awakening but not yet conversion. They have tasted a little bit of it. They see the marvel of it. They are stirred by it.

Years and years ago, I became very perplexed and troubled about the number of converts that seemed to fall away. They seemed so sincere at the first. Oh my goodness, there was one time when probably 90% of our converts would fall away and I was so troubled by that and thought this can't be good, this can't be right, we're doing something wrong. Over the years, I began to learn that the eye is not a good discerner of heart trust. Are you with me? The eye is not a good discerner of heart trust. You really don't know about a person's heart. Do you know what makes the difference? T-i-m-e, because God's true children persevere to the end. In those days, I think we were a more carnal congregation. Now we haven't arrived, don't misunderstand me, we're still learning and repenting, but we were a more carnal congregation and I believe we were more attracted to those who had only an emotional experience but no settled trust and rest in Jesus Christ. I'm thankful today that you have followed my leadership and we have amended the way we do some things and I can say that today those who come to Christ here, the strong percentage of them bear lasting fruit which pleases and glorifies God.

So there is a trial going on here. Isn't it amazing, the shepherds with such pure, straight, urgent, exclusive trust run to Christ but others are just trying to take it all in. There is a trial in their minds. "Is he one we are to believe in and trust in and rely on? Or is this just a fantastic story?"

Well, o come, let us adore him and let's go to the next thing here: declaring him to all. Declaring him to all. In verse 17 they said, "When they had seen this, they made known

the statement which had been told them about this Child." Here the shepherds are making their way to this musty earthy stable. They found Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus and there he lay in a feed trough, the King of glory, the Savior of men. There again, they must have knelt and wondered on the immense paradox: God in a feed trough. They must have marveled over the wisdom and the glory of God in all of this.

They explained to Joseph and Mary how the angels had appeared to them and told of his birth, how the angels had told of the place of his birth, the angelic choir had sung the praises of God. They must have marveled over all of these things but the startling glory of a host of angels could not compare it to the glory of this baby for he is the Creator of angels. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. You see, the glory of angels is his glory and he shares all of his glory with all of his celestial beings. So there he lay, tiny, humbly and quietly, though temporarily veiled of some of his divine prerogatives, yet he was always fully God. He humbled himself to become one of us so that we might be one with him, so that we might know him, enjoy him, love him and reign with him forever.

Now let me go on to IV. Now come, let us adore him treasuring him above all. This is a beautiful thing that we see in this text. Here Mary is, the Bible says in verse 17 that Mary treasured all of these things. Treasured all of these things. Pondering them in her heart. It has the idea of keeping something. It's like she just said this is glory beyond glory and she just kind of put a guard up, if you will, in her heart and just treasured all that was happening and all that was going on here. We can only imagine the myriad of emotions a new mother has but then all that she had in addition to that to contemplate, but is this not also a picture of true belief, treasuring Christ? Trusting in him always includes treasuring him. Listen to 1 Peter 3:15, the Bible says, "but sanctify," which has the idea of treasuring. It means put an effort into making him your chief treasure. You say we have some ebbs and flows in our Christian discipleship and so there is a part of our discipleship that requires you to keep pressing toward treasuring him above all others. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, then you'll be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and with reverence.

Are you striving toward treasuring him above all others? Can I challenge you this Christmas season, put some effort into it. Grab your heart and say that's okay and that's okay but I want to treasure him above all the rest. That's Christian discipleship. That's where Mary was. She just said, "I'm not going to lose this. I'm going to guard this. I'm going to treasure this. I'm going to hold this and ponder it." Keep Christ supreme. Make him the most special, the most precious in your heart. This is the joyful duty of all true believers. He is our greatest treasure. We cling to him supremely. Whatever else we must let go, we will let it go but we will not let go of him.

And you know, if the Lord tarries, one day for you, one day for me, death is going to come knocking and, you know, when death comes, do you know what you've got to do? You don't have an option. When death comes, you release all earthly things and I think for the child of God – are you listening to me – at death's door is when we finally cast the last idol out the door and say, "Lord, there is nothing left but me and you now." Because I

think probably in our earthly pilgrimage, that's the height of our trust because you ain't got no option. It was there all along. It was there, you did treasure him and you didn't work at treasuring him, that's one reason why you join a sound church. We need each other. We need the preaching of the word. We don't need worldly gimmicks in the church because we've got enough of that crap in us already. We want to come apart from that and learn to treasure him. Let's help each other treasure him, amen? But at death's door, nothing else is left.

Brother David Young shared with me some time ago, his mom was at death's door several times in the last few years before she died, and on one occasion she was in the intensive care unit and basically the doctor said, "This is it. We don't think she's going to pull through this." But she still had her mind and you had to know David's mom, she's quite a character. A sweet lady, a good lady. Loved Jesus. But she told David to come in there and I guess with his phone, to play the song, "It is finished." So David goes into the intensive care unit and he is playing "It is finished" back there by her bed and she is just singing with every bit of strength she's got in her. It is finished. You know, at that time, his mom knew two things for sure: there is nothing my family can do for me right now and there is nothing I can do for them, so I had just better reach out to Jesus. And her treasuring of Jesus came to the full.

Folks, don't wait until then. Let's be like Mary and put a guard up and say, "I'm guarding my heart. I'm going to work. I'm going to be in this discipleship struggle to keep treasuring him the most." Nothing wrong with enjoying the common grace God gives us. Those things are wonderful and good, but let's treasure him the most. You know, if you're genuinely converted, you either treasure him above all or you long to do so. It's in there and if you get off track, it bothers you and you keep getting drawn back.

V. Come, let us adore him, number 5: with joyful praise. Come, let us adore him with joyful praise. Verse 20. Here we go again. Everything surrounding Jesus' birth is just full of joy, celebration, praise. "The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them." It's a continuous flow here. It means they just continued praising God. They continued glorifying God. It's like at the beginning of the text when they were talking, "Let's go and see this thing," they didn't just say, one guy didn't just say, "Let's go and see this thing," they are all saying, "Hey, let's go! Let's go! Man, I'm in! Let's go!" They just couldn't stop talking about it. Now they are full of this praise and joy and all throughout the Gospel narrative of Luke we see these continuous waves of praise to God. It's sort of like a flowing musical, the solos, like Zacharias praising God for what he promised to do through him and his wife, Elizabeth, as she would miraculously conceive and bear the forerunner of the Messiah. Then we have duets like Mary who heard she was going to have a child of Holy Spirit and bear the Savior, and then her relative, Elizabeth, miraculously conceived and is going to bear the forerunner of the Messiah, and they get together and just praising God. The text tells us these are just two ladies outside of themselves with joy, shouting and praising God. Then we have the choral aspect, we have the townspeople praising God with Elizabeth for her wonderful gift of bearing the forerunner. We have the angelic choir and then we have the

shepherd choir, if you will, altogether praising God. Brother Tom, I don't know how musically accurate they were but they were praising God.

The Bible says there in verse 20, they went back glorifying and praising God. You know, when we find Christ, he generally does not elevate us to heaven's glory right away, he usually sends us back. I remember the night I was converted and the first or the next weekend I suppose it was, when I went back to my home and it was just different. I was different. God sends us back. He sends us back to our homes, he sends us back to our people, he sends us back to our work but we do not go back the same. Ours is a new life. We have a new purpose. We have a new love. We have a new hope. And we have a new song. Boy, isn't that good. The psalmist said in Psalm 40:3, "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear And will trust in the LORD." A new song.

The shepherds have been to Jesus and they have been changed and now they have a new praise. They are adoring him with praise in their hearts and praise on their lips. You know, legend has it that these shepherds raised the little lambs that were purchased by pilgrims when they went to Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement when every family had to bring a spotless lamb, and I'm sure that's true because it took a lot of lambs. But they leave those little lambs for the Lamb of God and that's the call to every single person, to lay aside the things that no longer matter and nothing matters. When you put Jesus up here, nothing else matters but him. What is it, Hebrews 8:13, the Bible tells us that all the other ordinances, all the old ordinances of the old covenant have now become, and the New American Standard does a great job here, obsolete. It's all obsolete compared to him. Some of you sitting here this morning, that's what you need to do, you need to say, "All the other stuff I set aside," just like the shepherds left it all aside and went and found Jesus because compared to him everything else is truly and absolutely obsolete.

O come, this Christmas time, O come, let us adore him.