

# **The People of Christmas**

## **How to Celebrate Christmas**

*Luke 2:17-20*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

December 19, 2010

# How to Celebrate Christmas

## Scripture

For the next few weeks of advent and Christmas, I plan to share a series of messages on “The People of Christmas.” The substance for this series comes from a book that was authored by the late James Montgomery Boice titled *The Christ of Christmas*.<sup>1</sup>

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Later this coming week we will celebrate Christmas. We will celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, which took place a little over 2,000 years ago.

I would like to draw your attention to one of the best known and most loved stories of Christmas: the shepherds who visited Jesus at his birth. I would like to read Luke 2:8-21, although my text for today will be only from verses 17-20.

So, let’s read Luke 2:8-21, keeping in mind that my text is Luke 2:17-20:

<sup>8</sup> And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom  
he is pleased!”

<sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and

---

<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Christ of Christmas* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009).

see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”<sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.<sup>17</sup> **And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.**<sup>18</sup> **And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.**<sup>19</sup> **But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.**<sup>20</sup> **And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.**

<sup>21</sup> And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. (Luke 2:17-20)

## Introduction

Several years ago I attended a missions conference where Steve Saint and Mincaye were the featured speakers. Steve’s father, Nate Saint, was one of the five missionaries who was brutally killed on January 8, 1956 by Waodani warriors in Ecuador, men from the most savage culture ever known. Mincaye was one of the warriors who had killed the five missionaries on that dreadful day.

However, Elizabeth Elliot, wife of Jim Elliot (one of the men who was killed that day), eventually went back to the Waodani and shared the good news of the gospel with them. By God’s mercy, Mincaye and many others repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life.

In time, Steve Saint and his family also went back to live with the Waodani in order to teach them more about God and help them to survive in the modern world. Steve has brought Mincaye to the United States on several occasions. And it was one of these occasions that I was able to hear them both at a missions conference.

Of course, Mincaye’s trips to the United States are completely mind-boggling to him. He has never seen streets and houses, stores and cars, and so much more. Everything is so totally new to him because his world is so different.

I remember Steve telling about when Mincaye went back to the Amazon Jungle and told his family and friends about grocery shopping. Mincaye said, “You go to a really big food house, which is filled with lots and lots of food. Then you take a cart and load it with food. When you are finished loading it with all the food you want, you go to the front of the food house. The only thing you have to do is when you are leaving, you have to go by the place where the young girls stand. They look at you very seriously. But if you just stand there and smile, when they smile back, you can take all your food and go eat it happily.”

At this point Steve felt he should explain that you have to pay for the food. So, he pulled out his credit card and showed it to Mincaye’s family and friends, and said, “You can only take the food after you give the lady a card like this.”

But Mincaye just waved his hand and said, “Don’t worry. They just give that card right back to you, and then you can go and eat all your food!”<sup>2</sup>

Thinking of people like Mincaye and the Waodani I wondered how one would tell them how to celebrate Christmas. People in our culture have settled into patterns about celebrating Christmas. But suppose Mincaye asked me when I met him at the missions conference to come down to Ecuador and share with his family and friends the proper way to celebrate Christmas. What would I share with them about how to celebrate Christmas?

## Lesson

The visit of the shepherds to Jesus on the day of his birth tells us how to celebrate Christmas.

### **I. Celebrate Christmas by Telling Others about It (2:17)**

First, celebrate Christmas by telling others about it.

---

<sup>2</sup> Steve Saint, *End of the Spear* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 290-292.

Luke 2:17 says, **“And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.”**

I would like you to picture the shepherds out in the fields, keeping watch over the flock by night. The night was no different than any one of the hundreds, even thousands, of previous nights. There they were, doing what they had been doing every night for years and years.

But then, suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

How do you think they reacted? Do you think they said to each other, “Wow! This is different!” Or perhaps, “Oh no! This is going to cut into my sleep for the night!” Or perhaps, “What kind of prank is this?”

No. In fact, we are told that they were filled with fear. They were absolutely terrified. Nothing like this had ever happened to them—or to anyone else!

And so the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

I suppose that by this time the shepherds were fully awake and their minds were racing. “Christ? The Lord? Now where have I heard about that before?” they would have thought. And I have no doubt that they realized that the angel was telling them what every Jew of that day was desperately waiting for: the Christ, the anointed One, the one sent by God to deliver his people.

And no doubt the shepherds would have then wondered, “Well, where is this baby?”

The angel continued and said, “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

And then, as if one angel and the glory of the Lord was not enough, suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

And just as quickly as the angels came, they were gone.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger (Luke 2:9–16).

What they saw confirmed what the angel had said to them. And so they witnessed with their very own eyes God in human form. As they looked at Jesus they knew that God was fulfilling his promise to his people, and they were seeing it with their very own eyes! Their Messiah had arrived!

And so we are told that **when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child** (Luke 2:17).

How could they not tell others about it? They witnessed for themselves what faithful Jews were waiting for.

We, of course, have even more of the story than the shepherds did. We have the record of Jesus’ life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. We have so much more to tell about than the shepherds did.

So, first, celebrate Christmas by telling others about it.

## **II. Celebrate Christmas by Wondering at the Event Itself (2:18)**

Second, celebrate Christmas by wondering at the event itself.

Luke 2:18 says, “**And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.**”

As the shepherds went and told people about what they had witnessed, the people **wondered** [or, were amazed; or, marveled] **at what the shepherds told them.**

Of course, the shepherds already had the angel’s explanation of who Jesus was. But, I believe that Mary and Joseph added to that.

Imagine when the shepherds arrived at the stable. Mary and Joseph would have been surprised to find strangers looking for them. And then the shepherds would have said that an angel told them about the birth of Christ the Lord. The shepherds would have naturally assumed that Joseph was Jesus' father.

"No," Joseph would have said, "I am not his natural father."

"So who is the baby's father?" the shepherds would have wanted to know.

"The Holy Spirit is his father," Mary and Joseph would have answered. And then they would have explained the supernatural conception of Jesus.

Surely the shepherds would have told people about this too.

Everything about the baby was a cause for amazement and wonder.

I think that the most common emotion of Christmas is *sentimentality*. People feel nostalgic about Christmas. They have wonderful memories of a particular Christmas or tradition. Others wish they could have wonderful memories of a particular Christmas or tradition.

But, it seems to me that the proper way to celebrate Christmas is not to think about a particular celebration of Christmas or a tradition associated with Christmas. No. The proper way to celebrate Christmas is to wonder (i.e., be amazed) at the event itself.

It is truly staggering to think about how the Second Person of the Trinity set aside the prerogatives of deity and took upon himself human flesh. It is astounding that Jesus is the only baby in history who was ever born to die. You and I are born to live. But Jesus was born to die. It is incomprehensible how there are two natures—human and divine—in the one person of Jesus.

So, first, celebrate Christmas by telling others about it. Second, celebrate Christmas by wondering at the event itself.

### **III. Celebrate Christmas by Pondering Its Meaning (2:19)**

Third, celebrate Christmas by pondering its meaning.

Luke 2:19 says, “**But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.**”

Now, we look at the birth of Jesus from Mary’s perspective. I am sure she wanted to know everything that happened to the shepherds. She wanted to know where they were when the angel appeared. She wanted to know exactly what the angel said. She wanted to know what the multitude of angels said when they praised God. She wanted to know everything!

**Pondering** really goes beyond wondering, doesn’t it? **Pondering** is trying to get beneath the surface. It is trying to figure out what it means. It is trying to understand how all the pieces fit together.

**Pondering** is work. Think of what it involved in Mary’s case:

1. It involved her *memory*. Luke 2:19a says, “**But Mary treasured up all these things . . . .**”
2. It involved her *mind*. Luke 2:19b says, “**But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them . . . .**”
3. It involved her *affections*. Luke 2:19c says, “**But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.**”

The proper way to celebrate Christmas is by pondering its meaning. Oh, enjoy the gifts! Enjoy your friends! Enjoy the parties! I think that these things, in their proper place, add to the celebration of Christmas. But, don’t forget to ponder the true meaning of Christmas.

If you ponder the meaning of Christmas properly, you will discover that your love for Jesus will grow richer and deeper each Christmas. You will appreciate more and more his birth and all that it means for you. You will thank God more and more for sending his Son to be born in Bethlehem so that he could live a perfect, sinless life, and then die to pay the penalty for your sins.

So, first, celebrate Christmas by telling others about it. Second, celebrate Christmas by wondering at the event itself. Third, celebrate Christmas by pondering its meaning.

#### IV. Celebrate Christmas by Glorifying God for It (2:20)

And finally, celebrate Christmas by glorifying God for it.

Luke 2:20 says, **“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”**

I cannot imagine that the shepherds were ever the same again, can you? Their entire world had been rocked and transformed.

The entire episode might only have taken about the length of our worship service! The night began with the angel shattering its silence with an amazing announcement. He was joined by a multitude of angels to confirm what was being said. That probably took only 2 minutes! They were probably only a mile or so outside the walls of Bethlehem. I’ll bet they were at the stable within 20 minutes. Then, they may have spent about 30 minutes with Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, telling and listening to the remarkable events of the evening. Then, another 20 minutes back to the sheep, telling people along the way all that they had seen and heard.

And so it is no wonder that **the shepherds returned** to their flocks, **glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.**

How do you glorify and praise God? The first way to glorify God is by becoming a Christian, if you are not already a Christian. God is glorified when we respond to his revelation in the way that he commands. He is glorified when people recognize Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of sinners. He is glorified when people believe that Jesus is the one who paid the penalty for sin. He is glorified when people repent of their sin. He is glorified when people trust in Jesus alone for the gift of eternal life.

The second way to glorify God is by praising him for who is and for what he has done in providing salvation for sinners such as ourselves. You can do that by *words*. You can sing his praises, as we do when we worship God on each Lord’s Day. You can share

with others what God has done in your life. And you can also praise God by your *life*. Live your life in such a way that becomes a follower of Christ. Conform your life to Christ. Conform your life to his word. Conform your life to his will.

So, first, celebrate Christmas by telling others about it. Second, celebrate Christmas by wondering at the event itself. Third, celebrate Christmas by pondering its meaning. And fourth, celebrate Christmas by glorifying God for it.

### Conclusion

Several years ago, I told the story of Larry Walters, a 33-year-old man who decided he wanted to see his neighborhood from a new perspective.

He went down to the local army surplus store one morning and bought 42 used weather balloons. That afternoon he strapped himself into a lawn chair, to which several of his friends tied the now helium-filled balloons. He took along a six-pack of beer, a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, and a BB gun, figuring he could shoot the balloons one at a time when he was ready to land.

Walters, who assumed the balloons would lift him about 100 feet in the air, was caught off guard when the chair soared more than 16,000 feet into the sky—smack into the middle of the air traffic pattern at Los Angeles International Airport. He had just begun shooting the balloons when he lost his grip on his pellet gun, and it dropped from his hands. He stayed airborne for more than two hours.

Soon after he was safely grounded and cited by the police, reporters asked him three questions:

“Were you scared?”

“Yes.”

“Would you do it again?”

“No.”

“Why did you do it?”

“Because,” Larry said, “you can’t just sit there.”

When it comes to Jesus and celebrating Christmas, you can't just sit there. You must do something about it. That is in fact what we learn about the birth of Jesus.

If I ever have the opportunity to tell people like Mincaye how to celebrate Christmas, this is what I would tell them. And what I tell them, I tell you as well:

First, celebrate Christmas by telling others about it. All other religions teach us what we must do to get to God. Christianity is the only religion that teaches us that God came to us. So, tell others about it.

Second, celebrate Christmas by wondering at the event itself. The birth of Jesus was probably a pretty ordinary birth. But everything else surrounding his conception, his nature, his announcements, and so on, was astounding.

Third, celebrate Christmas by pondering its meaning. Think about what happened surrounding the birth of Jesus. His birth is not merely sentimental. It is worth pondering.

And fourth, celebrate Christmas by glorifying God for it. Praise God for sending Jesus to earth. Praise him for all that his birth represents.

Celebrate Christmas in this way, and you will discover the very best way to celebrate Christmas. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz)

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for the birth of your Son, the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Thank you for the birth of Jesus Christ, a little more than 2,000 years ago.

Help us to celebrate Christmas by telling others about it, by wondering at the event itself, by pondering its meaning, and by glorifying God for it.

And for all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.