

God's Christmas Card

Luke 2:8-20

Our culture really gets into Christmas cards. It's reported that Americans send 2.1 billion of them each year. Hallmark alone has more than 2,700 Christmas card designs. I came across some comical cards that made me chuckle like jolly old St. Nick. Check out this one: "Christmas is just plain weird. What other time of the year do you sit around staring at a dead tree in your living room and eat candy out of your socks?"

Behind all the serious and light-hearted cards, stands the truth that at Christmas we celebrate the sending of God's Son into our world.

People had been pleading with God to come down into their world for a long time. Listen to Psalm 144:5: **"Bow down Your heavens, O Lord, and come down..."** Isaiah said something similar in Isaiah 64:1: **"Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! ..."** Isaiah is bold about his longing for something more. He dared to believe that something better was coming even though his culture was corrupt and everything around him seemed so dark. He is longing for the Lord to somehow come down into his world to make sense out of all the nonsense, to bring peace to all the problems, to dispel the darkness and to extricate evil.

Today we celebrate the fact that the Lord has come down! Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 2.

Let's set the scene. An angelic intervention takes place when God rocks the routine of some shepherds who are just out doing their job. Luke 2:8: **"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night."** In the early pages of the Bible, shepherding was considered a noble profession but in the first century shepherding had lost its luster. Shepherds made up one of the lowest classes of people, coming in just ahead of the lepers. Living out in the fields away from society made them outcasts.

Except for an occasional bleep from the sheep, the night was quiet. In the midst of the mundane, an angel of the Lord suddenly shows up. Look at verse 9: **"And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid."** Into the darkness of a silent night came the brightness of the glory of the Lord. I'm sure the shepherds were rubbing their eyes and shaking in their sandals. In fact, the word "terrified" means that they were alarmed and agitated. This is totally understandable because angels often announced judgment but this time they had a message of joy.

Verse 10, **"Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.'" The reason the shepherds did not need to be afraid is because the messenger was bringing "good news of great joy that will be for all the people."** Verse 11 tells what that good news is, **"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."** Verse 12 tells them how to find this good news, **"And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."**

The phrase “good news” is where we get the word “evangelize.” Notice that this is good news of great joy. The word “great” here is “mega” which means exceedingly, large, loud and mighty. It’s a superlative of greatest degree. Wycliffe translates it this way: “I evangelize to you a great joy.” This message is for “all the people” but I want you to see the word “you” as well. It’s for the whole world but it must also become deeply personal.

As the shepherds are trying to handle the message from this one messenger, they are taken aback again in verse 13, **“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God ...”** The sky was unexpectedly filled with a multitude of messengers. The phrase “heavenly host” refers to the Lord’s army. Their message is in verse 14, **“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”**

Today I want us to learn a few things from the shepherds.

1. Until you go, you’ll never know. After witnessing this incredible display of unbridled adoration and praise, the shepherds knew that they had to move. Verse 15 **“So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.””** They discussed what they should do and were unanimous in their decision to head to Bethlehem. I love verse 16 because it shows that their fear had been replaced with faith and then their faith went to their feet: **“And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.”** There was no delay. The idea is “come on, hurry up, and let’s bounce over to Bethlehem.”

I did a study on the word “come” this week and discovered that it appears 1,463 times in the Bible! The Almighty invites us to come to Him. Psalm 66:5: **“Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man’s behalf!”** I’m reminded of what Philip said to Nathaniel in Luke 1:46 in response to his skepticism about Jesus: **“Come and see.”** In John 4:29, the Samaritan woman is so moved by what Jesus told her about herself that she runs to tell others and makes this invitation: **“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”**

I love the fact that we don’t have to pay for what God wants to give us – we couldn’t afford it anyway. Our only responsibility is to come. Check out Isaiah 55:1-3: **“Come to me, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost...Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.”** And, when we’re wiped-out and heavy-hearted, Jesus makes this invitation to us in Matthew 11:28: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** If you ever worry about whether Jesus will receive you when you come, hold onto John 6:37: **“Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”**

Drop down to Luke 2:20 where we read what happens as a result of their going: **“Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”** Just think what would have happened had the shepherds delayed a few days or if they had just discussed what they had seen in the night sky. I don’t know where you are, but there’s a point in which you will never know until you go.

The offer is to come. Have you done so? Don't hold back. Don't stay distant. Until you go, you'll never know.

2. Until you know, you'll never show. Too many times too many try to act like Christians but the fact of the matter is that until you know Christ, you can't do the Christian life. Once you know, it will show in the way you sow the seed of the gospel. It's striking that the shepherds don't pull up a bale of straw and make themselves comfortable. They didn't hang around the manger because they knew that they were now managers of the message. Notice that the message they shared had nothing to do with seeing the amazing angels or of adoring Mary and Joseph.

They came to see Him and now they head out to herald the good news in verse 17: **"Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child, And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds."** We're here today because they couldn't keep quiet. Friends, once you know Jesus, it will show.

His name was Bill, a college student. He had unruly hair, wore a T-shirt with holes in it, old jeans and shoes with no socks and had just become a Christian. Located next to campus was a well-to-do church that wanted to develop a ministry to students but didn't know how to go about it. One day Bill decided to go to church there. He walked in late, wearing his everyday wardrobe, and couldn't find a seat because the church was full.

People noticed him walking down the center aisle and became uncomfortable. Seeing no seats anywhere, when Bill got up to the front, he just sat down right on the floor. While this was perfectly acceptable at a college fellowship, this just wasn't done in church. The congregation became visibly uptight, tension filling the air. And then people noticed an elderly deacon in his eighties slowly making his way to Bill. He was a distinguished man with silver-gray hair and a three piece suit. He walked with a cane. As he made his way to Bill, the congregation was relieved and most thought to themselves, "I'm glad somebody is going to tell that kid he can't sit there!"

It took some time for the deacon to reach the young man. The church became utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane on the tiled floor. All eyes focused on him. When he finally reached the college kid, he dropped his cane and with great difficulty he lowered himself to the floor and asked, "May I sit with you?"

I see two truths from this incident. First, when we know, it will show. Jesus calls us to reach out to people. Second, this is similar to what God did when He sent His Son. Jesus entered our world and wants to sit down in relationship with us.

Until you go, you'll never know. Until you know, you'll never show.

3. Until you show, you'll never glow. With hearts filled with gratitude, these men break out into praise in verse 20: **"Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them."** They don't just wonder about what they saw, they worship Him whom they saw. These rough shepherds go back to their jobs, but now do so with praise on their lips and a renewed desire to give glory to God. Psalm 34:3: **"Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together."** I love Psalm 34:5: **"Those who look to him are radiant;**

their faces are never covered with shame.” That means that when we give glory to God and praise Him with our lives, our faces will be radiant with the grace of God. When we show, we will glow.

A Christmas Card from Christ

Christmas cards first came on the scene over 150 years ago in England when Sir Henry Cole commissioned John Horsley to create a card that depicted the destitute that needed help during the holidays. But actually, the first Christmas Card was sent by God himself when He announced the birth of His Son, sent to depraved and destitute people like you and like me.

Jesus was born to the whole world but He was also born “to you.” Christmas is real history but it must become your story. Luke 2:11: “Today [that means right now – don’t hesitate or procrastinate] in the town of David a Savior [one who forgives sins] has been born to you; [personal] he is Christ [the long-awaited Messiah] the Lord [master and Leader].

It is not enough to just get sentimental during this season. I close with three questions:

- * Is He “Savior” to you?
- * Is He “Christ” to you?
- * Is He “Lord” to you?

Until you go, you’ll never know. Until you know, you’ll never grow. Until you grow, you’ll never glow.