

02/19/12

Acknowledging His Coming

- many of us at one time or another have seen the old movie “A Walton Christmas”...
- I realize there are some people here who don’t even know who the Waltons are...which is a frightening commentary on this generation...but that was back when there were a few things on TV worth watching...although even then you had to be careful of the recipe sisters...
- The setting of the movie was back before there was reliable communication so you didn’t always know exactly when someone would arrive...
- that’s so hard for people today to even imagine – it’s like, why wouldn’t they just send a text?

- Anyway, in the movie the dad had been away working which was fairly typical even in my grandparent’s generation...that’s what you sometimes had to do to feed your family...
- but the father had promised that he would do his very best to be home for Christmas...
- then of course there was snowstorm and everyone was concerned not just that he wouldn’t make it home for Christmas, but even that he would survive the storm...
- then at the last possible moment when you think all hope is gone...there’s sounds outside and sure enough...dad has made it home and he even has presents for everyone in family...
- I do think it’s hard for us in our generation to even picture what it would be like to be surprised by someone’s arrival...unless a person purposely doesn’t tell you in advance...our forms of communication have reduced the element of surprise...and therefore the delight of anticipation and the joy of the person’s arrival...

- the reason I raise that issue is because that’s what happened to a number of people whose stories are told to explain what happened when Jesus came...
 - person after person had the opportunity to acknowledge that the Savior had come...and then to choose to respond in a way that was consistent with what had just occurred...
 - this morning we want to study what happened to each of them, and think about how their response contributed to their possession of core strength...

- with that in mind, let me invite you now to open your Bible to Luke chapter 2 – page 44 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- our theme this year is **Building Core Strength**...how do we become the kind of individuals and the kind of church where we’re learning to make the main things the main things?...to be sure that we have the fundamentals in place?...
 - and as the stretching process of greater ministry opportunities all around us reveal weaknesses in the core – how do we shore all of that up so we’re not a mile wide and an inch deep?
 - that’s really what this year is all about...

- we’ve decided to spend a lot of our Bible study time this year in the gospel of Luke...
 - for a variety of reasons including the fact that we recognize that our core strength is found in a growing relationship with the Person of Jesus Christ...
 - it’s not about business plans and facility development...
 - it’s not about particular ministries and activities...
 - it’s not even about strategic planning and ministry dreaming...believe it or not...

- and we probably need to especially say after a week-long conference on biblical counseling – it's not even about knowing particular principles and verses from the Bible...
 - all of that has a place as a means to an end...
 - but ultimately our core strength—if it's going to exist—is going to be found in a Person, our Savior and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ...
 - studying the gospel of Luke can help us learn what it means to find our strength in Him...
- so far, we've spent two weeks in this book...
 - and we've learned that Luke was a real person, a Gentile physician who traveled with the apostle Mark...and he's writing to his friend – just like he would later when he penned the book of Acts...to a man named Theophilus...
 - and we don't know anything about him for sure—other than the possibility that he may have been a government or community leader of some kind...
 - but Luke is writing to help his friend have the story of the Lord Christ carefully laid out before him...
 - and that was a primary emphasis of the first chapter – the way Luke went about the responsibility of assembling his research...and we understand theologically that the Holy Spirit was involved as well...but the Holy Spirit used human beings in the development of Scripture – we looked carefully at that process 2 weeks ago...
 - but that was the way the book began – why Theophilus should place his faith in what Luke was presenting after this careful research with eyewitnesses and other gospel writers...
- then Luke talked about the predictions...the promises...to a priest named Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth...who was also a relative, probably a cousin, of Mary, the human mother of Jesus...and promises made to Mary as well...
 - and what's instructive about that is...these three individuals realized that not only was God making promises to them then, but if these predictions came to pass, they would also fulfill prophecies that had been made hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of years before...
- so Luke is trying to explain to his friend that God is a God who delights in making promises...and a God who is powerful enough to keep them...
 - and he wants his friend to come to a point of decision...there's two strong ingredients of core strength already...
 - the reliability of Scripture...the careful research of eyewitness accounts...
 - and the fact that God had no problem with going on record that this is exactly what is going to happen...who has the power and ability to do that but God Himself...
- well, the question then becomes...did the promises come true?...
 - and we're so used to looking at these verses during the Christmas season when everyone is feeling all sentimental because visions of sugarplums are dancing in our heads...that we sometimes miss the emphasis of this second chapter...
 - these people were just like the characters in a Walton's Christmas...
 - a set of promises had been made...
 - and there's great anticipation as they wait...
 - and if the promises come true – that's evidence, as one author put it, that demands a verdict...
 - it demands a response from people like you and me today...

- read selected portions of Luke 2...
- with the time we have remaining, let's think about **4 appropriate responses for people who acknowledge that Jesus has come...**

I. The Shepherds – an Acknowledgement of Joy

- you can imagine how dull and monotonous being a shepherd in the middle of the night would be...
- also history tells us that shepherds were often outcasts because they were considered ceremonially unclean...
- you may remember way back in the history of Israel, in the book of Genesis – when the patriarch Joseph's father and brothers were brought to Egypt – Joseph explained that the Pharaoh wouldn't want them living right there with them...
- **Genesis 46:34 - ...every shepherd is loathsome to the Egyptians.**
- now that was 1500 years before these events so it may or may not have any bearing on what's unfolding here...
- but John MacArthur explains this...

Shepherds were near the bottom of the social ladder. They were uneducated and unskilled, increasingly viewed in the post-New Testament era as dishonest, unreliable, unsavory characters, so much so that they were not allowed to testify in court. Because sheep required care seven days a week, shepherds were unable to fully comply with the man-made Sabbath regulations developed by the Pharisees. As a result, they were viewed as being in continual violation of the religious laws, and hence ceremonially unclean (John MacArthur, Luke, p. 155).

- now, please think about the fact that of all the people groups that could have received this announcement that the promised Messiah had come...God chose this group of shepherds...
- and you can imagine Dr. Luke researching this story, and then carefully recording it for his friend...
- like seriously, or all the possible recipients—it was the shepherds...Theophilus, can you believe that?...

A. In the context of terrible fear.

- **Luke 2:9 - And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.**
- there's the understatement of the day...
 - it's one of those – this is not going to turn out well kind of moments...
 - especially because the glory of the Lord is shining around them...
 - they are poor, lowly, filthy shepherds...and the religious leaders have drilled into them---you're not worthy, you're not righteous, you're unclean...
 - on the same day I was preparing this message, my personal Bible study time was on a passage from the book of Exodus which described how the priest was to come before the Lord's presence in the tabernacle to offer sacrifices...
- **Exodus 28:36-38 - You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, "Holy to the Lord." You shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.**

- the principle of holiness as God's central attribute had been drilled into the people of God and their fear at being surrounded by the glory of God must have been intense
- that's why the angel's words must have been so delicious...

B. A message of great joy which shall be for everyone.

- **Luke 2:10 - But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;**
- and you can imagine the complete switch when the shepherds heard that part...for all the people...[did you notice that emphasis throughout this text]...even people like us...how could that possibly be true?...because of the very next statement...

C. The great news that the Savior had come.

- **Luke 2:11 - for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**
- that's the answer – there's the plate of gold that always had to be between Aaron's head and the presence of God – Holy to the Lord...
- now the Messiah had come...the one that Paul would one day explain...
 - **1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,**
- and these shepherds took off running – at least the text says – they hurried to find Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus...
- I've often wondered if anybody stayed back to mind the sheep...
- and after their interaction...the passage reports...

D. A message that had to be joyfully shared.

- **Luke 2:17-18 - When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.**

- see, what was the point that Luke was trying to communicate to his friend Theophilus?...
- the promises came true...what God told Mary and Joseph would happen, as impossible as it sounded at the time---it actually happened Theophilus...
- and the announcement wasn't just made to anybody – it was made to a group of shepherds on purpose...and they placed their faith in what they heard...and they acted on what they heard...and they started telling others about what they heard...
- and if that can happen to unclean shepherds...it can happen to you too Theophilus...I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all the people...
- I wonder how many people will be here today who are somewhere between the...have heard the message phase...and the, have joyfully acknowledged it phase...
 - and it might be because you don't think you're good enough...welcome to the club...you're not...this isn't about your holiness, it's about the Savior's forgiveness and His imputed righteousness which can be placed on your account the moment you repent and believe...
 - other might say – well, I'm not sure I believe it...
 - how much more evidence could you possibly need?...
 - this was carefully researched by a physician who had absolutely nothing to gain by misleading his friend...

- there were plenty of eyewitnesses – do you really believe your knowledge is superior to the people who were actually present?...
- and not just the eyewitnesses – what explanation would you have for the fact that these events fulfilled prophecies that had been made so many years before?...
- someone else might say – well, I need to clean up my act first and then I'll respond...did we read anything about the Shepherds taking a shower before they found Jesus?...
- do you think they were passing around a tick of deodorant or a bottle of cologne?... (ode de sheepe?)...
- how do it think it smelled in the manger where Jesus was born?...the imagery here is powerful and purposeful...come as you are – and that's exactly the way the shepherds acknowledged the great news that Jesus had come...

- what about....

II. Simeon – an Acknowledgment of Fulfillment

- this is an amazing story of a man who had been promised by God that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah...imagine that...
- and what ties him logically to the shepherds is that he too had an opportunity to acknowledge that the promise came true...that Jesus had come...

A. Your word is true.

- **Luke 2:29 - Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word;**
- haven't we seen that theme throughout this book?
- he's been looking for the "consolation of Israel" (v. 25)...what a beautiful way to describe the Messiah...

B. You kept your promise that He would be for all people

- **Luke 2:30-32 - For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A Light of revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."**
- **Isaiah 9:1-2 - But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.**
- it literally takes your breath away to see these prophecies fulfilled in exact detail...
- Isaiah wrote 700 years before all of this occurred...and what Jewish prophet writing with just his own human understanding would have predicted that the Messiah would be for all the nations?...especially when he was writing during a time of pending judgment at the hand of a foreign nation?...
- and that was Simeon's response...along with the acknowledgement that...

C. The means of salvation He would provide would pierce His mother's soul.

- **Luke 2:34-35 - And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed— and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."**
- remember – Mary is probably a teenager at this time...just a young mother...
- and that piercing is going to begin later in this same passage as her Son begins to distance Himself from His parents when He is only 12 years old...but ultimately that piercing would occur at the cross...

- and Simeon know all of that...either through divine inspiration or piecing together the prophecies about the Messiah's substitutionary death...
- but do you see the theme of his response?....
- The Messiah is here...God has fulfilled what He promised to me, and promised to us...
- and the implication to Theophilus was – if you place your faith and trust in Christ...you're placing your faith and trust in someone who will fulfill His Word...
- I know we'll have folks with us today who would say – I'm just living in Simeon land right now...
- I'm clinging onto a promise that God has made to me in His Word – and right now I have no idea how it's going to be fulfilled...but I don't have to know...just like Simeon didn't have to know how....he just had to know "who"...
- and that's one of the marks of faithfulness...I'm glad for the many Simeons we have around here (young and old) –
- next came...

III. Anna – an Acknowledgement of Thanksgiving.

- it's fascinating whose stories make it in the Bible...and why...
- Luke was trying to make a point here to his friend Theophilus...
- yes people responded to the realization that Jesus had truly come by being filled with joy, just like the angel explained to the shepherds...so there was powerful emotion attached to this...
- there was also a logical calculation like Simeon's that understood all the promises that were being fulfilled...
 - if Theophilus really believed Jesus had come, and he made a decision to trust Him as Lord and Savior...his life would give evidence to both responses...
 - but he, and we, would also be like Anna...

A. Was advanced in years.

- there's a couple of different ways to interpret this phrase...
- **Luke 2:36-37 - ...She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four...**
- that's one way to interpret it...some scholars actually believe that what's being said here is that she lived 84 years after her husband had died...which would mean that she's well over 100..
- either way – she was advanced in years...

B. She too recognized the Messiah and gave thanks to God.

- **Luke 2:38 - At that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.**
- see, that's also what happens when a person really believes that the Messiah has come...
- they cannot get over the thanksgiving they have in their hearts for what Christ has done...and continues to do in and through them...

- that's why we try to sing so many songs that emphasize the fact that Christ is all we need...and that nothing that is occurring today should be able to interrupt our level of thankfulness for Him, and to Him...
- **Colossians 3:15-17 - Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.**

- this last major event in chapter 2 is one of more curious stories in all the life of Christ...
- but we know practically nothing about Jesus' boyhood other than these verses...
- but this too is an acknowledgement of His coming...by the Savior Himself...even as a young boy...
- and we could say it like this...

IV. Jesus – an Acknowledgement of Purpose

- this is one of those stories that makes the Bible so human...what parent can't picture this happening...
- you might want to ask our long-time church secretary Nancy Johnston about the time she left their 2 year old son Blaine in the nursery and went home...
- when she got back to the church to retrieve Blaine – the nursery worker was there with a smile on her face and said – I knew you'd be back...
- those kinds of crazy things happen to parents...
- and you understand – families traveled to these kinds of feasts in caravans as families, or neighbors – and they did that for safety...but what transpired here is very easy to picture...

A. His parents thought He was with others in the caravan

- **Luke 2:44-45 - but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him.**
- and what happens next gives us significant insight into what it meant for Jesus to be the God man...because on the one hand...

B. He is sitting in the temple listening and asking questions.

- here's this 12 year old boy interacting with the teachers...
- **Luke 2:47 - And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.**

C. Mom is being...mom.

- she essentially scolds the Messiah...never a good idea...
- **Luke 2:48 - When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."**

- and of course Jesus wasn't purposely trying to irritate his parents or be disrespectful to them...
- but there certainly wasn't an instruction guide about how to raise the Messiah...

D. Jesus explains that He is the Son of God

Luke 2:49 - And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's *house*?"

- He was on a mission, and He even understood that at 12 years old...
- and it's interesting that the passage explains that He went home and submitted Himself to His parents as He continued to grow...
- but it also explains that...

Luke 2:51 – His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

- she had a lot to think about as well...