

The Christmas Story

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] Father, would you open this Christmas message to our hearts, as you open our hearts to your Christmas message, that we might show forth your praise not only with our lips, but in our lives.

In Christ's name we pray, amen. Let's be seated. Let's be seated.
Let's be seated.

It ends with shepherds returning, probably not even registering, but glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told to them.

They witnessed something unique. They worshipped someone holy. And so the Christmas story is Christ-centered. We can make it just about anything we want, and it tends to become quite us-centered.

[1 : 51] It focuses on what we do, and sometimes in really good ways. But ultimately, the Christmas story is the Christ event. In the end, our response to the coming of Christ is and can be like the shepherds, though we have a choice, as it has been told unto us.

And so we can praise and glorify the Lord for what we have heard, though we haven't seen it, according to what the Lord has told us. So let's attend to what God is telling us.

Though what he said, and through what he said and did, in order that we might praise and glorify him this Christmas day. And so you'll want to follow along with me either one of two places on page five, but for the most part, I'm going to focus on the opening scripture sentences that are on page two.

So maybe start on page two, but later you'll turn to page five. Three things I want to share with you that God does in this story. He induces joy. He brings birth, and he glorifies himself.

And so the first thing God does through the good news brought to the shepherds is to induce joy. After the shock of the angel of the Lord's appearance to the shepherds, a declaration, not a decree, is made to these nomadic non-entities, non-citizens.

[3 : 19] And the Lord's declaration is this. I bring you good news of great joy. You see, the Lord induces great joy with good news for the shepherds, and actually all people.

I don't know what brings you joy, but there is nothing like God-induced joy. Joy isn't the absence of insignificance or adversity, but he brings joy, induces joy in our life through circumstances.

And while none of us can compare vocationally to the shepherds, spiritually we are just like them. We all need a Savior, a Christ, a Messiah.

And our condition is utterly separated from God through sin. This birth announcement brought to the shepherds, and all sinners induces joy because what it does is addresses our greatest need. Now when you hear induce or induction, you might think reduction of waiting, or maybe the limitation of some pain at childbirth.

[4 : 29] The induction of joy with the birth of Christ doesn't, though, reduce the pain in our life, but it terminates the penalty of sin. The penalty of sin which builds this barrier between us and God.

And so this news isn't fake or fiction, but it invites us into faith of Christ. It doesn't deny or dismiss sin, but it admits it.

And just like natural birth that requires a delivery, our sin requires a deliverer, a Savior, Jesus of Bethlehem.

And this is the real joy inducer. God does this through Jesus Christ. And if that doesn't induce joy for you, then please tell me later what does for you.

But God does more than just induce joy. He gives birth. Now by that I don't mean that He's pregnant, but I mean that He's provident.

[5 : 34] God is responsible. He is sovereign for the conception, and He also is the one who designs delivery. And that may be shocking, but something more surprising is in this Christ-centered event.

This seems so obvious, but we can miss something amazing in these few verses of 8 and 9. The Lord told something subtle to the shepherds. I wonder if you noticed that. The angel announced to the shepherds, for unto you is born this day.

In verse 11. Did you catch that? In other words, God gives birth. That means He shares the birth. Now I thought the Savior was born to Mary and Joseph, and there's no doubt that He was.

But that's not all. The birth was also to the shepherds and the whole world. This birth reached further than this nuclear family. The birth of Jesus Christ, not only a Savior, or not even a Savior, but the Savior, graced the whole world because it was to everyone through Mary and Joseph. The Savior Lord came not only for us, and that's really significant, but to us and the shepherds. And anyone else who cares or not cares to listen.

[6 : 56] Now, just imagine with me for a second, a total stranger's coming to the bedside of your birth center at the hospital. Strangers of a low regard like shepherds.

And they come up and they say, well, this birth is not only for you, Mary and Joseph, but it's to us. The manger became a family beginning and builder like no other that first Christmas morning. Unto us a child is born. Unto us a Savior is given. That's the Lord's claim, and that's ours too. This is for us, and this is to us.

And so God reveals to these shepherds and shows us that it's only by grace that we come to this manger. It is only by grace that we can enter into this family of God.

Born to you is God's way of generating generations of worshipers. But why then? Why does God induce joy and give birth?

[8 : 06] Well, the answer is, as it always is, with respect to everything that God does, is to glorify himself. His motivation is always to demonstrate.

It's always to declare his gloriousness. God can't help but do this because a being that is all-knowing and all-powerful and all-loving just exudes glory and majesty and power when he acts. And he's always acting. He puts his brilliant light in the most piercing and convincing of ways to us. So three times we're actually told this in verses 9 and 14 and 20.

And there's lots of kind of threes this Christmas. Last night, if you were here, you knew there were three mangers. There were three registrations, three births. There are also three tolds.

There's also three sermons on this text. There was one at 5 and 8 and 10. And again, I thank you for coming at 10 o'clock again here this morning. This is an important, central, critical story.

[9 : 18] But this is what it's all about. This is the purpose. This is the response that we're called to. The glory of the Lord shone around in verse 19. Or sorry, verse 9. Verse 14, The multitude of heavenly hosts said, Glory to God in the highest.

And the shepherds returned to work. Note that. Not a temple, not a church. Not that I'm giving you permission not to come to church. But they returned to work. And what did they do? Glorifying God for all the packages that they received under the tree.

No, no. Glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and all that they had seen. Christmas is Christ-centered.

It's not about all we give and receive. But it's about the glory God gives and the glory that we return to Him. Which begins by taking to heart all that He tells us.

Christianity is taking the good news personally and glorifying God for what we have been told. And there's another three. The word told is used three times.

[10 : 28] Verse 17, 19, and 20. Christmas is good news told of a Savior. Who knows who the shepherds told? But they witnessed the truth and they returned to their cold mountainside.

Glorifying the Lord. But all said, all said and done, is it enough for us to turn and to glorify the Lord? Is that enough for us this Christmas? What about you? Are you satisfied with that? Is it enough to take God at His word and glorify Him for sending Himself?

Sending us a Savior? Do you need, do you really need anything more or anything else than to glorify the Lord for what He's told you?

I speak to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.