

## **Go, Tell!**

### **Luke 2:16-20**

Re-reading the conclusion of the Christmas story from Luke is intended to yank us back into Christmas. Just when we thought it was over – the stores have moved on to something else, most of our decorations have been put away, we have already made resolutions to drop the extra holiday pounds, students and teachers are at least thinking about getting ready for school to resume, holiday vacations are ending. But this passage should keep us from ending the Christmas story too early. It should keep us from placing the baby Jesus in the manger scene and then moving on. We need to go back in to the Christmas story at least one more time, after the hullabaloo has died down and all the participants have been enjoying the peace and quiet of having a newborn baby around. Just checking to see if you were listening. If our own experience is typical, I would say that the terms “peace and quiet” and “newborn baby” do not go together. The terms did not go together in the story of the birth of Jesus either, at least not for the shepherds in Luke’s telling of the story. The shepherds had had no peace and quiet since they had been terrified by the appearance of angels, announcing the birth of the Messiah. So they ran to Bethlehem to see for themselves.

### **READ Luke 2:16-20**

It is worth returning to the Christmas story just for this – just for the reaction of the shepherds to what they had experienced. They spread the word. They glorified and praised God for this experience of His presence. Luke is really specific in his language here; the shepherds were not running around saying “Look what happened to me”, they were glorifying and praising God – a great reminder to us that our experiences of God are not about us, they are about God acting in the world and in the lives of His people. It made no difference to these shepherds that they were at the bottom rung of the cultural and societal ladder. They were not prophets or priests or royalty; they were likely not formally educated at all. It did not matter to these shepherds that their story seemed fantastic – that people would wonder out loud if they had been out in the fields too long. Angels? The Messiah? The Messiah born in a stable? No matter to these guys. They

knew what they had seen and heard. They had a story to tell, and inconveniences like their social status and a hard-to-believe story would not slow them down. They had experienced God, and they had to tell somebody.

As always, we focused through Advent on themes of anticipation and expectation – anticipating and expecting the coming of the Messiah as the baby Jesus. We build on the fulfillment of God’s promise that the first coming represented, as we anticipate and expect the fulfillment of His promise to come again in final victory. But in the meantime, in between those promises, we live in the experience of the fulfillment of His promise to be with us always as the risen Christ. Christ has come. Christ will come again. But right now, for each one of us, Christ is present and saving us now. That is a great story!

While we will not ever discard the themes of anticipation and expectation – because we will always be anticipating and expecting the coming again of Christ – we should have a continuous and permanent emphasis, and a lot of time and effort, on doing what the shepherds did – telling the story. As we work through the Gospel story of the life and ministry of Jesus, we will see many other examples recorded in the Bible and Christian history of people who experienced God and told the story. The woman at the well, who experienced Jesus and went back and converted her town. People Jesus healed, who ran and leapt and shouted His praises. The apostles, who lit a fire of the Gospel that spread to the entire known world. That list goes on and on. All those stories matter because they were told, and because they meant something to the people who heard them. If the shepherds had just visited the baby Jesus and gone back to the fields, we might not have ever heard of them. If they had not spread the word, and glorified and praised God for what they had experienced, who would have told the story? They were messengers of truth and grace into a world that needed both, and had no idea that it needed it from a bunch of smelly shepherds. These guys were spiritual heroes – ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

If you haven’t guessed, the application of all this to us is that we have a story to tell. It is not just the story of a baby in a manger. It is not just the story of the resurrection of Christ. It is all that, to be sure, but the story we have to tell is the story of

our personal experience of God. When the shepherds went back to their homes and fields and villages, they did not go back with scrolls of Scripture and complicated interpretations of the law. They went back praising God for what they had heard and seen and experienced. Some may have challenged them. Can you imagine a Pharisee confronting one of these shepherds with some interpretation of prophesy that said they could not possibly have seen the Messiah? Can you imagine the shepherd saying “Well, I don’t know about all that, but I do know about this. Let me tell you about the angels and the baby and His little family. I know about this, because I was there.” My friend Steven Gregg has a tee-shirt that on the front says “How do I know God is real?”, and on the back it says “Because I was there when He saved my life.” That’s the story the world needs to hear. Do you think our world is somehow in less need of a message of truth and grace and salvation than the world of the shepherds? We each have a story to tell – a story that we know perfectly because we were there when it happened. It may not be dramatic or polished or ready for Hollywood, but it is real. There is enough drama and slick presentation and questionable stuff out there – what the world needs is more shepherds praising God and telling the story about how their experience of God changed their lives. We should never hesitate to tell the story because it is about God, not us. We are obviously important characters in our own story, but it is not about us. Grace and promise are God’s initiative. We should be like the shepherds with our story – unable to contain it. We should be bursting with the need to tell the story of our experience of God, in a way, like the shepherds, that glorifies and praises God. I could not tell the shepherd’s story, and I can’t tell yours. Nobody else can.

It is in the telling of that story – that story of God changing lives and saving souls – changing my life, saving my soul, changing your life, saving your soul, that the world will come to God, one person at a time. Wise men still seek Him, and shepherds telling their story will lead them to Him. Go, and tell.

AMEN.