

Responses to the Birth of Jesus

A friend of mine was talking to me this past week about Hallmark movies. And in most episodes you have a girl and a guy or a kid, and they are all trying to decide what “Christmas” means to them. Well, we KNOW the meaning. It is called CHRISTmas! It is about Christ. As we get ready to gather with family and friends and eat and give gifts, we KNOW the meaning of Christmas. With this in mind, I want to spend a few minutes today considering some responses to the birth of Jesus. Though there are many, I have four: 1) Praise; 2) Thanksgiving; 3) Prophecy; and 4) Proclamation. With each one, I will read part of the story from Luke and a little from Matthew and give some explanation. And then for our application I want us to respond as we read the Word together.

1. Praise. In both Matthew and Luke, this is the most common reaction to the birth of Christ. In Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth, we see this first with the angel and the heavenly hosts. In Luke 2:8-14 we read: **“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And 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 then, the shepherds, without delay and much haste, went to the city of Bethlehem (City of David) and saw for themselves this baby, the only ONE who was Lord at his birth. And after seeing him they left with great praise. In Luke 1:15-20 we read: **“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. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”**”

Today, we praise God for the giving of his Son. For in the Son, ALL God’s blessings are found. Let’s apply this truth as we read together from Ephesians 1:3-14.

Pastor: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Congregation: In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom

and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Pastor: In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Congregation: In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

2. **Thanksgiving.** We see this in Luke 2 with a very old woman. In fact, she has been a widow for 84 years. She is a prophetess from the Tribe of Asher. She is one of the remnant of Israel, waiting for the promise of God's Messiah. And the very day Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple for his dedication, God, in his great providence and care for this very old woman of faith, brought her to the Temple at the same time. And her reaction to this event is one of thanksgiving. In vv. 36-38 we read: **"And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem."** Today, we give thanks to God for the giving of the Son. We give thanks for all his blessings! Let's respond with reading from the Word!

Pastor: I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly (Ps. 52:9).

Congregation: We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds (Ps. 75:1).

Pastor: I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Congregation: The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:12-17).

Pastor: Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Col 2:6).

Congregation: **Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving** (Eph. 5:4).

Pastor: **Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God** (Phil. 4:6).

3. Prophecy. Also in Luke 2 we see another response while Jesus was presented at the Temple. This time it was from a man named Simeon. V. 25 says he was a righteous and devout man. And he was **“waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”** In vv. 26-26 we read: **“And it had been revealed to him but the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”** Here we see one of the faithful “remnant” spoken of by Isaiah the other prophets. And then v. 27 ff. says, **“And he came into the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.’”** In this response we certainly see praise and thanksgiving. But, we also see a prophecy about this infant. As Mary and Joseph were marveling at the words of this man for their newborn (v. 33), Simeon gives a prophecy to the parents saying in vv. 34-35: **“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”** Today, as we look back upon the life of Christ, we see the clear truth from these words. First with Mary as she stood by the cross as a **“sword pierced through her own soul.”** Also, many in Israel (most) in Jesus’ day rejected him. But, there were also some who worshiped and followed him as we do here today. There are only two kinds of people in the world: those who worship him and those who do not; those who follow him and those who do not; those who love him as their Lord and King and those who do not. And this prophet Simeon was simply stating this truth.

Let’s respond with some familiar prophecies in the OT and then apply this with a warning to all who hear as we consider our own hearts toward Jesus. First, some prophecies.

Pastor: **The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone . . . For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** (Is. 9:2, 6).

Congregation: **Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.** (Is. 9:7)

Pastor: **But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days** (Micah 5:2).

Congregation: **Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zech. 9:9).**

Now, let's turn our attention to the warning of those who do not listen to the Words of these many prophecies, even after the cross and resurrection of our Lord. (Heb. 4:1-13)

Pastor: **Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."**

Congregation: **For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest,"" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest."**

Pastor: **Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."**

Congregation: **Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:1-13).**

4. Proclamation. We see this first with the shepherds in Luke 2:17-18: **"And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them."** We see this also with the angels as they say in 2:14: **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!** As Christians today, our most practical command comes from the Lord Jesus who says, **"As you go make disciples . . ."** We cannot make disciples without the proclamation of the Word of God, the good news of the gospel. And what is the good news of the Gospel? At the end of the day, it is Christ Himself we proclaim! There are many benefits, but none of the good things we receive from God come outside of Christ. ALL God's promises, ALL God's blessings, EVERY hope we have in this world comes to us because of and through Jesus Christ!

Let's respond with the reading of the Word.

Pastor: **For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all,**

bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Congregation: How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

Pastor: As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”

Congregation: So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:11-17).

Let us finish this morning with the proclamation of the angels, the elders, and the four living creations as they fell on their faces and worshipped around the throne of God.

Pastor: After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Congregation: And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen (Rev. 7:9-12).

May these responses and the reading of the Word of God bless us this Christmas season as we remember the Lord Jesus and his Gospel! Let's conclude with singing!