

Preparing and Responding to the Incarnation

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Introduction

This is the Month we celebrate the Incarnation — God coming to earth in the form of man — Jesus. Today we will take a look at our own hearts, our own families, and really ask the question, “How will we prepare and respond to the Incarnation”?

TODAY— *we will look at three parts of the Christmas story and see three pictures of how people prepared and responded to the coming King*

The shepherds responded and proclaimed!

- **Luke 2:8-9**

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

- normal folks like you and me
- in their routine, doing their job

Application — *sometimes God will intersect our “normal business” with the miraculous!*

- **Luke 2:10-11**

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. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

- “good tidings of great joy” — the same Greek word that translates the “Gospel”!
- the Incarnation *relieves* fear; brings peace and comfort
- the Incarnation *brings* the Gospel to all people

- **Luke 2:13-14**

And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!"

- God is excited about us! The language sounds like all of heaven has been waiting, and today’s the Big Day!
- If you don’t hear anything else today, hear this — God is excited about YOU!

- **Luke 2:15-17**

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." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.

- they experienced the Incarnation because they went to seek Him
- they listened to what God told them and responded

Application — *these are normal guys, that heard from a big God. If they can do it, we can do it! That's where we start, we listen for God and respond!*

Then what happened?

- They shared the incarnation, they shared the Gospel
- Whether this is a new idea or a lifelong practice, today God is speaking, (Hebrews 1 — in the past through prophets, and now through His son, Jesus!!) So we need to listen, and prepare to respond!

The Religious leaders — only a couple saw Him

- **Luke 2:22**

Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.

- it was tradition on the eighth day of a child's life that he be taken to the Temple and be dedicated to the LORD, according to the Law of Moses
- this is talked about in Exodus 13, it's a part of Jewish culture for newborns to be brought to the temple
- the Temple had multiple layers of leadership in Jerusalem — the Levites, the ordinary priest, the chief priest, and the High Priest. It was hierarchical; in ascending order, each had more authority and responsibility. There were hundreds, and at some times, depending on the occasion, thousands of Jewish leaders at the Temple!

Truth — *They knew the Messiah was coming. They knew where He was going to be born. THEY KNEW! What did they do? Nothing. We know they knew, because two years later when the Magi came, they were quickly able to tell Herod where the boy was to be born! Bethlehem is only six miles away from Jerusalem.*

- **Matthew 2:3-6**

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 'BUT YOU, BETHLEHEM, IN THE LAND OF JUDAH, ARE NOT THE LEAST AMONG THE RULERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.' "

- Most ignored it, they doubted it. They were so busy doing their jobs and being busy that they missed the most miraculous intersection of heaven and earth ever!

Application — *If we are not on the lookout we will miss it, even in the church — however let's look at the two people who did see Him, and see what we can learn!*

- **Luke 2:25-35**

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by 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 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel." And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.

- *What was Simeon's preparation? verse 25:* He was just, devout, patient, full of the Spirit
- *What did that preparation produce? verses 29 and 32 tell us:*
 - **peace** — in the midst of the craziness of the season, God's presence will bring you peace
 - **light** — the ability to see who He is, the revelation and glory of God's people become clear in the incarnation

- **Luke 2:36-38**

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

- *What were Anna's preparations? committed, fasting, prayers*
- *What did that incarnation produce?*
 - her faithfulness for all these years was fulfilled when she saw Jesus
 - it produced *gratitude* in her, verse 38 — which we heard about last week!
 - drove her to share that good news
 - Do you know someone in need this season? Jesus brings hope for them!

Truth — *our second example shows us that many in the business of the temple missed the main thing, but two received the blessing, because they prepared and responded*

The wise men brought gifts and adored Him!

- **Matthew 2:1-2**

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

Preparation: they were *watching* and they *responded* to it; they traveled a very far distance on their trip of faith!

Observation: What are we watching for? What are we really focused on? There is no shortage of distractions or lack of competition for our attention this holiday season. But if we can shift our focus in the right direction, we have a chance to see the miraculous happen!

- **Matthew 2:11**

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Observation: they responded with worship and giving!

- **Gold** — the metal of Kings, Jesus is the King of Kings
- **Frankincense** — frankincense is a Temple fragrance, symbolizing Jesus is our High priest
- **Myrrh** — is a common spice used to anoint a body for burial; Jesus was born to show us how to live and to die, to set us free!

- these gifts are about what Jesus gives to us!
- the Wisemen found what they were looking for! They traveled many miles on an uncertain journey — and they GOT it!
- when we look for and respond to God, he will give us what we are looking for!

Church...

There is a resounding need through each of these stories, to prepare and respond to the incarnation — whether it was through the angelic host, committed fasting and praying, or following the stars themselves. We also have to orient our lives to see Jesus, then we need to respond. Imagine what the Shepherds would have missed if they had not left the field! Imagine what the Magi would have missed if they had never taken that journey! Imagine what Anna never would have seen, if she had not been watching! We can spend this month getting caught up in the crazy — our we can get devoted to seeing God — that would change everything.

Discussion Questions

1. Was that a new concept for you, that the words “bringing good tidings” actually mean bringing “the gospel”? How does that affect your understanding of this story?
2. After the shepherds listened to the “gospel,” responded by going to see the Christ child, what did they do next? What does this mean to you?
3. How was Simeon prepared to recognize Jesus? Are these attributes you have?
4. How was Anna ready to know Him in an instant? Do you practice these same things?
5. How did the wise men immediately respond to Jesus? Is this your daily response?
6. Do you know individuals who needs peace, hope, and joy — Jesus — in their lives?