

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Part 3: Worshiping | Luke 2:1-20

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Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

If you're new to our church or been away for some time, we're glad that you're here today.

We're in the middle of our four-part Advent sermon series called "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," where we've been unpacking the ways we can anticipate Jesus' advent (or coming) this Christmas season by wondering, welcoming, worshiping, and waiting.

- Two weeks ago, we looked at "Wondering."
- Last week, we looked at "Welcoming."
- Today, we'll look at "Worshiping."
- And next week, we'll close out our series by looking at "Waiting."

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Worshiping."

Sermon Introduction

Kyle Martin was the 2019 valedictorian of The King's Academy, meaning that he graduated at the top of his class. But listen to what he said in his graduation speech.

I stand before you tonight as the 2019 valedictorian. This time last year, I found out that I was in the running for this title. **It was then that I decided that I wanted it, so I worked hard for it, I sacrificed for it, and yes, I stressed for it—and I got it!**

And at our senior awards ceremony, it felt *so good* when I heard my name announced for this title—so good...*for about 15 seconds*. 15 seconds of my heart racing and my adrenaline pumping. 15 seconds of "Yeah, I won!" 15 seconds of being at the top of the pile of all my accomplishments. And it felt euphoric.

But there must come a 16th second, and on that 16th second, I sat down in my seat, I looked at my silver stole that says "valedictorian," and I thought, **"That's it? What just happened? Why am I not feeling anything else?"** To be honest, I don't even know what I was expecting. A parade of balloons to drop? Or maybe I was hoping that all of my problems would fade away in comparison to this amazing achievement? But none of that happened. Not even in my heart. I felt nothing. I was shocked.¹

I think we've all experienced moments like that in different areas of our lives. We had some grandiose expectation for what something would be like, only to think to ourselves afterwards, "That's it?"

This phenomenon can be described in a lot of different ways, but in a word, it can be described as "worship."

The best and simplest definition I've heard for what worship is in general is that "Worship is our response to what we value most."²

¹ Kyle Martin, "Brutally Honest Valedictorian Regrets Being Top of the Class," May 31, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T76FdtKreNQ>.

² Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe: Worship as a Way of Life* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Multnomah, 2003), 2.

Another way of saying that is: “Whatever is worth most to you is what you worship.”

As one author says, what you worship is “whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, ‘If I have *that*, *then* I’ll feel my life has meaning, *then* I’ll know I have value, *then* I’ll feel significant and secure.’”³

For Kyle, in his heart of hearts, he wanted to be valedictorian—he wanted to be at the top of his class—so he worked hard for it, sacrificed for it, and stressed for it.

For us, perhaps that’s comfort, control, money, beauty, power, intellect, security, status, approval, pleasure, people, or something else.

Understood this way, you could say that all a human being ever does is worship because we’re all living *for* something and we’re all driven *by* something; all our thoughts, desires, choices, actions, and words are all *responses* to what we value most.

So if we all worship something, the most natural question to ask is, “Is what I’m worshipping worthy of my worship?”

That’s what we’ll be looking at more in today’s passage.

The One Thing

Worship the only God who is worthy of our worship.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 2:1-20.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today’s passage.

So the birth of Jesus was already foretold by the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary—how she will conceive a son by the Holy Spirit, and how he will be called Son of the Most High, and how he will reign as king over his people forever (1:26-38).

And now we’ll see the events surrounding Jesus’ actual birth and how that affected different people present that first Christmas.

So that’s where we are in today’s passage.

Scripture Introduction

So let’s read Luke 2:1-20.

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,

³ Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Penguin, 2009), xx.

and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This is God’s Word.

Overview

We’ll at this passage in three parts. In the first two points, we’ll look at two reasons to worship the only God who is worthy of worship, and then in the final point, we’ll look at two expressions (or responses) of worship to the only God who is worthy of worship.

- I. Worship the only God who sovereignly humbled himself (vv. 1-7)
- II. Worship the only God who brings peace (vv. 8-14)
- III. Worship the only God by testifying and treasuring (vv. 15-20)

I. Worship the only God who sovereignly humbled himself (vv. 1-7)

Verses 1-3 say this:

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

Caesar Augustus was the most powerful person in the world at the time. His real name was Octavian. He was the son of Julius Caesar’s nephew and he united Rome after defeating Mark Antony and Cleopatra. He was given the name “Augustus” which means “holy” or “revered” and, at the time, that title was only reserved for the gods. In fact, he was called son of Zeus and “savior of the whole world.”⁴

So here, we see Caesar Augustus, the most powerful person in the world, flexing his so-called “sovereign” power by issuing a decree that “all the world should be registered.” This was essentially a census for tax purposes, where everyone had to move throughout the Roman empire to be registered, and this was only to burden the people with taxes for Caesar’s sake.⁵

So in these verses, it *appears* that Caesar Augustus is sovereign over all the world. He issues a decree and the whole world moves.

But is Caesar *really* the sovereign one here? Let’s keep reading.

⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015); R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 58.

⁵ Joel B. Green (*The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997], 136) explains that there were only two reasons censuses were taken—either for tax purposes or for military service. Since the Jews were exempt from military service, this census was taken for tax purposes.

Verses 4-5 say:

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

It may not be readily apparent, but I want us to see here that *God* is the only true sovereign One—not Caesar.

Let's first take a step back first and ask the question: What does it mean for God to be sovereign?

According to the Bible, for God to be sovereign means that he declares the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:9-10); he works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11); he is in absolute control from the big picture to the little details and everything in between. In other words, what God wills *will* happen.

So the next important question is: What has God willed that must happen?

Throughout Scripture, God had been communicating his plan of salvation for sinners. At the Fall, we find out that God's salvation plan centers on one person—there will be a man born from a woman who will end the curse of sin (Gen. 3:15). As we continue to read Scripture, we find out that this one man will be from Abraham's family (Gen. 12:1-7), will come from the nation of Israel (Exod. 19:4-6), will come from the line of King David (2 Sam. 7:10-16), will be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22-23), will be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:4-6), and so much more! And this one man that God's whole plan of salvation centers on is known as the *Christ* or the Messiah, which means "anointed one" (cf. Isa. 11:2; Matt. 3:16).

Now I want to focus for a moment on the fact that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem.

Matthew 2:4-6 = ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he [King Herod] inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

So anyone reading the Scriptures would have known that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem.

But now we can begin to see a problem: Mary is pregnant with Jesus the Christ, but she is living in Nazareth, so how is God going to get Jesus to be born in Bethlehem?

Well, to begin with, God could have chosen a different virgin woman who was already living in Bethlehem and betrothed to someone from the line of David (as Joseph was). That would've made things a lot easier for God.

Or God could have made Joseph and Mary take a personal private trip to Bethlehem to visit Joseph's relatives there. That also would've solved the problem in a relatively simple way.

But that's not what God does.

[¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.]

Instead, God *sovereignly decrees* that a decree should go out from Caesar Augustus that *all the Roman world* should be registered in a census (cf. Prov. 21:1; Ezra 1:1; 6:14; Neh. 2:8).

Caesar *thought* he was exercising his sovereignty, but ultimately *God* was exercising *his* sovereignty *through* Caesar's tax census.

Jesus *had* to be born in Bethlehem, so God sovereignly moves an *entire empire* to make sure that happens.

So *God* is truly sovereign; keep that in the back of your mind as we keep reading.

<pause>

Verses 6-7 say:

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Let's first look carefully at this passage to clarify the picture of the nativity scene of Jesus' birth that some of us may have.

First, it's probably not the case that Mary was having contractions on her way to Bethlehem and she frantically gives birth to Jesus as soon as she arrives to Bethlehem. It says, "And *while they were there*, the time came for her to give birth." So it seems like Joseph and Mary had enough time to get settled in Bethlehem, and then *while there*, the time came for Mary to give birth to Jesus.

Second, there's no mention of a stable and it's unlikely that Joseph and Mary would have stayed in a stable for the duration of their time in Bethlehem. Rather, remember that Bethlehem was Joseph's hometown, and he would have most likely stayed with his relatives there. The word translated as "inn" here could also be translated as "guest room," which is what the ESV footnotes. The only other time this word is used in the Gospels is for the guest room in which Jesus held his Last Supper (Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11). There's actually *another* word typically used for the word "inn" that Luke is well aware of because the only other time it appears in the Gospels is in *his* account in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:34).

<Show [palestinianvillagehome.png](#)>



So Joseph and Mary probably were not staying in a stable with only animals surrounding them. Rather, they were likely staying as normal guests in one of Joseph's relatives' homes. But because of the census, perhaps there was a closer relative staying in the guest room, so they needed to stay in the family living area, which would've been connected to a space for the family's animals, typically separated by a half-wall.⁶ So when Jesus was born, the manger (or the animal feeding trough) was available for them to place him in.

So that clarifies the picture of the nativity scene, but these accommodations were *still* not comfortable by any means.

How many mothers here could ever imagine delivering their first child in this way?

No hospital bed. No doctors or nurses. But in a cramped house with extended family members in the other rooms. In a living area with surrounding animals that you can see and smell. And after the exhaustion of delivering your first child, you yourself are trying to wipe clean your baby covered in blood and wrap him in swaddling strips of cloths.⁷ And to top off your first delivery experience, you then place your wrapped newborn child in a stinky and dirty animal feeding trough.

No mother would ever wish this upon themselves or anyone else.

And in light of what we read in the first five verses, this almost doesn't make any sense. If God *sovereignly* moved an empire to move Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, in order that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem according to his Word, couldn't he have *sovereignly* provided better accommodations for the Christ to be born?

But that's the wrong question. The question is not what God *could* have done, but what he *willed* to be done.⁸ In other words, this was no accident, but God *sovereignly chose* to humble himself—even in the incarnation. Speaking of Jesus...

Philippians 2:6-8 (NLT) = ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Jesus as God the Son *chose* to humble himself not just in his *crucifixion*, but it all began with his *incarnation*. He did not come wrapped in the glory that was eternally his, but he came wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a feeding trough. And every day afterwards would be a continual humbling of himself until he would hang naked and alone on a cross, despised and shamed, bearing the full penalty of all his people's sins.

Now why would God do that? Why would he *sovereignly choose* to humble himself—to subject himself to such humiliation from his birth all the way to his death?

The Bible says that, in some sense, he did it for *our* sake. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet *for your sake* he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

<pause>

Just think about this for a moment. The God of the universe used his absolute sovereignty over all of creation to *humble* himself for *your* sake—"so that *you* by *his* poverty might become rich."

So that *we* may have an inheritance—*his* inheritance—that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us (2 Pet. 1:4). "So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable *riches* of his *grace* in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7).

⁶ R. T. France, *Luke*, TICS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 32-33; Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 31; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

⁷ Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008), 74.

⁸ John Piper, *Good News of Great Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 37.

The word “grace” has been described as an acronym, G-R-A-C-E: “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.”

Just think about how radically different is the way that *God* uses his sovereignty and how *Caesar Augustus* used his sovereignty.

Caesar used his “sovereignty” to make himself richer by burdening his people with heavy taxes. But *God* used his sovereignty to make himself poor in every sense in order to make his people rich in every sense—salvation from sins *now* and inheriting the new heavens and new earth *later*.

Caesar sovereignly moved an entire empire so that he would live more lavishly. But *God* sovereignly moved an entire empire so that he would be born in an animal feeding trough.

Caesar used his sovereignty to *take* what he needed from his people. But *God* used his sovereignty to *give* his people what they needed.

Caesar used his sovereignty to *exalt* himself. But *God* used his sovereignty to *humble* himself.

I can assure you that no other god does this for you. Every other god is like Caesar who *takes* from his people to *exalt* himself. Whether you’re pursuing the god of comfort, control, power, security, approval, or something else, it will *take* and *take* and *take* from you before it finally destroys you.

But God used his sovereignty to humble himself in his birth all the way to his death, so that he could *give* and *give* and *give* to us, so that we “may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

<pause>

Now if you’re a believer in Jesus Christ, does your life *show* that you worship the God who humbled himself? In the ways that you treat people, do you look more like Caesar Augustus or Jesus Christ?

We *become* what we *worship* (2 Kings 17:15; Jer. 2:5; 2 Cor. 3:18). What we *behold* is what we *become*.

If you worship the Caesars of this world—or any other counterfeit god—you will *take* from others to *exalt* yourself. But if you worship Jesus Christ, you will “in humility count others more significant than yourselves” and “look not only to [your] own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

In the home, are you serving your family—or are you waiting to be served?

In the workplace, are you humbling yourself to serve your co-workers, company, and community—or are you only in your workplace for what’s in it for you?

In the church, are you intentionally giving yourself to befriend and help others to follow Christ—or are you consumed with yourself and how the church should serve you better?

If we worship the God who humbled himself, then “a servant is not greater than his master” (John 13:16). Our service to others should reflect the same humility that we worship our God for.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we do not *live to get*, but like the God we worship, we *die to give*.

<pause>

So first, worship the only God who sovereignly humbled himself for our sake, and second...

II. Worship the only God who brings peace (vv. 8-14)

Verses 8-9 say this:

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ 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.

So a group of nearby shepherds are tending to their work at night, and then an angel of the Lord appears to them. But *with* the angel also appears the *glory* of the Lord as *light* shining around them. In another part of Scripture, a similar light is described as “a light from heaven, brighter than the sun” (Acts 26:13), so perhaps that’s what these shepherds were experiencing—amidst the darkness of night, they’re suddenly surrounded by “a light from heaven, brighter than the sun.” And surrounded by the radiant *glory* of the Lord, they *knew* that they were in the Lord’s presence (v. 15), and so they are *rightly* filled with great fear.

In *every* instance in the Bible that I can think of, when someone recognizes that they are before the presence of the holy God, they are *afraid*. Moses was afraid before the burning bush (Exod. 3:6), Isaiah cried out “Woe is me!” or “I am ruined” when he recognizes his sin before God’s holiness (Isa. 6:5), Peter was afraid and fell down on his knees and pretty much says the same thing when he recognizes who Jesus is (Luke 5:8, 10), and John was also afraid and said he fell down as though he was dead when he was in the presence of God (Rev. 1:17-18). In *every* instance, when sinners recognize that they stand before a holy God, they are *rightly* filled with great fear.

No matter who you are, when you stand face-to-face before the holy God one day, I *guarantee* that you will recognize that you are a sinner who deserves his wrath. No exceptions.

But verse 10 then says:

¹⁰ 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.

So the shepherds are filled with *great fear* but the angel says to them, “Fear not.”

Let me just comment on a common misconception. It’s been said that the most frequent command in the Bible is to “fear not” or “do not be afraid,” and therefore, to be afraid or to worry or to be anxious is sinful.

But let me just say that the *tone* of how “fear not” is said makes all the difference on whether it’s a *command* or a *comfort*. When my wife and I put our kids to bed each night, we turn off the lights, we pray for them, and we kiss them goodnight, but right before I walk out of the room, one of my sons says to me, “Daddy, I’m very very very very very scared.” And I respond to him, “Don’t be afraid. Mommy and daddy will be right outside.” My words are meant to *comfort* my son who is afraid, not to *command* him not to be afraid, and the difference is heard in my *tone*.⁹

So here, the angel of the Lord is *not* saying, “What’s wrong with you shepherds? Why are you afraid?” Rather, they’re *legitimately* afraid as sinners before a holy God, and so God *comforts* them with these words, “Fear not.”

But he also gives the *reason*: “for [or because], behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” In other words, “Don’t be afraid because I’ve come to bring you great *joy*—not great *fear*.”

And what’s the *source* of that great joy? What’s the *foundation* for their great joy? “Good news.”

And what *exactly* is the “good news”?

Verse 11 says:

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The “good news” is that a baby has been born today, and he is Savior, Christ, and Lord.

⁹ Alasdair Groves, “Even in Our Anxiety, God is in Control,” TGC Podcast, September 24, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/tgc-podcast/even-in-our-anxiety-god-is-in-control/>.

There are only two times in the entire gospel account of Luke that the word “Savior” is used. Here where *Jesus* is called “Savior” and in the previous chapter where Mary says that her spirit rejoices in “*God* my Savior” (1:47).¹⁰ So *Jesus* is called Savior and *God* is called Savior, and since there is only *one* Savior (Acts 4:12), Luke recognizes that *Jesus* is *God* the Savior, just like he is also *God* the Lord.¹¹

And how *exactly* is he Savior? What *exactly* will he save people from?

Matthew 1:21 = She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for **he will save his people from their sins.**”

The very *reason* for the shepherds to be filled with great fear—that the holy God should judge them for their sins—is the very thing that Jesus will *take away*. He *himself* will bear his people’s sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By *his* wounds, we are *healed*; by *his* wounds, we are *saved* from our sin (1 Pet. 2:24). That’s why Jesus being born is “good news of great joy.”

But how will the shepherds know that the Savior, Christ, and Lord has been born? How can they be sure that all of this is true?

Verse 12 says:

¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

It wouldn’t have been strange to find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths; that was normal. But I’m sure there was no other baby that was lying in an animal feeding trough.

I’m sure *tons* of questions began to fill the shepherds’ minds: “Wait, did you just say the Savior, Christ, and Lord will be ‘lying in a *manger*’—in an animal feeding trough? Did we just hear that right?”

But before they can even *begin* to ask questions...

Verses 13-14 say:

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Now it’s no longer just *one* angel of the Lord there, but “a *multitude* of the heavenly host,” probably too many to count (cf. Rev. 7:9). And the word “host” is best understood as “army.”

So it’s not just the radiant *glory* of the Lord shining around them anymore, but there is an entire *army* of angels surrounding them—and these wouldn’t be angels with *harps* in their hands but angels with *swords* in their hands (Josh. 5:12) and perhaps with “horses and chariots of fire” as we see elsewhere in Scripture (2 Kings 6:17).

If the angel of the Lord didn’t first comfort them by saying, “Fear not,” I think this would have been a *terrifying* sight. But what’s ironically comforting is that this vast army of angels is not here to declare *war* but to pronounce *peace*.¹²

But this peace is not *automatically* applied to *everyone* on earth, but only “among those with whom [God] is pleased.”

¹⁰ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

¹¹ Leon L. Morris (*Luke*, TNTC [Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008], 69) notes that the word “Lord” is used to refer to God 25 times in the first two chapters of Luke’s gospel account.

¹² Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008), 75.

So the most fundamental question here is, “Who are the ones with whom God is pleased?” How can we know that *we* are the ones with whom God is pleased?

Hebrews 11:6 = And **without faith it is impossible to please him**, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

So peace is only experienced by those who *believe* in him—who believe his Word and who believe the Christ to whom his Word testifies.

If we *believe* that Jesus is the God who humbled himself to be born in a manger, to be our substitute, to live the perfect life we could not live, to die to take the penalty that our sin deserves, and to resurrect to give us new and eternal life, then we can experience this *peace* that God provides.

So what *exactly* is this peace? When God talks about peace, what does he mean?

This peace is what the Jews would call *shalom*. It’s not just peace as in the absence of conflict, but it’s a *wholeness* and *flourishing* that occurs when man is in right relationship with God, with himself, with other people, and with nature. It’s an all-encompassing peace.

But because of sin, that peace—that *shalom*—has been torn apart.

Tim Keller, author of *Generous Justice*, writes this:

Sin entered the world to deface and mar everything that had been made. Because we became estranged from *God*, we also are alienated from our true *selves*, and from *each other*. Our primal self-absorption has led to profound *social* evil—to war, crime, family breakdowns, oppression, and injustice. When we lost our relationship with *God*, the whole world stopped “working right.” The world is filled with hunger, sickness, aging, and *physical* death. **Because our relationship with God has broken down, shalom is gone—spiritually, psychologically, socially, and physically.**¹³

But what sin *ruins*, Jesus came to *restore*. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus would first and foremost bring all those who believe in him into a forgiven and restored relationship with God. But from there, his peace (his *shalom*) would continue expanding to restore our relationships with ourselves, with other people, and with nature itself, culminating with the *full* restoration and consummation of *shalom* in the new heavens and new earth.

And he gives this peace—this *shalom*—purely by his *grace*. He does not give like the world gives, but God gives us peace as a *gift*, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (John 14:27; Eph. 2:8-9).

No amount of power can *demand* God’s peace from him. No amount of money can *buy* God’s peace from him. Rather, Jesus invites everyone and anyone, no matter who you are and no matter what you’ve done, to come to him and receive his peace *by grace*.

If you would only humble yourself to repent of your sins and believe in him, his peace—his *shalom*—is for you.

If you’re not a believer in Jesus Christ yet, I pray that you would respond to Jesus’ invitation today and put your faith in him—and begin to experience his peace for the very first time today.

And so, *because* those on earth who *believe* are given his peace—a peace that is given purely by God’s *grace*—the angels declare that *God* therefore is given glory in the *highest*, “for *from* him and *through* him and *to* him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

<pause>

¹³ Tim Keller, *Generous Justice* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 176-177.

Just think about how radically different this peace from God is from the *Pax Romana* (or Roman peace) that Caesar Augustus is credited for bringing to the Roman world.

*Caesar's "peace" was rooted in great fear. He had the most powerful army in the world and he used it to declare war and conquer all the cities of the known world. And so, his peace was externally enforced by military might; it was a fearful peace that beat any detractor into submission.*¹⁴

But *God's peace was rooted in great joy. He has the most powerful army in all the cosmos and he used it to declare peace to everyone who would believe in him throughout the earth. And so, God's peace was internally induced by God's grace; it was a joyful peace that invited any sinner into worship.*

Caesar Augustus was *not* the true Son of God or Savior, and so he could *not* bring true "good news" or true peace.

But Jesus Christ, the true Son of God and Savior, came to bring true "good news" and true peace that does not bring great *fear* but great *joy*!

<pause>

So for all of us, at this point, I think we need to ask ourselves again: Is what I'm worshiping *worthy* of my worship?

Is what you value most, is what you're living for, is what you're driven by *worth* giving your life to?

Scripture says that there is only *one* God who is *worthy* of our worship. He is the only God who sovereignly humbled himself for our sake. And he is the only God who brings peace (or *shalom*) to undeserving sinners like us.

Now if you're *convinced* that this is the only God worthy of our worship, then let's now turn to looking at two expressions (or responses) of worship.

III. Worship the only God by testifying and treasuring (vv. 15-20)

Verses 15-17 say this:

¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

So the army of angels leave and the shepherds quickly go into Bethlehem to look for the Savior, Christ, and Lord who has been born and is lying in an animal feeding trough—and they find him! And the shepherds start testifying about what the Lord told them concerning Jesus.

All this happens so fast and it's stated in such a matter-of-fact way. There's no slowing down. There's no dialogue recorded. Luke doesn't give us any of those details. But there's only *one* thing that's highlighted here—the fact that the shepherds *testified*.

And I think this is a great definition of testifying—"they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child." Basically, they spoke about how God's Word was true. They *heard* God's Word, they *believed* God's Word, they *confirmed* God's Word, and then they *testified* to God's Word.

And this was their expression of *worship*.

¹⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015); R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 58.

What the shepherds *valued most* was the “good news of great joy” that was declared to them; the Savior, Christ, and Lord wrapped in swaddling cloths right before their eyes; and the peace of God that this baby would bring to all those who believe.

That’s what they most valued and *that’s* what they responded to. They were *overjoyed* and out of the abundance of their hearts, their mouths *spoke* (Matt. 12:34; Luke 6:45).

Verses 18-19 then say this:

¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

“All who heard it” probably refers to other family members in the house that night and perhaps some of the neighbors who came by. And as they heard the testimony, it says that they “wondered.”

But “wondering” is not enough. In fact, throughout Jesus’ ministry, many people *wondered*; they marveled, they were astonished, they were amazed, but they did not necessarily *believe* (Luke 4:22; 8:25; 9:43; 11:14, 38; 20:26; 24:12, 41). They *see* something amazing, they *hear* something convicting, they *experience* something miraculous, but that’s still not *true faith*.

It’s not enough to just wonder or be amazed or to marvel, but we’re called to *believe*.

And I think that’s why verse 19 starts with “but.” The response of “all who heard it” is contrasted with the response of “Mary.” Mary is clearly understood to be a believer at this point in the text, so how *she* responds to the testimony of the shepherds highlights how *we* should also respond as believers.

“Wondering” is not enough. “But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”

She “treasured up” the testimony—she “treasured up” God’s Word—*trusting* that God *really* is true to his Word; he *really* has fulfilled his Word. *Everything* that he said about Jesus is *true*.

And she’s “pondering” them in her heart. That’s a *continual* thing. It’s not just in *that* moment, but she *treasures up* these things, *so that* she can *continue to ponder* these things *after* that night.

And this was her expression of *worship*.

Mary *treasured up* what she *valued most*. She *kept* thinking about those words—essentially God’s word about her son—*because* that’s what was *most* important to her. *God* was her treasure, and so she treasured up *his* words. She didn’t want to forget it, she didn’t want to assume it, and so she keeps it ever present in her mind, pondering it over and over again.

<pause>

Now what about us? Last week, we talked about speaking or *testifying* about how God our Savior is mercifully and personally at work in our lives. So let’s focus on *treasuring up* and *pondering* as worship for a moment.

What do you think about each day? What keeps you up at night? What do you treasure up and ponder?

Is it work? Is it relationships? Is it financial security? Is it people’s approval? Whatever it is, it’s probably a reflection of what you *worship*.

What *content* are you exposing yourself to? What are you allowing yourself to see and hear and experience that will continue to replay in your mind? Can we remember news and songs and movies better than God’s Word?

We simply cannot treasure up and ponder what we do not first *put into* our minds.

So just wanted to give a few practical suggestions for how we can put God's Word into us, so that we can treasure up and ponder it throughout our lives.

First, show up consistently to Sunday Celebration and LIFE Group week-in and week-out. In Sunday Celebration, we read the Word, hear the Word, pray the Word, sing the Word, and see the Word in the ordinances *together*. And in LIFE Group, we *continue* to treasure up and ponder God's Word *together*—to better understand and apply God's Word in our lives *together*.

Second, get on a Bible reading plan. Check out one of the suggested Bible reading plans on our church website and resolve to start a Bible reading plan as we begin 2022, and get a head start this week. There's no substitute for set-aside time in God's Word each day.

Third, pray through what you read in the Bible. After you read the passage that's from your daily Bible reading plan, don't just pray some other random thing, but pray in light of what you just read from God's Word. That's one of the best ways to treasure up and ponder God's Word.

Verse 20 then closes by saying:

²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

So after the shepherds finished testifying in the house, they went back to the fields to tend to their sheep, but they were "glorifying and praising God" the whole way back.

Mary treasured up and continued to ponder the "good news" long after that night. And for these shepherds, they couldn't contain themselves the whole way home.

That's a stark contrast with Kyle Martin, the high school valedictorian, who could only enjoy the "good news" of being top of his class for 15 seconds.

The "good news" of Jesus Christ produces "great joy" that *lasts*. The water that Jesus gives becomes in us a spring of water welling up to eternal life, where everyone who drinks of it will never be thirsty again (John 4:13-14).

So this Christmas, let's not just *wonder* in the moment and then forget, but let's drink *deep* of that well of "good news of great joy" once again. Let's testify to and treasure up the fact that the Savior, Christ, and Lord sovereignly humbled himself to bring peace to all those who believe in him. *That's* what Christmas is all about.

So believers in Jesus Christ, let me ask once again: Is the God we worship worthy of our worship?

As a church, may we always be able to say, "Absolutely yes, with our whole lives." Amen.

Life Application

I already shared some suggested applications for treasuring up and pondering God's Word in terms of showing up consistently to church gatherings, getting on a Bible reading plan, and praying through God's Word, so I'll just share one more suggested life application for this week.

This Christmas, spend set-aside time worshiping the only God who sovereignly humbled himself for our sake and who brings peace (or *shalom*) to undeserving sinners like us.

Before you open presents on Christmas morning, reflect on the "good news of great joy" that came on that first Christmas. *Testify* by reading aloud this Christmas narrative in Scripture with family and friends, and by singing songs that declare these amazing truths to one another. *Treasure up* and *ponder* the fact that the peace that God gave to us was God's Riches At Christ's Expense. And worship him! Join the shepherds and Mary that first Christmas by *worshiping* God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

That's what having a Merry Christmas is all about.

The One Thing

Worship the only God who is worthy of our worship.

Conclusion

Can we all stand?