

WHAT AFTER THE MANGER?

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Scripture: Luke 2: 15-20

We have all had a wonderful time celebrating Christmas – enjoying family time, good food, cakes, etc. But now that begs the question: What happens after? What's next? What happens after the manger?

Luke 2: 15-20

¹⁵So 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.” ¹⁶And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸And all those who heard it marvelled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”

Let's pray.

Father Lord, we thank You once again for this opportunity to be able to come together to hear from Your word. Father Lord, as we dwell on these words, we pray that You would speak to us, You would reveal Your heart and it would change us, that we would go back overflowing with Your Spirit and Your word. In Jesus' most precious name, we pray. Amen.

So, what after the manger? What happens now when we have finished with the celebrations, when the tree is tucked away, when the lights are brought down? What do we do?

Let's first look at what the shepherds did.

Luke 2:15 “They said, ‘Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass.’” There was a decision that was being made at that point. “Let us now go!” the angel had finished speaking. The glory had faded. The night had become dark once again. The shepherds were left with a choice. What was the choice? That they would choose to go.

Revelations of this kind will always leave us at a crossroad. It will require for us to make a decision. When we hear from God's truth or we hear something revealed, we need to make a decision. And the shepherds here made the choice of moving. “Let us now go.”

- **They chose obedience over convenience.** What was the convenience for them? It was tiring. It was nighttime. They had had a whole day of tending to the sheep. They had done their job. And suddenly out of the blue, the angel appeared. They were responsible for the livestock. They could have very well said: Let's take rest. Let us put the stocks back into the stables and then decide tomorrow, or let us go tomorrow. But they chose to say: Let us go now.

How many times we find ourselves doing something similar, where we try to put off a decision which requires an immediate action? How many times have we said: I'll pray about this seriously when this concern is over. I'll commit to this when things are better. Children also say: I'll do this after the show is over. Give me 5 more minutes. I'll do this later after

playing. All of this is disguised disobedience. What is being portrayed as delayed obedience is actually disguised disobedience. And the shepherds chose to act immediately.

- **They chose faith over familiarity.** What was familiar to them? The fields, the pastures where they tended the sheep every day was familiar ground. And suddenly they were told about this manger far away. They didn't know where it was, but they chose faith. How is it faith? Because they stepped away from what they could control into what they could only trust.

How often do we do that? How often we are so scared to step out of our comfort zones because we don't know what's happening on the other side. It's not familiar to us. But that is what spiritual growth is all about. Spiritual growth is when we stop asking the question: "What will this cost me?" and rather start asking, "What will I miss if I don't do this?"

The Bible is full of such verses:

2 Corinthians 5:7 "*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*" Do we do that? Do we choose to walk by faith? We want to see where we are going. We want to see what steps we are taking.

Romans 10:17 "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*"

Hebrews 11:1 "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, for the convictions of things not seen.*" It does not say conviction of things see; it says convictions of things not seen. And that's where faith steps in. Faith is where you do not know what your next step is going to bring you, but you still take it. And so they did that. They left their familiar ground and chose to move in faith.

- **They chose response over reflection.** They didn't start analyzing the message. They didn't say: Was this real? Was I delusional? Did I have a tiring day and just dream up the angel? They didn't debate theology. They did not look at the message that they heard by looking at what they had probably read in the scriptures. They believed and they moved.

And here's the thing. God never reveals truth to us for our information only. God reveals truth so that it transforms us, so that there is an action.

- **They chose togetherness over isolation.** I'm sure the oldest shepherd didn't tell the youngest guy: You go and find out what's happening, and let us know. Then we'll decide whether we all want to go or not. They all said, "Let us go."

And that's what church is all about. It's not a walk of individuality. It's not a walk in isolation. Spiritual decisions are stronger when it is taken in a community. The church is only as strong as its weakest one who's in faith. Each of us has that burden to build each other up in faith, stronger and together. And that's what we come into church for. In one of the messages I had preached quite some time back, I did not say that the church is for the sinners outside. It's for us – to build each other up. It's for us to edify each other. It's for us to become stronger together. Together we become stronger. Faith is never a solo journey. People in church walk together in obedience.

What is the key takeaway from here? Revelation will put you at a crossroad. Revelation will demand that you take a decision. And when that decision is demanded, it is not just an emotional response. There has to be a direction. There has to be an action.

An example I had once given is how we, on a ship, prepare for a passage. When we get orders to move from a particular port, we're moving to another place which is about 4,000 or 5,000 miles away. A considerable amount of time is spent in preparing for that. The navigating officer would

study the plan, would prepare the route, will look at all the charts, all the navigational information, all the data that he has available, and prepare a plan for the ship. And thereafter this plan is scrutinized by the captain. He will verify everything is in order, and he will then allow the plan to be executed.

So it is a four-step process:

- i. Appraisal of the passage,
- ii. Planning the passage,
- iii. Execution of the passage,
- iv. Monitoring.

What would monitoring do? It does not mean that now that we have done the first three parts so diligently, we go back to our rooms and we sleep till the time we reach the next port. It's monitoring on a daily basis. And one of the aspects of that monitoring is information in the way of warnings, alerts that would come to us anytime during the passage.

And these would be simple things like a military exercise happening along the same route, or piracy attacks that may have transpired, or oddly, a vessel grounding in the same area that we are intending to go. The ship's team does not at that time start analyzing that message. It does not start scrutinizing the authenticity of that message. It does not say that I prepared my plan better than what this report is supposed to be. There is an action, and it's immediate. The immediate action is altering the course where something has happened that demands an action. It's not emotional, it's not disguised in scrutiny. It is not debating. There is action with the direction.

That's what we, as believers, have. God will speak to us at the oddest time. we are not to sit down to start analyzing it; we are not to start debating it. If we know God has spoken, there is a response required. And that was what the shepherds did. The angels spoke, angels came with the word, and they responded with an action.

Moving on to v. 16. "They came with haste." It's very easy to misconstrue that word as speed, but that is not what we meant here. It's not about speed; it's about value. It's a language of importance. Their urgency, their need to move with haste, or coming to the manger with haste, revealed their hunger for God. They were not being dragged, they were not being pulled, they were not being pushed into Bethlehem. But they were being drawn towards what they had heard.

And that is what is important. When God becomes real, delay becomes absolutely impossible. There is not any scope for us to try and delay when God is calling. Spiritual hunger is the difference between people who just attend church for the purpose of checking off a list, or for actually pursuing Christ.

When you look at church as a place to check off as a 10:30 attendance in the morning, or you check it off by walking in at 11, 11:15 when the worship is over, and the message is halfway through, and you can say, "I went to church today," then that's not what's happening. That's not spiritual hunger. The thing is, when we start negotiating Jesus as an option, He is no longer Lord. he then becomes one of the options that we're looking for. He cannot be negotiated.

The shepherds did not look at the message and say, "Okay, let us check our schedules. Let us look at what's planned for tomorrow." They did not say that it's night, let's rest it out. Let's be fresh, let's be there with more new strength, and then let's move tomorrow. There were no negotiations. There was action. They said, "Let's do it now," and they moved with haste.

So, we also need to understand that there is no scope, there is no room to leave when it comes to Lord Jesus Christ. There is no possibility of having Him as an alternate. We have to hold Him as #1, and worship will always cost us something. It will always cost us the comfort of getting out of bed in the morning. now with the winter, it's really nice to cozy up into the blanket, but it's going to cost you to get out to get out of the blanket sooner than you want to. It will need you to start moving soon so that you are here at 10:30, because that's what is important.

God's here at 10:25. Know this! He's not going to be walking in a minute after the worship has started. He's here because He's longing for the presence of His children. That's the whole idea. If He's here on time, what's stopping us from being here at the same time? What's stopping us from putting Him as priority #1?

Another illustration from shipping: We usually have a drill every Saturday. It's on all the ships around the world – Saturday at 3 pm. Whatever time zone the ship is in, there will be a drill. What's not known is what type of drill it would be. It could be a life-saving drill, it could be a firefighting drill, or it could be any of the hundreds of emergencies that we practice for.

But even though it's such a repeated affair, it is such a repeated task, week after week, whenever that alarm sounds, and whichever alarm sounds. You have different alarms for different emergencies. Whatever type of alarm sounds, every individual on that ship will respond with the same haste, with the same speed that is required if it was actual. He does not say, "O, another drill! Let me finish my coffee." Or "Let me just go down and see what's happening," because that alarm sounds like something more significant at that point of time, and that is his life. but if he is a minute too late, the lifeboat's gone. These are people who are testing how to save their life.

What about us, when it's our eternal life which is at question? How can we be so callous, so easy-going with something as important as that? Speed is not that of panic or trying to get there fast; speed is about priority. You're putting God first.

Luke 2:17 tells us that the became witnesses. They made known abroad. Practically, if you look back at this, they were probably the first evangelists after Christmas, because they could not hold back what they had seen. They just had to tell everybody and everyone whom they met as to what they had seen. God could easily have chosen kings, scholars, and priests. There were plenty of them around doing a pretty neat job at what they were expected to do. But God chose ordinary people. He chose lowly shepherds.

Why is that? Because then, their world would have credibility. There was no vested interest, there was no need to manipulate the experience that they would have had. They just had to speak it out. They did not receive a command to preach. They were not told by the angel that you're going to see this and thereafter, you're going to start talking to the world from the pulpit. No, they were told to just speak about what they had experienced.

Apart from that, it was impossible for them to keep quiet. When something like seeing the Son of God happens to you, it's just impossible to keep it private. What's stopping us? we know about the Son of God; we have experienced it. I'm sure that each one of us has experienced it in a number of ways. But, are we talking about that to the world around us?

A heart that has truly met Christ, will have to speak about Him. There is no exception to that. If you don't, has your heart really met Christ? Testimony flows from experience and not expertise. When I say that, it means that it's not by qualifications, nor education, nor social standing. It's just experience.

They did not have to explain the prophecy. They did not have to tell what was written in the scriptures. They just had to explain what they had seen. They did not need to preach, they did not have to give very eloquent words, they didn't have to articulate what they had seen. They just had to tell what they had experienced.

And how did they do that? Their own life becomes a changed platform. The famous saying of St. Francis is: "Always preach the gospel, and when necessary, use words." I think we struggle a lot with the words because it's easier to do rather than to have a life to demonstrate what we have experienced. But that's what it is. Our life has to change. Our life has to show what Christ has done. Our life is the biggest platform that the world sees, a stage that they see every day, being enacted. They see Christ through our lives.

Verse 18 says, "People saw them and were amazed." Why? Because one day they saw shepherds who were just going about their mundane lives of tending to sheep. Then suddenly they saw these people who were joyous, overzealous for what they had seen. Something had changed, and what did it do? One group's obedience awakened faith in many hearts, and they were in awe at what they had heard from these shepherds.

That's what it is. Witnessing is not about increasing numbers. Again, another struggle that the church always lands up in. we try to look at how many people we have brought to Christ. Friends, you did not bring even one. If your life has been a testimony to Christ, if you have been witnessing, it has raised an awe in someone about this God. If they are then convicted by what they see, then the Holy Spirit works in their lives to bring them to Christ.

It's not you and I who's doing that. it's not about numbers. It's about expanding the awe of God in this world. Psalm 83:18 says that "men may know that Thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth."

When I say 'men', it's talking about nations, it's talking about the world. Every other person, every other nation would see and they would know that this God, this Jehovah is the most high on earth. That's all we need to do. We need to just talk and talk about this God – what He has done in our lives, by our lives being a testimony to that. God does not save us so that we can sit down on that experience.

He saves us so that we can speak about what has happened to the world. Our testimony is not a theology. Our testimony is not to decipher what the Bible has said. Our testimony is simply to say/show what Jesus has done in our lives. it's a story of that change that God has brought in our lives.

Finally, in v. 20, we see what happens after the manger. "They returned glorifying God." The shepherds suddenly didn't realize that they had left the sheep out in the pasture. They had left their jobs and they're going to attend to what the angel has said. They did not run away from that. they returned exactly back to their same lives, to what they had left. But they returned changed.

The true encounter does not remove us from life. It transforms how we live it. That's what is important. We all have not moved into the mountains because we have experienced Christ. We have not suddenly found ourselves disconnected from the world. We have come back to the same life, to the same world, to the same relationships, to the same world, to the same people. But what has happened is something that has reshaped how we respond to it. It has transformed us. we start living life differently. We start living life as God intended it.

Worship became their lifestyle, not their moment. Obviously at that moment, they were in the manger praising God, seeing what they had heard about, what the angel had told them. but they carried this praise into the fields. They came back worshipping and making known to men as to what they had seen.

But this is something we end up doing very often. we have the seasonal worship. It then is not worship – it becomes shallow. Lasting faith is when we praise God even when the angels have gone. You may not have the same glitter and same tinsels and the same tree and the same lights as always, but your worship has to outlast the season.

There was a visible change. Everything within them had changed. They were no longer the same shepherds. They had now seen the Son of God. There had to be a change. There was joy that was not based on circumstances. There was joy that was overflowing from inside. It was rooted in Christ. And they became living evidence. Their obedience was now a testimony. People who once ignored these shepherds, considering them as just shepherds, took note that there was something different about them. There was something different in their lives, how they lived.

And that's what it is. A changed life is the loudest sermon. So that's the case with the shepherds. What about us? what has happened to our life? Our life has also changed. And it's changing every day. We are receiving God's correction on so many ways every day. But is that something that the world sees? Or we just keep it hidden? We just keep it to ourselves.

Encounters with Christ do not remove us from life. in fact, they reshape how we live it. and our worship thereafter must outlive the season.

Another illustration from the sea. You all must be knowing what a dry dock is. Dry dock happens every five years for a ship up to 15 years, and every two and a half years thereafter. This is when the ship is taken out of the sea, brought into a dock where the hull is cleaned, the barnacles removed, all the corroded steel replaced, the instruments are calibrated, the worn parts are replaced, machineries are overhauled, ship is repainted – everything is changed. And the ship comes back into the sea. The world will see a new ship – in a sense, the same ship with a new coat of paint. To them, everything looks the same – the same name, the same hull. But there's something that the crew knows – that the ship has been completely transformed, renewed inside out.

That's our lives. the world sees us just as we are, probably in a happier phase. But they don't know the truth from inside. That truth is known to us. we know that we have been changed inside out. All the sin that corroded our lives has been repaired. All that was distorted by life has been recalibrated. And it's not happening once in five years, or once in two and a half years. It's happening on a daily basis when we are walking with Christ. That's what Jesus does. Every day He overhauls us. Every day we undergo a spiritual dry dock. We return to the same jobs, the same home, same people, same relationships, same routines. But we don't return as the same people.

But do we make known to those around us what caused that change? What changed within us? who was responsible for that change? Did Christmas only change the calendar? Or did it change our heart? Was there something that was renewed in our hearts as we went through the season of Christmas? Because for us, Christmas is not on 25th December. Christmas is every day. There is a renewal every day in our hearts.

It's not a date of celebration. It's not a milestone. It's not a marking point. It's a turning point which happens every day. And when He's considered the only way, because of the change that we have, He can no longer be an option.

So, here's a challenge for each of you. We finished with the season of Christmas. Very soon we're going to be bringing down the tree. No sigh of relief! No thinking "It's over! Now to rest and relax." But that's not what it is. We do not let Jesus stay only in December. We have to carry Him into every ordinary day of our lives. He has to be in our workplace. He has to be in our relationships. He has to be in our daily obedience. And that's an intentional act. That is something that we need to purpose.

Let's get into the practice of writing 2026. But that's not what it's all about. It's about making sure that we live Christ every day, and for the world to see. That's what is required after the manger. The Christmas season is over. We take Him forward, not just leave Him back in December.

Trust you are blessed.

Amen.
