

## How To Celebrate Christmas Luke 2:8-20, Matthew 2:1-2

### **Slide 1**

We've been taking the last couple of Sundays to reflect on Advent, the arrival of Jesus into this world.

We have much to be thankful for concerning Advent since, as we have seen, we had a desperate need for Advent.

It makes no difference what your family background is, what kind of upbringing you've had or what part of the world in which you were raised, what your educational level is, or what your talents are.

None of the things we think are important to a person's status matters because the Bible says that there is one level where every single human being stands on common ground with each other; we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

It's like the evangelist Billy Sunday when he was preparing for a meeting in a large city.

He wrote a letter to the mayor in which he asked for the names of individuals he knew who had a spiritual problem and needed help and prayer.

He was surprised when he received a city directory from the mayor. We all have a need for Advent because we're all sinners. We break God's law and therefore we're under God's judgment.

When God decided to create us, He knew we'd rebel against Him and there'd be no way to make that rebellion right even if we wanted.

So, before the creation of anything, before God decided to create us, He also decided and promised to Himself that He'd come and die for us, paying the penalty that His law demanded for our sin.

Before the creation of the first molecule, we were in His mind. That's when He made the commitment to come and die for us so that we might know Him and have a relationship with Him forever.

Webster's dictionary tells us that a promise is a declaration that someone will do the thing specified.

It's also a declaration that gives the person to whom it's made a right to expect or to claim the performance or forbearance of that specified act.

Before the foundation of the world, God made a declaration that He wanted us to have an intimate relationship with Him but in order to make that relationship possible He would have come and die for our sins.

Those who lived before the advent of Christ had the right to expect the performance and forbearance of that promise.

We, who're on this side of the cross look back and rejoice in the performance and forbearance of God in keeping His promise. But, humanly speaking it wasn't an easy promise to keep.

Since the beginning of this world, the arch enemy of God, Satan, has waged an all out war with every conceivable wickedness, scheme and perversion that he could muster to try to thwart God from keeping His promise to send Christ.

Yet, at every turn God, Who is the supreme, unchallengeable ruler of the universe, brushed aside Satan's attempts to derail His promise.

As we observe Christmas, we celebrate that God brought into this world, the Promised One, the Savior, the Messiah just as He promised and declared He would before the foundations of the world.

Today I'd like to wrap this study up by asking the question, "*How can we respond to these truths we have studied together?*"

In trying to think of an appropriate response I've gone not to the Bible but instead to a hymn, a hymn that we sing at this time of the year. It is a hymn that's played and sung in thousands of churches and homes each Christmas.

This particular hymn is popular not just here in America but all across the world.

There are more than 40 English renderings of the original Latin lyrics, which have also been translated into more than 120 languages and dialects.

It's been the favorite of generations and such noted Americans as Robert E. Lee and Theodore Roosevelt. The hymn is "*O Come, All Ye Faithful.*"

The message of the song is clear. It invites us to respond to the birth of Bethlehem's tiny baby.

We're not told to bring something tangible or costly and expensive. Instead, this 18th century Latin hymn has a 3-fold invitation that anyone, rich or poor, can fulfill.

All are called to come, behold, and adore the King of angels Who is Christ the Lord. That's the message of this hymn, which makes it kind of fitting that history has chosen to ascribe the lyrics to no man.

The hymn's origin remains unknown although the lyrics have been attributed to John Wade, but no one really knows.

So, in response to these truths about Advent we have looked at these past two weeks, let's consider the message of this hymn.

## **Slide 2**

First, we're invited to come. The hymn says:

*O come, all ye faithful,  
Joyful and triumphant!  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;*

This is an open invitation to all. Age isn't important nor is geographical location. Neither is one's level of maturity, knowledge of the Scriptures, cultural background, financial status or anything else. The invitation is opened to all.

Every one of God's proclamations is connected with the word "whosoever:" "Whosoever believeth," "Whosoever will." Thanked God for that "whosoever."

I would much rather have that word "whosoever" than my own name because if God used my name, it might refer to some other Oscar Pruitt who had lived and died before me; but "whosoever" includes me.

So, think about who was invited to come on that first Advent. First, there were the shepherds.

*Luke 2:8-12, "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."*

*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

Shepherds were from the lowest levels of Jewish society. They were looked down upon as being among the basest elements of society.

They were thought to be crafty and dishonest like gypsies, vagrants and con men all rolled up into one.

They were uneducated, many couldn't read, and as far as work, nothing paid less. They couldn't bring any gifts to Jesus because they had no money.

They were not even allowed to testify in court because it was assumed they would lie. These were the ones who heard the angels sing.

In fact, there are only 2 other people in Scripture who heard angels sing: Isaiah and John.

Now, look at the other group that was invited to come, Wise Men from the East.

*Matthew 2:1-2, “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”*

They were as different as they could possibly be from the shepherds. They were the opposite of all those characteristics I just mentioned.

These were men of influence. They had no trouble gaining an audience with the King. The shepherds wouldn't have been allowed in the outer courtyard.

These were men of wealth and knowledge, professors of the day. Yet, in spite of the vast chasm of difference between the two groups, both were invited to come.

The invitation is the same today. It's extended to all; no matter who you are. Whether you're important or unimportant in the eyes of people.

No matter what you've been through or are now going through. No matter what you've done. The invitation is given to all - Come.

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus put it this way, *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."*

Of course, when you receive an invitation to come to some event it requires you to set aside whatever plans you may have. It requires you to set aside what you're currently doing in order to respond to the invitation.

The same is true of the invitation to come to Jesus. We must set aside all those things that have preoccupied our thoughts and lives. All those things that have been distractions and obstacles in keeping us from coming.

The invitation to come to Jesus is extended to everyone, but it requires setting aside all those excuses we've been making.

### **Slide 3**

Next, we're invited to come and behold him. The song says:

*Come and behold him  
Born the King of Angels:*

On the surface there was no difference between the baby Jesus lying in that manger and any other baby.

Contrary to what we have seen depicted in paintings, there was no glowing halo around his head. He looked like any other baby.

But deep within, He was like no other baby that has ever been born. For there lay the unique God-man. We're to stop everything and behold Him who has been *"born the King of angels."*

In Webster's dictionary, "behold" means to gaze upon. The basic idea being prolonged contemplation. The Greek word used in the New Testament for "behold" is the word from which we get our English word "theory."

Thus, the word carries the meaning of seeing something and then theorizing about its meaning. Pondering is a good word as it implies a diving beneath the surface to understand.

The Bible tells us Mary did this as she watched the events of Jesus' life. We're told she treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart; theorizing as to their meaning and significance.

Luke 2:19, *"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."*

Concerning Christ's coming and the salvation He has provided for us, there's another group that desired greatly to behold Him.

The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 1:12b that *"Even angels long to look into these things."*

Maybe when you were a child you thought how great it would be to be an angel and fly around, doing good and mighty things.

Maybe you imagined what it would be like to live in their dimension and see the glory of God and witness the battles between the host of heaven and the forces of hell.

Such things are a mystery to us and yet Peter tells us that our salvation is as much a mystery to the angels as their activities are to us.

The angels in heaven are in the presence of the glory and majesty of God. Yet they long to look into this message of salvation. The word "*long*" used in this verse means to gaze with outstretched necks.

Even though the angels had a part in the coming of Christ and in His life on this earth, there's a real mystery to this whole concept of salvation that God has granted only to us.

The angels must have been totally mystified by the incarnation and everything that followed after that.

Max Lucado, in his book, *When God Whispers Your Name*, wrote: "*Come and behold Him. Go back and spend some time beholding, contemplating, theorizing about the truths we have studied during Advent.*"

*Slow down and take time to behold what it meant for God to become a helpless, dependent baby. God the Son, who confused the languages at the Tower of Babel and I don't know how many languages that was, but for Him to think them up meant he could speak them all and yet now as a baby he must learn how to speak.*

*Sometimes when I think about how Christ humbled himself to become one of us, I try to think of some of these practical issues.*



*Can you imagine a William F. Buckley, someone with a great command of language and vocabulary, being told that they needed to go back to the first grade and then to have someone sit down with them and read Dick and Jane books.”*

Such thoughts provoke in me a greater wonder at the incarnation. I'm afraid that, because we've heard the story so often, we've put our minds on cruise control.

In doing this, we miss the true wonder of God becoming a human being and a dependent little baby, not that we can ever truly comprehend it, but I think we can go much deeper than we do.

Come and spend some time beholding Him, theorizing about Him and His birth!

#### **Slide 4**

Finally, this hymn invites us to adore Him. The hymn says:

*O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord.*

Adore means to worship or honor as a deity; to regard with reverent admiration and devotion.

To adore Him requires more than a casual glance or a curious gaze at the scene in Bethlehem.

The babe in the manger wasn't sent to arouse attention or satisfy idle curiosity, but to bring us to our knees; to cause us to worship Him, to adore Him. Christ the Lord!

But you can't adore Him if the only time He enters your thoughts is on Sunday morning at 11:00am.

You can't adore Him if you, your wants, your needs and your complaints are the center of your thoughts. You can't adore Him if you don't take some time to behold Him.

Adoring implies worship. Worship involves giving not getting. That's why so many complain of not "getting anything" out of the service in their church because they only come to get.

Many don't come to give themselves to God in worship; they're only thinking of getting. But giving is what we're going to do in heaven - giving our total being to the Lord in worship.

Another thing about worship is what or who we worship determines what we become:

- If we worship possessions, we grow more materialistic
- If we worship pleasure, we grow more sensual
- If we worship self, we grow more selfish

Guess what happens when we truly begin to worship Christ and adore Him; if we take the time to accept His invitation and come and then begin to behold Him?

To behold His character, sacrifice, and love. To behold His choosing us before anything was created, and to behold His faithfulness in carrying out His promise to us that the Christ would come.

As we begin to behold Him in His incarnation, life, ministry, death and resurrection - HOW can you not adore Him?

It takes an awful cold, hard, sinful, rebellious heart to reject Him or to only half love Him considering all that we have seen during this Advent season. How can we not help but love Him?

## **Slide 5**

### Conclusion

Come to Him, come to Him with your disappointments, needs, and hurts. Come to Him as a sinner who recognizes that you can't improve yourself to meet God's standard of holiness.

Come, spend some time beholding, contemplating, theorizing over the Advent of Christ, and as you do, let it move you to express your love and adoration to Him.

I trust you'll have a blessed Christmas because you've taken the time to come, to behold and to adore Christ your Savior and Lord.