

THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Bret Harte wrote a story about the Wild West, called “The Luck of Roaring Camp.” Roaring Camp was the meanest, toughest Mining Town in all the West. There were more murders and thieves there than any other place around. Roaring Camp was inhabited entirely by men ... except for one woman who made her living in the only way she knew how. Her name was Cherokee Sal.

Cherokee Sal became pregnant and gave birth to baby. She died in childbirth, and no one knew who the father might be. The men put the baby girl in a box with some old rags under her. Somehow that just didn't seem right, so one of the men rode 80 miles to buy a Rosewood Cradle. When they put the rags and the baby in the beautiful new cradle, the rags just didn't look right. So another man rode to Sacramento and purchased some silk and lacy blankets. They men lined the Rosewood Cradle with silk and tucked the new blanket around the little baby girl. But then someone noticed that the floor under the cradle looked dirty.

The next thing you knew, a few of those big, tough men got down on their hands and knees and scrubbed the floor until it was spotless. Of course, then the walls, ceiling and dirty windows looked awful. So they washed down the walls and the ceiling, and they even hung some clean white curtains on the windows. Things were beginning to look a lot better. But they soon realized they had to give up their carousing and fighting. After all, the baby needed a lot of sleep, and babies can't sleep during a brawl. Besides all that, the baby didn't like angry voices or frowning faces. So the men started smiling and talking in pleasant, cheerful tones. And, since babies shouldn't be left alone, they set the cradle by the entrance of the Mine and one of the men stayed next to her while the others worked.

Then somebody noticed how ugly the mine entrance was. So they planted some flowers and made a small garden near the cradle. And as they worked, the men looked for shiny little stones that they could show to the baby and watch her gurgle and coo. But when they held the stones down near her, they saw that their hands looked black and dirty. And they didn't want to scare the little baby with their scraggly hair and wild beards. Pretty soon the general store sold out of soap and shaving gear.

The baby changed everything. And that story gives a small picture of the way the Son of God can transform our lives. How has the Bethlehem Baby changed your life?

Around our house we start putting up decorations long before Christmas. For most kids their focus is Christmas morning. They wake up and open their presents. Some go to church and come home for a big meal. Then it's over. At the end of the day, when all the gifts have been opened and there's nothing under the tree then Christmas is over. For many it is anticlimactic. However, what comes after Christmas is perhaps the most important part about it. Some of you are thinking “Your right pastor, the after Christmas sales are the best part”. That is not what I mean. The day after Christmas was important. It is still important for many reasons.

Luke 2:17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

In a few hours Christmas will be over. The presents will have all been opened and the decorations will have been put away. Let me ask you a simple question, what will you do the day after Christmas? In this passage we see that there are 3 ways that we are to respond to Christmas.

1. Pondering – vs. 19

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

After Christmas is good time to reflect on what you have just seen and heard. How many times have you heard the Christmas story? I'm sure most of you could come up here today and tell the story. You heard many sermons, prayed many prayers and rubbed up against the truth long enough to get a callous on your heart so the real truth cannot penetrate deep into your daily life. Familiarity breeds contempt.

When we lived in Kuwait, we would hear the Christmas Carols playing in the malls. It was illegal to tell people about Jesus but there in the songs His glory was being proclaimed. A few weeks ago I heard on Good Morning America someone singing Hark the Herald Angels Sing:

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings. Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by. Born that man no more may die.
Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing. "Glory to the newborn King!"

They sang these powerful words but no one thought anything of it. Why? It was just a traditional Christmas carol. The first way to respond to the Christmas message is to make it fresh in your heart by pondering it in a new way. Don't let the familiarity of the story rob you of it's true meaning.

A chauffeur had driven the chemistry professor to dozens of speaking engagements. He'd heard the same canned speech scores of times. He said on the way to another engagement, "Professor, I believe I could give your speech myself; I've heard it so often." The professor said, "I'll bet you \$50 you can't." "You're on," said the chauffeur. He stopped the car and the two exchanged attire. They came to the banquet and the chauffeur dressed in a tuxedo, sat at the head of the table and was introduced. He stood up and gave the speech exactly as he had heard it so many times before. There was a standing ovation when he was finished. The emcee got up and said, "You know, we are so fortunate to have such a fine resource with us tonight, and since we have a little extra time, let's have some questions and answers." The first question was asked and the chauffeur stood there dumbfounded, clearing his throat in nervousness. Finally with a flash of insight he said, "You know, that's just about the dumbest question I have ever heard. In fact it is so dumb I bet even my chauffeur could answer that question."

If you think about it some Christmas traditions are very strange. The greeting on one certain Christmas card goes like this: "Christmas is just plain weird. What other time of year do you sit around staring at a dead tree in your living room and eat candy out of your socks." There are some things about the whole Christmas story that are also pretty weird. A virgin teenager gets pregnant. Visits by angels. Caesar's tax. The trip to Bethlehem but no room in the Inn. God born in a stable. Magicians bearing gifts. It is all too incredible to believe. You have heard this story so many times but when was the last time you really stopped to think about it?

The Greek word used for PONDER is SUMBALLO which comes from SUN which in combination means complete and BALLO which means to arise or throw. Together they form the picture of continued thought or rumination. Have you ever seen a cow chewing it's cud. For a cow to be able to digest grass they have to ruminate – which means they bring up what they have just eaten so that they can chew on it more. The grass must be completely crushed before the bacteria in the cow can digest it. If the cow simply swallowed the grass it would simply pass through the cow without being digested and be of no use whatsoever to the cow.

We are like that sometimes aren't we? We see or hear something amazing but instead of pausing to allow it to impact us we allow it to pass through us resulting in no lasting change.

C.S. Lewis said, "we don't need to be told new ideas so much as we need to be reminded of old truths"

Warren Wiersbe tells about the time the late William Randolph Hearst sent out his agent to secure particular art pieces. After months of searching, the agent reported that he had finally found the treasures. They were in Mr. Hearst's warehouse. Hearst had been searching frantically for art pieces he already owned.

This Christmas we remember again the true meaning of Christmas. God gave himself for us. He was born as one of us so that each of us might be born again into the family of God. That baby born in Bethlehem almost 2000 years ago is the savior of all of us. Let's not forget the real reason for Christmas this year.

2. Praising – vs. 20

Luke 2:20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The shepherds had witnessed the world's greatest birth announcement ever. I am sure you have heard and read those words many times but let me just highlight one word and that is the word YOU.

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring *you* good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to *you*; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to *you*: *You* will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The angels said to the shepherds: I bring YOU good news (of great joy for all the people). A savior has been born to YOU. This is a sign for YOU. YOU will find the baby... The angel's message to the shepherds was that Jesus is YOUR Savior, YOUR King, YOUR Christ, YOUR gift – straight from God. Just for you. Sometimes we focus on the fact that 'God so loved the WORLD' that we forget 'God so loved YOU that He gave His only Son'.

At our house the gifts are all out and the girls have been having a great time going around and finding out which ones are theirs. They can tell which gift is which because their gifts have their names on it. The message of the angels is that Jesus is YOUR gift this Christmas.

The fact that Jesus came for you means that you need to respond to his incredible gift. What will YOU do with Jesus? How will YOU personally respond? Don't look at the person sitting beside. Don't look at the worship teams or the pastor. God's gift is for YOU and YOU have to determine how you will respond. You respond through praising Him.

Someone once said, "We have become a generation of people who worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship." Leonard Sweet wrote: "Our pews are occupied by people who want to be moved, but who don't want to move." We crave the experience of worship but don't work towards it. But worship is what we were created for.

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

3. Proclaiming – vs. 17-18

Luke 2:17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

The third way we respond to the gift of Christ this Christmas is by proclaiming him. Treasuring Christ is something we do not by keeping Him to ourselves but by making Him know to the whole world. Luigi Tarisio was found dead one morning with scarce a comfort in his home, but with 246 exquisite violins, which he had been collecting all his life, crammed into an attic, the best in the bottom drawer of an old rickety bureau. In his very devotion to the violin, he had robbed the world of all that music all the time he treasured them; others before him had done the same, so that when the greatest of his collection, a Stradivarius, was first played it had had 147 speechless years. Yet, how many of Christ's people are like old Tarisio? In our very love of the church we fail to give the glad tidings to the world; in our zeal for the truth we forget to publish it. When shall we all learn that the Good News needs not just to be cherished, but needs to be told? All people need to hear it.

Saving knowledge is diffused over the earth, not like sunlight but like torchlight, which is passed from hand to hand. -- James Strachan

Just like the shepherds who went away that first Christmas to tell everyone they met, there are so many who have yet to come and see Jesus. Like the angels who interrupted the shepherds sleep the world today needs the light of Christ to come and wake us up from our sleep and point us to the one who can truly save.

The word ANGEL is the Greek word AGGELOS which means messenger. Everyone who tells the good news about Christ is an angel. That explains the following story. A minister went to visit a newly-married couple. He knocked on the front door. A woman's voice from within called, "Is that you, angel?" The minister replied, "No, but I'm from the same department."

Is 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned... 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

During the American Revolution the Battle of Blue Licks was fought at the stream that bears that name. The battle never should have been fought, for it was fought after the war was over! News traveled slowly in those days. Blue Licks is in Kentucky, and there was no quick communication over the Appalachian mountains. No one knew the war was over. In a sense, Christ won the victory over evil at Calvary. All that is left for us to do is tell the good news.