

"A Response of Faith"

I've always liked reading the Gospel of Luke. I like it because Luke writes in a way that convinces the reader that Christianity is for all people. I also like it because Luke's account of Jesus' life is based on the testimony of other people. You see, Luke didn't know Jesus, but he followed a prominent guy around named Paul, who did know Jesus. And with Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Luke talked to a lot of people who were connected directly to Jesus and his family. Think of him as this embedded reporter who was always asking questions. In fact, to shed some light on Luke and his gospel account, we need to look no further than the opening two verses. In essence the first two verses say that he has investigated all the reports handed down to him by the original eyewitnesses to Christ and he found them to be true so he wrote them down for others to know the truth. The word that jumps out to me in the first two verses is the word **eyewitnesses**. No doubt some of the original disciples and most likely even family members of Jesus were those eyewitnesses.

Now the reason I bring this up is that in our gospel reading today, Luke records this very curious response to the birth of Jesus from the shepherds; those who heard the story of the shepherds, and of course from Mary herself. But before we look at those responses I want you to imagine what it might have looked like for Luke to actually gather this information. Let's say he was with Paul in Colossae (I picked that city because Paul mentions Luke in the letter to the Colossians). And while they are there talking about Jesus and sharing his Gospel message, a guy tells Luke that he knows another guy in town who was actually there when Jesus was born. This guy who is now in his late 60's, was an eyewitness to what happened that night in Bethlehem. Luke, armed with his scrolls and pens and probably his assistant hurries through the streets and finds this gentleman at home.

Luke peppers him with questions. What did you hear? What did you see? The man, who says he worked at the stables at the time, describes in great detail what happened. He tells Luke about the shepherds who barged in that night and found the baby lying in the manger. He tells Luke about how they were talking about the thousands of angels that

told them what was happening in Bethlehem. He tells Luke about how everyone who heard the shepherds **were obviously amazed at this news**. And then he tells Luke about Jesus' mother Mary. "She was sitting there kind of stunned but seemed at peace," he says. Luke pushes him for more. "What do you mean?" The man looks at Luke and with a tear in his eye says, "Mary knew what was happening. She might have been a little out of it, but I could tell that she was actually reflecting on what had just happened and trying to determine what it meant for not only her life, but for the lives of everyone in every place from that day forward." In short, while the shepherds were seeing, and those who heard about what they saw were wondering in amazement, Mary..I think the best way to say it is that "she was treasuring up all these things and pondering them in her heart."

Of course, we'll never know who the eyewitnesses were that Luke actually got his information from, yet we know it's true because it's the Word of God. But think about this. These responses were given to Luke in great detail by someone very close to Christ's birth and this is no coincidence. **It's what God allowed them to hear and what God needed Luke to hear so he could include it in his Gospel, which means it's what God wants us to hear today.** Because all of these responses are responses of faith...faith in the presence of the Word made flesh. Faith in a world that even though it probably appeared messed up and lost for most of them that night, proved to be the exact opposite. Because on that night God in the flesh, Christ the Savior, united himself to humanity by being born as one of them. And the same is just as much true for you today.

So since I feel I have taken you on kind of wild journey so far today, I might as well keep it going, so I ask you to think about this. If a reporter from a major network showed up at your house tonight, or better yet, a well-known author who was writing a book about what Christmas is really about in the year 2016, how would you respond? Now, this is not some *gottcha* moment or some guilt trip I'm trying to lay on you here, but think about how you would answer this question. Think about how your family would answer this question. Because for most of us, even though we might be quick to say it's all about the birth of the Savior, if we're really honest, it's about way more than that. And most of those things are not found in the Biblical account of Christ's birth, I promise you.

But as we approach Christmas Day, I invite you to really think about what happened that night so long ago in Bethlehem. Think about the real people who saw angels announcing the birth of a savior. Think about the real people who heard this news. And think about the real mother who had just given birth even though she had never done

what it takes to actually get pregnant. Think about her response of faith-- not just that night but from the very beginning when the angel Gabriel announced to her that she would bear the Son of God. Think about her response of faith as she mothered this child as he grew up. Think about her response of faith as she witnessed his miracle of turning water into wine. And think about her response of faith some thirty years after his birth as she watched the horror of her son being nailed to a cross where he was left helpless and alone as he bore the wrath of our sins. This story is as real as it gets and it all began on that night in Bethlehem. And the best news any of us could ever hear is that through our faith in Christ, it is our story now.

That's what's most amazing about Christmas. Christ came into this world-- a world that can be so cold and cruel, many times because of the messed up things we all do, and changed it forever! Could there be anything more important than that? So, I ask you again...not as a fictional reporter or author, but as your brother in Christ, what is Christmas really about in your family? If it's the gifts and trees, decorations and cheer, I'm right there with you. But what do you treasure the most?

Look, I know it's hard to treasure something that you can't see or feel. I put an *iphone 7* in your hand and it's easy to treasure, right? But I put a wafer in your hand like I will do a little while and tell you it's bread and it's Jesus coming to you for your forgiveness and that's harder to treasure because it defies our understanding, right? The same thing is true with the whole incarnation. But God becoming flesh in the form of a baby is not about our understanding; it's about how God understands us. He knew what we needed and He made it happen. All he wants from us is to believe it.

My friends, over the next few days, things will get hectic; things will get stressful; things will not go as we had planned but what else is new? And we can either respond as those who know nothing about why we celebrate Christmas or we can be bold and respond in faith knowing that ultimately everything will be OK because the immortal and perfect Son of God was born for us. That's what it's all about. **(Card)**. In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**