



Temple Baptist Church
Wilmington, North Carolina
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What to Do When You've Seen Jesus
Luke 2:8-38

Well, the gifts are all given, the meals are all eaten, and the family gatherings have all been enjoyed. We've shared in all the special Advent and Christmas worship services and musicals. Christmas Day is past once again.

But is Christmas over? Is that it?

Since the church began to celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25 in the fourth century, for hundreds and hundreds of years Christians only *began* celebrating Jesus' birth on Christmas Day. On the Christian calendar, Christmas is actually a twelve-day festival beginning on Christmas Day and continuing through January 5, the day before the Day of Epiphany, which is the celebration of the revealing of the Christ child to the nations through the visit of the magi. Hence the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

In our time, except for the churches that are more liturgical in their worship, we've tended to celebrate Christmas up till December 25, Christmas Day, and then when it's over, it's over! We start taking down the tree, putting away the decorations, exchanging gifts, and everything gets back to the "normal" schedule.

But if we've truly seen what Christmas is really all about, how can we ever put it behind us?

When they saw Jesus

In this text we're looking at on this First Sunday after Christmas from the Gospel according to Luke, we see several people who saw our newborn Savior—some that night that he was born, others a little over a month later.

Seeing the Christ Child had a major impact on them. When the shepherds and Simeon and Anna saw the baby Jesus, they responded appropriately. They each *did something* after they saw him. Think about it . . .

When *the shepherds* were out in the fields outside Bethlehem keeping watch over their flocks at night, the angel of the Lord appeared to them suddenly and they were understandably terrified. He announced Jesus' birth to them as **good news that will cause great joy for all the people** (2:10).¹ He told them that the Savior, who was the **Messiah, the Lord**, had been born in Bethlehem, **the town of David**. The multitude of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel singing God's praise, and then the angels left and went away into heaven.

So what did the shepherds do?

They discussed it briefly and decided that they had to go to Bethlehem to see this thing that had happened that the Lord had made known to them. They quickly went to Bethlehem, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby Jesus, this Christ Child, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger (2:15-16).

So what did they do at this point? Did they just go back to the fields and check on their sheep?

No, they went out and told others what they had seen, and **spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child** (2:17). And then they **returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told** (2:20). Theirs was a response of both *witness* and *worship*!

Well, what about old *Simeon*?

When Jesus was a week old (eight days by Jewish reckoning that counts a part of a day as a whole day), according to Jewish custom and the Old Testament law (Leviticus 12:3), Mary and Joseph named him Jesus (the name Gabriel had given Mary when he told her she would bear the Messiah) and had him circumcised. Then when he was 33 days old, again according to Old Testament law (Leviticus 12:6-8), after the days of his mother's purification following the birth were completed, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and to offer the prescribed sacrifice for her purification. The law called for the offering of a one-year old lamb and a young pigeon or turtledove. It also made provision that if the mother couldn't afford a lamb, she could offer **two doves or two young pigeons** (Leviticus 12:6-8). Mary and Joseph brought the doves or pigeons. Yet whether they realized it or not, they were also presenting the Lamb of God!

When they came to present Jesus and to make this offering, Simeon saw them in the temple. Luke tells us that **Simeon was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him**" (2:25). Luke also tells us that the Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon **that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah** (2:26).

The Spirit had led Simeon to the temple that day at that particular time when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus in to fulfill what the law called for with a newborn son. When Simeon saw Jesus, he took him in his arms and blessed God, saying (2:29-32),

**"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."**

As you can imagine, Joseph and Mary were amazed at what Simeon was saying about Jesus. But Simeon wasn't finished. He also blessed them. But then he gave Mary a word to prepare her for what she would experience in time to come as the mother of the Messiah (2:34-35):

"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Simeon *recognized the significance of Jesus*—something of who he was and what he had come to do. Though he likely didn't understand it fully, God had shown him that Jesus would not be the kind of Messiah most of the Jews were looking for, and so he would be rejected by many. And out of that realization, he both praised God and blessed Mary and Joseph as well as Jesus,

knowing that the task before them was great and would at times be very painful for Mary.

And then there was *Anna the prophet*. Though the prophets were usually men, the Scriptures also tell us that Deborah and Huldah were prophets in the Old Testament (Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14 // 2 Chronicles 34:22), and that Anna and the four daughters of Philip were prophets in the New Testament (Luke 2:36; Acts 21:8-9). There were others as well.

Anna was 84 years old. Early in her life, she had been married for seven years. After her husband died, she never remarried. For many years—Luke implies but doesn't explicitly say that it was since her husband died—she was continually in the temple, **worshipping God night and day, fasting and praying** (2:36-37).

While Simeon was blessing Mary and Joseph and Jesus, Anna came up to them. She also began to give thanks to God for Jesus. But like the shepherds, she did even more—she **spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem** (2:38).

When we see Jesus

So what does all this say for us today? What should we do when *we* have seen Jesus?

Now we of course don't see Jesus in the same way they did. Yet thanks to God's redemptive work in him, we know much more about him than the shepherds and Simeon and Anna or even Mary and Joseph did.

We see him in Scripture as he was foretold in the Old Testament and proclaimed in the New Testament.

We see him when he comes into our lives as we trust him as Lord and Savior and yield our lives to him.

We see him at work in our individual lives and our life together as God's people in very powerful ways if we're open to him and looking for his work.

So we *do* see Jesus, just in different ways than the people in our text did. So what does their experience as witnessed to in God's word say to us today?

Simply this: *When we have seen Jesus, we must understand his significance, praise God for him, and tell others about him.* Think about that for a moment . . .

We must understand his significance—who he is and what he came to do.

He is the *Savior*, the one who came to deliver us, not from Rome, but from our sins and from our resulting bondage to death and the grave. He saves us and forgives our sins now and delivers us from sin's penalty and power. And when he returns in glory he will redeem our mortal bodies in the resurrection. He saves not just our spirits but our bodies as well, so that our entire being will be redeemed and made whole in him!

He is the *Christ*, the Messiah, God's Anointed One, the descendant of David who will deliver his people and rule forever and ever in righteousness and peace, setting all things as God intends them to be in new heavens and a new earth.

He is the *Lord*, the one who is God in the flesh, the ruler of all creation, to whom one day every knee **in heaven and on earth and under the earth** will bow and confess (Philippians 2:9-11).

He is **the consolation of Israel**, God's salvation, **a light for revelation to the Gentiles, a light for glory to [his] people Israel**, and a sign that was spoken against.

He is how God came into the world to save and redeem a people for himself. He is the world's only hope!

When we really understand all this about him, who he is and what he has come to do, *then we will praise God for him*, just as the shepherds and Simeon and Anna did. We will worship him with the Father and the Spirit as one God in three Persons, all active in his redemptive work. We will praise our holy and sovereign God for who he is and how he works, for his mercy and grace and steadfast love and righteousness and justice and power. We will praise and worship him for all he has done in Jesus Christ and for all he will do in him.

And when we understand something of who Jesus is and what he has come to do, and we praise God for him, *we will tell others about him*. That's what the shepherds and Anna did. The world around us needs good news, and that's what the story of Jesus is! We must tell people *about him!*

It's wonderful to tell people about our church; but more than about Temple, *we must tell people about Jesus!* It's wonderful to talk about our experiences, but *these conversations must point people to Jesus!* It's essential that we minister to people in need, because that shows them *Jesus*. But as those deeds of mercy open the doors of their minds and hearts, we must bear witness about *Jesus* in our words as well as by our works.

You see, Christmas Day may be past, but Christmas isn't over. There is so much to be done. The minister-poet Howard Thurman has put it very poignantly:²

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoners,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

When we see Jesus, we must understand who he is and what he came to do. We must praise God for him in worship. And we must tell others about him.

Are we doing these things?

†MEG

¹ Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® (2011 edition).

² Howard Thurman, "When the Song of the Angels is Stilled"; <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/when-the-song-of-the-angels-is-stilled/> (accessed 12/18/2017).