

The First Sunday After Christmas

December 28, 2014

This week's sermon is an adaptation of a sermon originally prepared and preached by Pastor Egbert Schaller.

HOW TO MAKE CHRISTMAS LAST

Luke 2:17-18

Now when [the shepherds] had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

In the name of our newborn Savior, dear fellow-redeemed:

It won't be long now until we sleep and wake again only to find all evidence of the Christmas season gone. The stores have already started the changeover. With the exception of a few straggling after Christmas sales, it is difficult even to buy an ornament for the tree just a few short days after the main event. Seasonal aisles have been swept clean—the red, white, and green of Christmas is soon replaced by the red, pink, and white of Valentine's Day which is still weeks away. You may twist the radio dial just as you did on December 24th, but you won't find many Christmas tunes anymore.

How diligently we prepare for Christmas Day with families, food, and festivities, only to have it come and go so quickly like sand through our fingers. We want to reach out and hold onto those special days, but who can hold them? "Time waits for no man," the saying goes and so the day, the hour, the minutes that are to us "Christmas" simply melt away. The children go back to school, and our work carries on as before.

Yet the festival of Christmas is not one that needs to share the fate of other happy moments. Christmas was not meant to fade away but to endure. Aren't there, after all, at least 12 days of Christmas? For those of us who today are struggling a bit these hours with the "letdown" after Christmas, let the Gospel account of Luke comfort you and show you **HOW TO MAKE CHRISTMAS LAST.**

I.

Certain things are revealed by the Christmas story which we are likely to notice only after we have heard it many times and studied it carefully. For example, we have often examined shepherds—how they were out in the field on Christmas Eve and went with haste to Bethlehem. We know about the facts surrounding their first Christmas, but have you ever thought about *how short* the shepherds' Christmas really was?

We talk about how quickly Christmas comes and goes for us, but what about these men? What did they have of Christmas? We make a night and a day of Christmas and maybe even a second Christmas day after that. Further, we have an entire season of "preparation" for the holiday of holidays—the season we call Advent. We prepare with special worship services and songs and even penitence—preparing our hearts and minds to greet the King of Kings.

But what about the shepherds? There they sat in the dead of night dark as it was. Silently they were bearing the universal burden of mankind, earning their daily bread through hard labor. This was what they knew: their sheep, their tired bodies, and who knows of the worries and sorrows that were hidden beneath their cloaks.

The shepherds had no Christmas preparation the way we have. There was nothing to tell them that the blessed day was on its way. There was nothing to help them get ready for it. There was no "Silent Night" playing from the radio. There were no Christmas specials on television. There was no lighted Christmas tree to gather 'round.

Suddenly an angel appeared to them and what did they have of Christmas? A moment of fear, a few short sentences about peace on earth, goodwill toward men, and then the heavenly messengers were gone. The shepherds' Christmas was over. How long did it last? Two minutes? Five? Maybe ten?

But you say, “No! Their Christmas wasn’t over yet! They went to Bethlehem and found the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” Yes, that is all true, but when they got to Bethlehem they hardly found anything that would make them feel they were still having Christmas—no lights, no great comfort. There were not even any angels visible at the stable singing glory to God in the highest! The shepherds came and simply found Mary, Joseph, and the Baby lying in a manger—a tiny newborn with tiny fists, perhaps eyes shut, maybe crying, and a very tired mother. They saw nothing but poverty and simplicity.

Then the shepherds went back again to their lives of toil and trouble, sorrow and discouragement. They went back to those straying and ornery sheep, back to the cold darkness of the field, and it was night again for them. Christmas—a brief, blinding flare of glory—had come and gone. How quickly the special moments had slipped away for them. Have you ever thought about how short their Christmas “time” was?

II.

As short as their Christmas Eve was, the shepherds leave behind for us a valuable lesson: Those shepherds knew how to make Christmas last! How they did stretch their Christmas! Celebrating far beyond the events of that night by laying hold of the one thing which never fades— *“the word which was told them concerning this Child.”* [v.17]

Christmas had come to them to leave behind the words: *“There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:11). How wise they were in their simple ways to know that the glory and light of Heaven which they saw and the company of

angels would all fade away. They realized that the *words* were the thing. The words were the mighty truth that God sent His Son to redeem them from sin and death. This word made Christmas last for the shepherds—the word concerning what had been told them about the child.

It was likewise the *word* that they shared with those whom they met. The shepherds did not tell others to go *see* the baby Jesus. What was there to see? The shame and lowliness of the stable. Already Jesus had begun to suffer, to bear the world's sin.

The shepherds did not tell others about their visit to the manger, they didn't talk about the Christmas "trimmings," for those had lasted but a short time. Instead, they made Christmas last by talking about what it really is—glad tidings, good news for all.

If we take hold of these enduring things—these tidings—the golden hours of the season will live on for us. How often our Lord and Savior throughout His earthly life tried to teach men to lay hold of joy by laying hold of the *sayings concerning Him*. When the disciples of Emmaus were troubled in their hearts over His death, He did not tell them, "See Me, here I am, I am not dead." Instead, He took them to the Scriptures and said, "*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken*"—the things that are written (Luke 24:25).

Jesus would say similar things to us today: "Take the *words* of Christmas. Why make so much of the star and of the angel? These things do not make Christmas. Pay attention to the *saying*—the mighty message and promise of God in Heaven: I have come to save you. I have left my throne and descended to bring you light and life.

In fact, we have many more of the sayings than the shepherds had. The message of the angels has been expanded and magnified by the prophets, evangelists, and apostles. It has been set to poetry and music. If you focus on the *words* of Christmas then your Christmas will last.

III.

Perhaps you'll think that there were other reasons behind the lasting Christmas of the shepherds. After all, what about all their *experiences*. They saw the heavens opened. They saw the holy Child even in His humility. Wouldn't their experiences make Christmas more lasting for them and not the sayings alone?

If you think there is more to a lasting Christmas than the sayings concerning the child, then look for a moment to those whom the shepherds greeted. "*And all who heard it marveled at those things where were told them by the shepherds.*" [v.18]

Think about the people who heard the shepherds. For them, Christmas was "over" before it had ever come—the birth, the angels, the visit to Bethlehem. If you weren't Mary, Joseph, or one of the shepherds you would have missed it all!

Those who heard the shepherd's tidings didn't have any multitude of the heavenly host appearing before them. But they did have the *words concerning the child*. It was these words that caused them to be amazed—to wonder at the things that were told to them.

The trouble with us is that we drop the glad tidings with the needles off our Christmas trees. We sweep them up and put them away for another year. Down comes the tree from its traditional spot, down come the decorations from our windows, off we go to our jobs and recreations, and Christmas as far as we're concerned is finished for another twelve months. Sometimes we're even the slightest bit happy that it is gone with all of its hustle and bustle.

But no, Christmas has only begun if you will only take the sayings, lay them end to end, and compare them, search them, live with them, and ponder them in your heart.

Ponder what it means for you that “*unto you this day is born a Savior.*” It means that we have not been born to die a miserable, lingering death in sin but to live. It means that though this world is cursed, we are not under a curse. For “*God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons*” (Galatians 4:4-5).

Take the glad tidings—the good news of Christmas, the words concerning the Child, the things about Him...and stamp them on the door of each new day that you enter. This is how you can make Christmas last beyond the lights and ornaments. This is how you can have the joy of Christmas even after the “warm fuzzy” feeling with family and friends and candlelight church services has passed for another 360 days. Christmas for the Christian is whenever we hear the glad tidings.

Are you in sorrow? The good news: Christ is here to whom you may turn.

Are you in temptation? The good news: Here is the Child who gives you victory in all temptation.

Are you afflicted with injuries of heart and mind? The good news: Christ is here to bear the burden. He has carried your sin-guilt in His own body on the cross, paying your debt and freeing you once and for all from God's condemnation.

Christ is here and God's Christmas gift *endures* for you. It endures in the sayings the shepherds told concerning the child. It lasts for you whenever you hear the gracious words of our heavenly Father that Jesus was born for *you* and that you have forgiveness and eternal life in Him. Amen.

— Adapted by Pastor David P. Schaller