

God's Invitations in the Bible, Part Eight  
Too Great an Invitation to Refuse  
Luke 2: 8 – 20  
December 13, 2009

It occurs to me that Christmas is one invitation after another. We're invited to go places we are glad to be invited, and many places we don't want to go, and have little time to go even if we wanted to go there. We're invited to buy more things than we are in position to comfortably afford. We are invited to eat more food than we normally eat, and certainly more than our waistline or well-being can withstand! No matter how you describe it, Christmas is one invitation after the other.

This morning, I don't want to talk with you about the frivolous invitations to eat, buy, or socialize at Christmas; I want to talk with you about an invitation that easily can be called the greatest invitation of Christmas: the invitation given the shepherds in Luke Chapter Two watching their sheep out in the lonely, dark, desolate fields.

It was an invitation to leave what they were routinely doing and to go meet the newborn King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It is the same invitation that has been extended through the centuries to people like you and me, to leave where we are and meet the King of Kings.

Let's look closely at this invitation, and then I am going to ask you to respond to the invitation, just as the shepherds had to respond. Let's read our passage of Scripture in Luke 2: 8 – 20 (read).

**1. God's invitation will be unsettling at first, but what God invites me to do is always for my good (Luke 2: 8 – 10).**

A. Don't be afraid of God's invitation to you. What God desires for you is for your ultimate good.

1. **Jeremiah 29: 11** – *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."*

B. Even as we say we trust God's plans for us, we are still generally fearful when God interrupts our routine and redirects our life.

1. The angel's first words to Joseph in a dream were, "Do not be afraid."

2. The Angel Gabriel, sent by God to deliver a life-changing message to Mary, felt compelled to say in introduction, "Do not be afraid, because you have found favor with God."

3. And then, out on that wind-swept hillside, the first words spoken to the shepherds were, "Do not be afraid..."

C. To be afraid when we receive an invitation from God puts us in good company; but the big question for us: will we overcome our fear and misgivings and accept God's invitation?

1. Joseph did, and said, "I'll take Mary as my wife, even though her being with child violates all my preconceptions about how things are supposed to be with an engaged couple."

2. Mary accepted the invitation, and said, "I am the Lord's servant, even though my life will be forever altered."

3. And the shepherds accepted the invitation, and set off to find the Messiah in a stable, even though it meant abandoning their woolly charges to the dark and dangerous night.

D. Have you accepted God's invitation?

1. It may be for salvation! It may be for rededication of your Christian life. Or it may be for a specific call to service in a specific place or ministry.

2. It may be to change what you are doing, or where you do it.

**2. God's invitation will challenge me to move from a spectator to a participant (vs. 11 – 12).**

A. Essentially, tending sheep is a passive activity – they were watching the sheep, contemplating the sweep of the night sky.

1. The invitation was to become participants in the Christmas drama.

2. They were to go and seek out the newborn king, worship Him, and then to go and tell others what they had witnessed.

B. You and I will never get very much from our Christianity by only being spectators.

1. Just being a spectator of others worshipping is not very fulfilling.

2. God invites us to become participants instead of spectators.

C. "Pastor, how can I participate?"

1. When we sing, do you sing – really sing? When the offering is received, do you participate by contributing? When the Word is preached, do you open your heart to the Holy Spirit, or do you merely endure the time, until you can escape back to your normal life?

**3. God's invitation requires our immediate obedience (v. 16).**

A. Imagine how dramatically the scene changed when the angels departed as quickly as they appeared. The glorious, breathtaking lights and sounds disappeared.

1. The angels didn't stick around to lead the shepherds to Bethlehem; the responsibility to respond fell completely on the shepherds.

2. To their eternal credit, they were obedient.

B. Notice *how* they were obedient: They "*hurried off.*"

1. There was no hesitation.

2. I think it is at this point many Christians run into problems.

C. Instead of acting upon God's invitation, we find reasons why this is not a convenient time.

1. "Lord, let me get my life in order. I will do what you are asking of me, but at the proper time and place. Let me finish what I'm doing at present, and then I will come and do what You have asked me to do."

2. What has just happened? God's invitation was extended, and the story ended right there, because God requires immediate obedience.

3. Putting God on hold is to be in effect disobedient.

D. I'm glad the story of the shepherds didn't end at this point; they hurried off to see the Savior.

1. I pray your story doesn't end this morning.

**4. God's invitation is meant to be shared with others (vs. 17 – 18).**

A. Surely God wanted the world to know the Savior was born.

1. Why didn't the angels shout the news far and wide? Why wasn't there a wide screen, multi-media, massed choir extravaganza to spread the word to a larger audience? Why was such an important event ushered in by such a low-key announcement?

B. The answer is simple: He has appointed first-person witnesses to tell the world of His birth – and all about His life, death, and resurrection.

1. That is why a person, upon receiving Salvation, shares the news with everyone he/she can.

2. That is why they share the news with their new church family what God has done in their life.

3. The invitation should be shared with others!

This morning God may be giving you an invitation. How are you going to respond? Will you put Him off again, and reject His invitation. I beg you to do what the shepherds did, and hurry off to participate in what God is doing.

Today, I wonder, has the invitation ended with you? Is there something God wants you to share with the church family? If so, then I want to give you that opportunity in just a moment. The invitation may be a life-changer. Don't put it off.

Let's pray!