The Shepherds’ Discovery

Last in the Christmas series “Christmas Discoveries.”

# **Scripture**: Luke 2:8-20

# Key Thought: As we understand the three titles of Jesus that God revealed to the shepherds, we discover joy and peace.

# Intro:

The titles we are given at our work are important. They are indicative of our responsibilities, our level of authority in the company, and usually also are reflective of our pay level. Unfortunately, in the real world, sometimes we get the responsibilities without the title and it takes a while for things to catch up. But nevertheless, job titles remain an important indicator of our position.

As I was studying the Christmas story this time, I thought about the fact that the angel announcement to the shepherds contains three titles for Jesus, the baby was who was to be born. The fact that these titles were announced before his birth indicates how special he was. Each of the titles tells us about his role in a different area. You could think of them like job titles for the one that God was sending into the world.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. Luke 2:11 NIV

Let’s look for a few moments at these three titles one at a time.

# Jesus is Savior

## We don’t think we need a “Savior”

The first title is “Savior.” The problem with talking about Jesus as Savior today in New England is that most people don’t relate to a need to be saved. Connecticut is the richest state in the nation and many people are like those in the church of Laodicea in Revelation. They say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing” (Rev. 3:17). Traditional language from the Bible uses the word “lost.” Jesus said he came to “Seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10 NIV). But most of us don’t think of ourselves as “lost.” The apostle Paul describes us before we open our hearts to Christ as “dead in your transgressions and sins” (Eph. 2:1). But we don’t relate to that either. Modern psychological advice urges us to feel less guilty without telling us how. We just don’t think about needing a Savior. So it is little wonder that the word “Savior” does not have the meaning that it did when it was announced to the shepherds. Christmas is an opportunity for us to discover the healing God is offering through a Savior.

The truth of it is that we are much more need in need of the saving grace that Jesus offers to us then we are willing to admit. In fact, spiritually, we are prisoners of our own self-centeredness longing for rescue. We are beholden to our lower instincts, too often slaves of greed and lust and envy. And we need a cure. But we frame our problem as a need for growth or even further evolution of the race. Are we willing to listen to Holy Scripture? In the Good Book God describes our problem as a sinful heart that needs a transforming touch of the Holy Spirit. We need a Savior. Jesus came to be the kind of Savior we need.

## But the Bible describes our real need

Science may describe God as a concept that humans have created. But the Bible teaches that God is the powerful Creator person whom we have forgotten. It pictures our race as estranged from God since our disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Ever since then, God has been working to reestablish the connection, to overcome the distance between his creatures and their Creator; to work a cure for the sinfulness of his creatures. He has been planning to send a Savior.

God had sent prophets to give messages to his people Israel and to prepare the way for the one whom Zechariah had announced as the leader, the champion, of salvation, the one who was to come. Now Jesus is announced to the shepherds as the one who rescues the human race from their spiritual predicaments and fundamental estrangement from God; our Savior.

One writer summarizes all that it means for Jesus to be our Savior this way.

In terms of the universe, we see Jesus Christ as the personal and eternal Word of God, as Creator and Redeemer. In terms of his earthly life, we see the cross and the resurrection as the sacrificial climax and achievement, and as the axis of every Christian’s understanding of history, from death to life. In terms of application, we see justification by faith and forgiveness as the pattern of God’s grace coming as a gift to the undeserving. (From The Lord of the Journey edited by Roger Pooley and Philip Seddon)

# Jesus is Messiah

The second title for Jesus that was given to the Shepherds is Messiah.

Another big idea we need to remember comes from the meaning of the term, Messiah.

What does it mean to us that Jesus is the Messiah or the Christ?

## What does Anointed mean?

The Hebrew term is Messiah and the corresponding Greek term is Christ. The root idea of both terms is the action of anointing with oil. Messiah means that Jesus is the “Anointed One.” Let’s look back into the OT and see if we can understand more about what it means for Jesus to be “The Anointed One.”

At God’s command, Moses had instructed the people of Israel to make a special perfumed oil out of spices and olive oil. This oil was only to be used to anoint those that God instructed to be anointed. When someone was anointed, the oil was put on their head.

The first ones to be anointed with it were Aaron and his sons who were anointed as priests for Israel (Lev. 8:12). Succeeding high priests were to be anointed as well. The high priest in office at the time was in charge of the oil. Later in Israel’s history, God instructed the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul to be king of Israel and later Samuel was sent by God to anoint David as King (1 Sam. 9:6; 16:12). In the next generation, Zadok the priest anointed Solomon (1 Ki. 1:39).

Elijah the prophet was instructed to “anoint Jehu…king over Israel, and anoint Elisha…to succeed you as prophet” (1 Ki. 19:16).

The important fact for us is this. So only three types of people were anointed; priests, mostly high priests, kings and prophets.

## Daniel’s prophecy points the way

In one of his most important prophecies, Daniel looks forward to the “Anointed One, the ruler” who was to come (Dan. 9:25). He sets the stage for the expectations that the nations of Israel would have had when they heard the term “Messiah.” He would be a ruler. And he was coming.

Now the Shepherds heard the announcement that Jesus is the “Anointed One” who was to come. He has arrived!

Notice that Jesus became the apex fulfillment of all three strands of people who were anointed. He is the promised heir to the throne of King David, through whom the kingdom of David would last forever. He is anointed to be King over God’s people. The Book of Revelation tells us that someday he will return to earth and on his robe will be the title “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 19:16). He is the fulfillment of the promises to David, the culmination of the Jewish expectation of a coming kingly figure.

Spiritually, the book of Hebrews tells us that he is our High Priest forever (Heb. 4:14; 8:1; 9:11).

Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, Heb 8:1 NRSV

He made the ultimate sacrifice of himself as the Lamb of God as John the Baptist described him. It was the sacrifice to end all Levitical sacrifices. It is sufficient forever for the forgiveness of all our sins. So Jesus is the Anointed One because he is our eternal and ultimate High Priest.

And he is also the prophet like Moses who was predicted to come as well (Deut. 18:15). In Acts 3 Peter speaks of Jesus as the prophet who was to come and quotes Moses. So Jesus is the culmination of the line of prophets. Peter and the early apostles recognized this. Listen to these words from one of Peter’s early sermons.

For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.’

“Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”   
Acts 3:22-26 NIV

In Jesus all the preparation of the OT comes together in one person. All three lines of anointed people, priests, kings, and prophets, find their culmination in the Anointed One who came at Christmas. Christians read and study the OT even though it seems laborious sometimes in order to understand the preparation and prediction of Jesus. Through the nation of Israel, God prepared the seedbed of humanity for the coming of his Son, The Anointed One, and the pinnacle of his Revelation t the world.

# Jesus is Lord

The third title given to the shepherds is the one the early Christian used for Jesus. Their confession of faith was simply, “Jesus is Lord!”

## What does “Jesus is Lord” mean?

In the early days of the disciples following Jesus, the use of the word “Lord” may have been more the courtesy shown to a teacher and leader. It would not necessarily have conveyed a full understanding of his divinity. The disciples at that time were just learning who he was. Jesus reflects this use of the word “Lord” in his rebuke of those who would not put his teachings into practice.

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? Luke 6:46

But later we see the apostles using the word “Lord” of Jesus in a different way. The Jewish people when they read the Old Testament did not say the covenant name of God but substituted the Hebrew word for Lord. So using the word “Lord” for Jesus opened the possibility of another meaning connection.

In addition, the Jews lived in a culture where Roman citizens had to swear loyalty to Caesar with an oath, “Caesar is Lord.” Remember that the Romans had many gods. In addition, all the Roman Caesar’s claimed to be gods. So to say “Caesar is Lord” was to acquiesce both to Caesar’s rule and to give worship to him as a “god” figure.

In deliberate contrast, the confession of faith of the earliest Christian church was “Jesus is Lord.” It is reflecting in the NT.

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Rom 10:9 NRSV

No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor 12:3 NIV

When the Apostles confessed “Jesus is Lord” in this context, it was much more than just acknowledging Jesus as teacher. With this cultural background, the title, “Lord” spoke strongly for them of Jesus’ divine nature and authority.

For example in the dialogue in Acts 15 of Ananias receiving instructions from God, we read;

The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.” Acts 9:11 NIV

But when Ananias later explains what has happened, he says,

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 9:17 NIV

Peter admonishes us:

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord! 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

To revere is an action we reserve for God.

As the Apostle Paul summarized it.

At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:10-11 NIV

Often we say the word “Lord” too lightly. We do not allow it its full force. Christmas reflection can help us correct that.

We make Jesus Lord of our own lives when we worship him and when we allow him to have leadership and mastery over our own lives. He is Lord when he is our mentor, and the Son of God to us.

# Conclusion

The Angels also give the characteristics of their announcement. It is announcement that is, “Good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10 NRSV). It is an announcement that will result in glory to God and in peace (not Gk shalom but eirene). The Greek word means quiet and rest and is used in the NT not just of freedom from conflict but also of our peace with God. Paul uses it in his salutations, (See Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; 1 Thess, 1:1) as did Peter and John (1 Peter 1:2; 2 John 3; Rev. 1:4).

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Rom 1:7 NIV

This same Greek word for peace appears in Jesus’ admonition and promise.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”   
 John 16:33 NIV

So as we meditate on and take to heart the truths we learn from the three titles of Jesus found here in the Christmas story in the angels’ announcement to the shepherds – Savior, Messiah, and Lord, we will find three things that we desperately need in today’s world - true Good News, inner peace and overflowing joy!

I close with a Christmas story:

The Visitors by Phil Lollar (SP-CH)