

Listen and Believe

By Bob Young

Need

Listen to God in the Christmas story; receive the communication of God clearly and without static. Understand that there is something to be believed, what is it? What is the “so what”? What does it all mean? Is this about anything other than a baby in a manger?

Information

Luke 2

Motivation

The newness of approaching the Christmas season differently

The Christmas Story Retold

My experiences with Christmas plays: tumbleweeds as Christmas trees; getting to be more than one thing in a small class at a small school; gunny sack outfit to be shepherd; bathrobe to be one of the kings.

When we think about the Christmas story, we focus on the main characters. Often those who are highlighted in children’s Christmas plays are those who play primary roles. Few children come home with excitement in their eyes to tell their parents they get to be one of 20 shepherds.

When we think about the Christmas story, what we may not focus on is that we are receiving communication from God. In fact, the furthest thing from our minds may be that we are privileged to hear directly from God.

Luke’s account of the role of the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20) is not very long, and may not contribute much to the average Christmas play, but the text suggests some things that should make the top of your “to do” list as you think about the upcoming holiday season. This text will provide the foundation for a short 4-lesson Christmas series entitled “My Christmas To-Do List.”

A Christmas To-Do List: Listen and Believe

[Song: O Listen to the Wondrous Story...]

Set up the situation as described in Luke 2.

Use your holy imagination. How many shepherds were there? How do you envision the event—weather, situation, experience? What time of year did this occur? [Not to bog down, but the date is almost certainly not Dec. 25; one can give a fairly close estimate, the Bible says more than some might think.]

The angels announced in spectacular fashion that the Messiah had been born. The shepherds heard and received the message. They were listening. As soon as the angels left, the shepherds looked at each other and said, “What are we waiting for?” That they immediately believed the announcement is worth a second look.

Why is it so hard to listen? listening to one another, listening to God?

“The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

What is the message God wants us to hear? Several things are suggested in the text.

The glory of the Lord

“Do not be afraid”

Good news of great joy.
The birth of a savior
He is Christ the Lord
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

What does it mean to believe?

HBO=Hear, believe, obey. The Bible is filled with people who heard, believed, and obeyed a lie. Adam and Eve, judges, kings, prophets.
God calls us to hear, believe, and obey the truth.

Genuine belief implies action. What do you believe? I can tell by your actions.

- Can one genuinely believe without following through on the belief?
- What does it mean for you to believe in Jesus?
- Is this merely his existence, or is it something more.
- Sin = that which denies the existence or claims of God. Why should we preach about church attendance, Bible classes, Sunday night, Wednesday night, daily prayer, daily Bible study, moral issues... Because it is possible to live life as though God doesn't exist, looking very much like the ways of the average non-believer in our community.

Belief...

Implies something about how you live your life.

Implies something about the relationships of your life—family, friends, workplace.

Implies something about how you spend the Lord's Day.

Implies something about the relationships you share with brothers and sisters in Christ, where are you when the family reunions occur?

What are you waiting for?

Let us see this thing, let us see the possibilities that God is placing in front of us at this season. My friend Bob Smith sends out a daily thought. Last Wednesday's quote from Vince Lombardi said: *We would accomplish many more things if we did not think of them as impossible.*

Christmas easily becomes stagnant, repetitive, the same old thing. Older folks often give up on Christmas. It is so easily misused, so easily ignored, or used hypocritically to claim Christianity when nothing is changed the rest of the year.

What if we could hear something different this year? What if our understandings, beliefs, and life were changed in ways we have not experienced before?

Not impossible to listen and hear God's message.

Not impossible to believe in Jesus and be changed.

Not impossible to renew faith when faith has weakened.

Not impossible to start today.