

THREE CLICKS TO JESUS

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
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Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

On some college campuses there is a popular game called **Three Clicks to Jesus**. The ideal setting is a dull history lecture on the origins of the First World War.

At a signal from a student sitting at the front, the class turn to a random Wikipedia article on their laptop. The challenge is to find the name "Jesus" within three clicks. Supposing the article is on Somalia. They would scroll down until they found the section on "religion", **Click 1**. Next they would scroll down until they find a mention of Christianity, **Click 2**.

They would then scroll down the doctrines of Christianity until they find the name "Jesus", **Click 3**.

The elapsed time may be 30 seconds.

The victorious student raises their hand in triumph surprising the professor who is wondering why the German invasion of Belgium in August 1914 is the cause of such excitement.

Round 1 being completed the students now start round 2.

The competition continues until the conclusion of the lecture.

I personally have never played this game but I have children who have squandered a very expensive education building up an impressive reputation as someone to be reckoned with on Three Clicks to Jesus.

There is, however, an important theological lesson from this game for all of us in this Advent season.

You see, the secret of success in Three Clicks to Jesus is speed. You can't dawdle. You must rush through the pages of the Wikipedia articles if you want to be the first to Jesus.

I like that emphasis. There is a lot to be said for urgency in coming to Christ. This is brought out powerfully in the story of the shepherds in Luke chapter 2.

This is an encounter of men and angels.

It is a meeting of earth and heaven.

It is both terrifying and joyful.

There is spiritual food for our soul in this narrative.

From the many tasty morsels, here are three that have nourished me this week.

There is an outline in your RidgeLines if you would like to follow along.

First, **THERE IS A TIME TO HURRY**

Once the shepherds had heard the good news of great joy that a Savior had been born nearby they do a very wise thing. Luke tells us, **"So they hurried off."** (v 16)

Now I have watched shepherds in Israel.
You wouldn't mistake them for Olympic sprinters.
Their movements are slow and careful because they don't want to spook the sheep.
They know that any sudden motion could disperse the flock.

But there is a time to hurry and that is when God breaks into our world. When you have been greeted by the angel of the Lord and serenaded by the angelic choir, you don't sit around the fire and leisurely discuss who is going to look after the sheep. No, you leave the sheep in God's hands.
There is a higher priority than mutton.
So they hurried off.

What an example to us. We say we can't come to Christ because of this reason or that reason.
God will take care of those things.
"But what about my work or my family, or this project?" God knows all about that.
Coming to Jesus is a matter of spiritual urgency.

Yes, there is a time to hurry.

First **we hurry to see.**

"The shepherds said to one another, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (v 15)

When God is at work we want to see it.

In 1904 there was an extraordinary revival in Wales.

Over 150,000 people came to Christ.

Lifestyles were changed.

Homes and families were healed.

Entire communities were transformed.

The police had little to do because crime virtually disappeared. The churches were packed every night as people came to pray and praise God.
The news spread around the United Kingdom and soon trains came from London full of people hurrying to see the revival.

The tragedy in our day is that we hurry to see things of lesser importance.

We think that Christmas is only about gifts and garlands.

We exhaust ourselves as we hurry to decorate the tree and we hurry to the stores, and we hurry to get out the Christmas letter.

The shepherds were wiser. **"They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger." (v 16)**

Let me encourage you this Christmas to hurry to see Christ.

Perhaps you have been putting it off for a more convenient time. But the opportunity won't always be there. The angel said, "Today a Savior has been born". If the shepherds hadn't gone immediately to the manger they would have missed it. Paul echoes that urgency when he declares,

**"Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."
(2 Corinthians 6:2)**

The carol puts it well: "Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the Son of Mary." Then **we hurry to tell.**

Luke tells us, **"When the shepherds had seen Jesus, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about the child." (v 17)**

Now the text doesn't tell us they ran to do this but it is hard to imagine that having seen Christ the Lord, the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of all, that these shepherds just strolled down the street.

What they had just seen in a manger was even more amazing than the angels in the night sky.

These men may not have done much running before but they hurried that night to tell the good news that Christ was born.

Christmas provides an opportunity for us to tell the old, old story. A typical conversation this time of the year might begin with the question, "How do you celebrate Christmas in your house?"

The Christian can reply, "Oh we always go to the Christmas Eve Service. We love hearing the story of Jesus being born and being worshiped by shepherds and Magi."

There is always a great deal of argument this time of the year as to whether we should say, "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays". I never mind what people say to me.

If they wish me a "Happy Holiday" I ask them, "Do you know where we get our word "holiday"?"

It derives from "Holy Day", and do you know why Christmas is holy?

It is because a holy God sent his holy Son to do a holy thing for his holy people."

Christmas is a holy day. It has been recognized as such for centuries. Long before people ever got paid vacations the church insisted that on certain days you did no work. On those days you celebrated the great biblical events like the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, and Pentecost. These were all holy days.

So there is a time to hurry.

People sometimes ask me why I walk so quickly.

When I reflect on it I suppose my view is that life is short and I haven't time to hang about.

People comment that I bound into the pulpit.
I suppose I do. I can't wait to get up here and preach the good news of God's grace.
It is what I live for. It is the focus of my week.

Did you know that hurrying is very biblical?
I will prove it to you.

First Samuel says, **"The king's business required haste."**
(1 Samuel 21:8 KJV)

Well I am employed in the King's business and so are you if you are a Christian. We can't laze about and waste time, for the King's business requires haste.

Now let's recognize that there is a wrong type of haste at Christmas. Herod showed that when he rushed to destroy the babies in Bethlehem.

But there is an appropriate haste.
It is the haste of the Magi coming to the Messiah.
It is the haste of the angels flying to the skies outside Bethlehem.

It is the haste of Mary visiting Elizabeth and Zechariah.
For Luke tells us, **"Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth."**
(Luke 1:39 & 40)

Mary hurried because she had great news to tell her cousin and it overflowed into her magnificent Magnificat.

So yes, Christmas is a time to hurry. To hurry to see Jesus and to hurry to tell others about him.

Here's tasty Christmas morsel number 2.
I struggled to express this. I came up with
GLORY LEADS TO GLORY, LEADS TO GLORY

Did you notice how the theme of glory runs through this narrative of the shepherds?

At the beginning of the story we read, **"The glory of the Lord shone around them."** (v 9)

In the middle of the story the great company of angels praised God saying, **"Glory to God in the highest."** (v 14)

Then the story concludes with, **"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen."** (v 20)

Glory is a word we hear a lot at Christmas.
The children sang about it.
It is found in our Christmas cards.

It appears on Christmas morning when we open Aunt Bertha's present of homemade socks and exclaim, "Glory be".

But what exactly is this glory?

The Dictionary of New Testament Theology tells us that glory is a recognition of another's work by giving them the honor they deserve.

It adds that glory is a quality belonging to God.

Glory radiates from the one who has it.

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery informs us that glory is one the major themes that tells the story of the Bible.

So we find glory at the great moments of redemption history like the giving of the law, the worship of God in the temple, the call of the prophets, the transfiguration of Jesus and the descent of the Holy City into the new heaven and earth.

All these events are surrounded with glory.

Glory is visible and tangible.

It is called Shekinah and represents the presence of God among his people.

This glory speaks of the transcendence and greatness of God. It includes the idea of splendor, beauty, magnificence, radiance and rapture.

When human beings encounter this glory they are filled with both awe and fear which is why when the shepherds saw it, **"They were terrified." (v 9)**

This glory simultaneously invites both approach and distance.

When we see this glory we experience two opposite emotions.

Our fascination draws us nearer to God.

Our fear makes us want to run for our lives.

God brandishes glory as a soldier wields a sword.

Glory is both sacred and dangerous.

It inspires reverence and respect on the part of the beholders. Yet an encounter with God's glory is one of the greatest experiences of life.

Christmas is a time to seek God's glory.

As we do so we are transformed by it.

We are changed from one degree of glory to another. Glory is the gift that goes on giving for glory leads to glory, leads to glory.

The glory that the shepherds witnessed in the sky was a foretaste of the glory that everyone will see when Jesus returns to earth a second time.

So Isaiah tells us, **"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh will see it together."**

(Isaiah 40:5 RSV)

Here is a daring prayer for this Christmas season.

"God, give me a glimpse of your glory."

That glimpse will give us courage in danger.
It will sustain us in our sorrow.
It will help us to live good and godly lives.

We glimpse that glory when we meet with Jesus for he is the radiance of the Father's glory. When we come to him and trust him with our lives we can say with John,

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Here is a third magnificent mouthful from this Christmas feast in Luke chapter 2.
THE CHRISTMAS STORY IS LIFECHANGINGLY TRUE.

It is true. It is historically true. It is biblically true.
It is spiritually true. It is personally true.

This week I listened to an interview with Bishop John Shelby Spong on his latest book on how to make Christianity understandable to modern people. The Bishop began by saying that we must acknowledge that the first three chapters of the Bible aren't true. In addition if we want modern people to take the Christian faith seriously we must admit that the virgin birth isn't true, the resurrection of Jesus isn't true, and the Second Coming of Jesus isn't true.

This contradiction of the Bible's claim is somehow supposed to help people come to faith. But it is completely misguided. Myths and fairytales can't help real people facing the extraordinary challenges of the 21st century. But God's truth can.

The incarnation is one of the greatest truths in the universe. It tells us that God in the form of his Son Jesus, became a human being and took on human flesh and yet retained his full godness while being completely human. This truth is so magnificent and mysterious that even the wisest people struggle to comprehend it. Listen to what these great theologians had to say.

The Church Father, Athanasius, described the truth of the incarnation like this. "God became like us that we might become like him."



Peter Abelard said the purpose of the incarnation was that God might illuminate the world by his wisdom and so excite us to love him.

Thomas Aquinas said that by the incarnation, "The greatness of God was not cast off, but the slightness of human nature was put on."



In his one of his Christmas sermons Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When God's Son took on flesh, he truly and bodily took on, out of pure grace, our being, our nature, ourselves. This was the eternal counsel of the

Triune God. Now we are in him. Where he is, there we are too. In the incarnation, on the cross, and in his resurrection. We belong to him because we are in him. That is why the scriptures call us the body of Christ.”

But how do we know the incarnation is true?

Because it results in a life change.

Myths and fables can't do that.

I love the story of Santa Claus but Santa can't make me a better person. Santa can't forgive my past.

Santa can't comfort me in my grief.

Satan can't strengthen me in disappointment.

But Jesus Christ can.

And because he is the truth he transforms us.

That was the experience of those shepherds.

They, **“Returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.” (v 20)**

What an extraordinary transformation.

These shepherds were rough men. They were outsiders in Judean society. They weren't welcome in the synagogue or the homes of respectable people.

They couldn't give testimony in a court of law.

Their normal conversation consisted of cuss words. Amazing Grace wasn't part of their repertoire.

But now they are praising God.

And why is that?

Because it is true that a Savior has been born.

The angel had not misled them.

The prophets had not lied.

The Holy Scriptures had not deceived them.

Everything had been pointing to this moment when the Messiah would come. Now it has arrived.

Everything was just as they had been told.

That is why we can trust the word of God.

That is why we can believe the promises of Jesus.

For the person who knows him, knows the one who is the way, the truth and the life.

The Christmas story is life-changingly true.

Having met Jesus those shepherds would never be the same and neither will we.