

HOW CAN WE NOT ADORE HIM?

Our theme for Christmas this year is **ADORE**. The word “**ADORE**” is late Middle English from the Latin “*adorare*” literally meaning “*to verbally praise someone, idolizing; revering, and even venerating them.*” It’s counterpart in Scripture is most often the Greek word “*proskeuno*” which is translated as “*worship*” in most translations.

So, when we sing the lyrics of that familiar Christmas hymn, is that what we’re really urging folks to do? Is that what you yourself are eager to do? Jesus once chastised those who honored God with their lips, but whose hearts were far from Him. (Matthew 15)

I would hope that we all want to adore Christ. Yet, if we are totally honest with God and with one another, it is probably not always our first impulse. As we come together as the church even today, are our hearts filled with adoration for God’s only begotten Son? If not, why not? Perhaps because we are so familiar with the Christmas Story that we’ve lost the wonder of the Wonderful Counselor and have allowed the busy-ness of the season to rob us of our passion for the Prince of peace.

A couple weeks ago we considered the Magi who had come to adore the newborn king – how they fell down in adoration at the sight of Him and were moved to give Him precious gifts. But, they weren’t the first strangers to behold the Christ child. Luke 2:8-20 offers this earlier record. On the very night of His birth...

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)³ And everyone went to his own town to register.⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, 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.”¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

¹⁷ **When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,** ¹⁸ **and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.** ¹⁹ **But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.** ²⁰ **The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**

The visitation by the angels first caused the shepherds to tremble in fear. Yet, their terror soon turned to a trek to the stables of Bethlehem, searching for the Christ. They weren't commanded to go look for Him, but they were compelled to do so, and it was implied that they would be. After all, the angel said, "You will find the baby." I doubt that they found Him in the first place they looked – there was doubtless more than one corral for sheep in the area - but eventually they stumbled into the right stable. And when they saw the babe lying in a feeding trough, they were amazed.

If we were to make a pilgrimage to **the little town of Bethlehem** today, we could find what is called the "Church of the Nativity" – the traditional site of Jesus' birth since the 2nd century. It may be the exact location – or at least close to it – but no one knows for sure. It's not as if the longitude and latitude were recorded. It may have been a cave. It may have been a rough wooden structure. Whatever the case, we would not think it to be a fit abode for God's Son. Though we might manage to come near it, maybe even stand in the exact place, I'm afraid that no matter how ornate the site might be, it will be empty of the glory that one adorned it.

The truth is that we don't even know **the precise year** let alone day of Jesus' birth. Any vital records would've been destroyed along with the archives of the temple in AD 70. Was it **December 25, 2016** years ago? The Biblical text gives us a time frame. Matthew tells us He was born prior to Herod's death which was in 4 BC - so our Roman calendar is likely off 5-6 years. We can't be sure of the exact month of Jesus birth either. Judging from when Zacharias is thought to have served in the temple and assuming Elizabeth conceived almost immediately thereafter, and factoring in that Jesus was conceived 6 months later, some conclude He was born in October rather than December. They could be right, but there's room for error in the calculations. So, even if we could be transported in a time machine to Bethlehem, I wouldn't know what date to enter into it. We might get close to the time, but a day early or a day late, and we'd miss the glory.

So, without angels to guide us, how can we find the Christ today? How can we "Come to Adore Him?" Only if we **venture on a journey of faith**, asking not angels, but the Spirit of the Living God to illuminate that scene in our hearts. "Lord, let us behold Him – and move us to adore Him. For I believe if we can catch but a glimpse of the Word who became flesh, we will not be able to help but adore Him." What if the Lord granted that request?

The Holy Spirit inspired words of Isaiah in chapter 9:6-7 may help. What if angels did point the way? What would we do? Hopefully we would do as the Shepherds did.

First, **they hurried off** to find the Promised One. May we be as eager to “*celebrate the presence*” of the Messiah. And when they beheld Christ the Lord, they were moved to share the good news. Our text says that “**they spread the word.**” Can we do any less? Shouldn’t we “*Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and everywhere?*” In fact, we are commanded to do that very thing.

Once they had told everyone that they possibly could, it says that “**they returned.**” Returned where? To the manger? Perhaps, for one more look at the Christ. More likely this refers to them returning to their flocks – back to work, but, but with a new song on their hearts as they were **glorifying and praising God.**

It seems to me that we often get caught up in extremes. I, for one, can be so concerned about evangelism, that I forget about worship. Others are so intent on a praise service that they neglect the call to share the gospel with the world. It’s not an “*either-or,*” but a “*both-and.*” People often debate over whether worship should be “*traditional*” or “*contemporary,*” but the real question is whether is authentic – flowing from hearts that adore the Lord. The shepherds give us a good example of what it means to praise God directly and also glorify Him by sharing the good news with others,

I believe if by God’s grace we are able to recapture the wonder our passion will be rekindled. May it be so. For when were are awed by the gift of God, we will not be able to “*help but adore, Christ the Lord.*”