

# Luke 2021

by Carter Conlon

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*This sermon delves into the story of the shepherds visiting Jesus at His birth, emphasizing the profound joy and hope that Christ's coming brings, and the eternal impact of His birth on our lives. It encourages listeners to reflect on the deeper meaning of Christmas and how it applies to their daily struggles and future, highlighting the transformative power of inviting Jesus into their hearts.*

**Scripture:** Luke 2:10, John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 10:9, Revelation 21:5

**Topics:** "Joy of Christ's Birth", "Transformative Power of Invitation"

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## Description

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## Transcript

I have one prayer request I'd like to read, then I'd like to share with you tonight from the Word of God based on what Pastor Tim Delino spoke about on Sunday morning about the shepherds. If you haven't heard it, I encourage you to go back and listen to it. It was a banquet feast, talking about the shepherds coming in to that particular place where Christ was in human form and worshipping him.

It was a phenomenal message. I feel like a crumb fell down off the table to me, off that banqueting table, and I want to share that with you tonight. The prayer request that I want to focus on is from William in Connecticut.

He said, please pray for me and others like me working in healthcare. We are very exhausted and burnt out. Thank you, Times Square Church.

Thank you, William, for sending in your prayer request to us. We are going to pray for you tonight and many others that are like you that are feeling a sense of absolute burnout in this generation because the stresses against us are coming from almost every side. The incivility in our society today, the oppression, the repression, the cancel culture as well, and other things.

We're looking at all of these things and just saying, God, what's to become of us? What is our future going to hold? Where does Christmas fit into all of this, especially as we come into the Christmas season? Is

there something in this story that seems to have captivated humanity for 2,000 years? Did I miss something? Is there something in here that could apply to my life? Can it carry me through and beyond just this particular season called Christmas that technically ends right after December the 25th, usually every year? The thought on my heart is the thought of many people's hearts is, why does Christmas have to end? This feeling of at least if it's just even a glimmer of hope that's come into your heart, maybe just a measure of civility that's coming into people, a little acts of kindness that perhaps are not seen throughout the year, and you're wondering in your heart, oh, God, why does this have to end? And is there something deeper or richer for this in me that I've not considered before? So if you'll turn in your Bible or whatever device you have to gain access to the Word of God to Luke chapter two, we're going to start there. And I'm calling this, I had two different titles that were stirring around in my heart. One is, why does Christmas have to end? And the other is Luke 20, 21.

As we're going into 2021, I thought this was an interesting take on Luke chapter two, verses 20 and 21, because there's a transition that happens there between verse 20 and 21. And we're going to talk about that in just a moment. So Father, I thank you, God, tonight with all my heart.

Oh God, we need your word. Lord, it is true that the entrance of your word gives light. And so Lord God, you've got to take us beyond just the good feeling of the Christmas season that so many of us have known and continue to know.

And you get to take your people into the deeper meaning of what really transpired here and how it affects us today. And so God, would you help me to convey this tonight? Would you help us to hear this simple teaching? And then as we go to the communion table, Lord, let us go there with gratitude and gladness in our heart that doesn't have to end the day that Christmas is over. So Father, thank you for this tonight.

God, thank you for the anointing of your spirit. I recognize God. I have nothing to say without you.

Lord, I have no revelation unless you choose to give it to me. There's no power in my voice except for that which is of you that chooses to use this vessel to speak. And so Lord, tonight for the sake of your people and for the glory of your own name, just transcend my human weakness and speak my God into the hearts of people who are all over this country and all over the world tonight or tomorrow, whatever day they listen to this, Lord, and who are just looking for a glimmer of hope because they are exhausted.

And I thank you for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, the scene in Luke chapter 2 starts with a day where Caesar Augustus gets it in his heart to count the world as he knew it, his particular domain.

He said, let's count the people. You know, there's, you know, some versions say it was for a census. The others say it was for taxation.

I say it was for both. Count the people so that we can know where they are, how we can gain more treasure from them, how we can get more taxes from the people. So it was a repressive time.

It was an oppressive time. There was a dominant force that had come into the Holy Land, had overpowered, in a sense, God's people at that time were imposing a worldview upon the people. It was not a biblical worldview.

And they were corralling the people like cattle all over, telling them, you can't go here. You can't go there. You've got to go here.

You've got to go there. It really was, in one sense, the COVID time in Luke chapter 2, the COVID time when Christ was born. People would have lost employment.

They had to leave where they were. They had to travel to their city of their birth. That means they had to leave if there was a, shopkeepers had to leave and lose income.

Carpenters had to stop making furniture. People had to move. There was inconvenience.

There was expense. Nobody much cared, just for the purpose of obeying authorities and literally being counted. So it was not quite the same as us today, our circumstance, but it was similar in nature, similar in heart.

There would have been a despondency in a lot of the people that were there. Now in the country, in verse 8, it tells us in Luke 2, there were shepherds living out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. Now, historically, they tell us that you became a shepherd if you couldn't get a job, basically.

That's what you did. I mean, it was, I'm not downplaying dishwashers. God bless you if you're a dishwasher in a restaurant in the middle of the night, and I appreciate the fact that you are working.

But realistically, the shepherds were the dishwashers of their generation. If you couldn't get a job, you became a shepherd. It's cold.

It's dank. It's dark. It's out at night.

It's maybe boring, and there's not much of a chance of advancement, I don't think, in that particular career. And so suddenly, out in the middle of, I love the fact that I've heard it said by somebody, I think it was Pastor Teresa said one time that Jesus came to the night shift, and I thank God for that. He didn't appear to the movers and shakers.

I guess they were too busy. Or the self-possessed, or those that are concerned about their own comforts. He came to those who were out in the field and maybe feeling a little bit hopeless.

Maybe wondering, can it get any worse than it is now? Here we are looking after these sheep, risking our lives for mediocre pay, realistically, because the sheep were attacked by wild dogs and such like, and they would risk their safety and their life to protect them. Very little reward for this particular career. And then suddenly, it's like you and I, maybe, if we're living in an era and doing a job that we don't like, and feeling hopeless, wondering what the future's going to hold.

And then suddenly, somebody just invites you to a church play, or maybe online. You have an opportunity, like at Times Square Church, to see a wonderful Christmas story, and you're kind of invited in. Now, there was no internet back then, and there were no cell phones, and there's no videos, no television, no nothing.

So God just decided to put out an internet Christmas production of his own. And suddenly, it says, the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. And the angel said to them, do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy to all people.

So these are elements of the message the angel brought. This is good news, and it should produce great joy to all people. Not just a momentary joy, not just a day, like Christmas Day can bring, or the Christmas season can bring, but it's great joy.

It's beyond just this momentary joy. It's a joy that's unspeakable. It's a joy that's full of glory.

It's a joy that lasts. It's a joy that transcends circumstance. It's a joy that's deeper than just anything on the exterior around us.

It's a joy that embeds itself in the human heart when a relationship with God is now intact. And the essence of this joy, the angel said, for there's born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you, you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

Here's your sign. You will find God in human form, who has come down into the earth in the weakest of humanity and wrapped in strips of cloth that generally are pieces of cloth that society has discarded. In some cases, sometimes they're sewn together and they're made into makeshift blankets.

And here's the great joy, that God has come down. He's come down in human form. He's God.

You understand? He created the universe. He's God. By the word of his mouth, galaxies came into existence.

He can raise the dead. He can calm the storm. He can do anything he wants.

He's God. And he chooses to come down among us, not as a 10-foot giant, not as a majestic, glorious, transcended being as he could have been, but he comes down as a baby in a manger to show us that he is not offended by our weakness. He comes down as a baby who can't feed himself, he can't talk, and somebody else has to change his diapers to show us that he's not afraid of our weakness, our inabilities, he's not afraid of our mess, he's not offended by our struggles, that he has come down to dwell among us.

That was his name, Immanuel. God is with us. And he didn't come down in our strength, but he came down in our weakness to show us that I'm willing to dwell among you and be God to you, and I'm willing to raise you up no matter how deep your struggle might be.

And with this truth that had just been conveyed in this incredible video presentation of God, suddenly there's with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men. So this was a Christmas production like nothing you'll ever see in your lifetime. I mean, there were no risers that these angels were standing on, there were no wires holding them up in the sky.

They were floating there. And I don't know what angel voices sound like, but it must be. They have to be in perfect pitch.

It has to be a choir like you've never heard ever, ever at any time in history. There's no humanness in it. The sound doesn't have to work its way through sin, a sin nature to come out.

It is completely unhindered by that which would separate from God. And they were saying, glory to God in the highest, glory to God, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men. This incredible song that accompanied this incredible gesture of God's goodness to you and I when he came down and proved to us, and here's what he said to you, I'm not afraid of your struggles.

I'm not ashamed of your mess. I'm not angry with you and your weakness. I've come to get you.

And not only to get you, I've come to live inside of you, even when you can't walk and when you don't know what to say and you can't see a way forward. I've come to be God to you. You see, this benevolence, this goodness of God was so profound that the angels could not contain themselves anymore.

I've often said, just the way my mind works, they're leaning on the canopy that kind of separates heaven from the earth and there were just so many of them pushing in to see this great sight that they tore it, they broke through and they came into the heavens and they couldn't do anything but begin to shout glory to God, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill, God's goodwill, God's good gesture towards men. And so it was when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. They came with haste and they found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.

And when they had seen him, they made widely known the saying which God told them concerning this child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in their heart.

Now here are the verses I want to really focus on, 20 and 21, because we're going into the year 2021. It starts with, then the shepherds returned. In other words, you might really get touched this Christmas.

You might feel a glimmer of hope in your heart. Somebody might invite you to watch something online because most likely it won't be in church because nobody can go there. We're in a moment like Luke chapter 2 and verse 1. Nobody can actually meet the way they should.

And maybe while you're watching it, while you're hearing the choir sing and you're hearing that Christmas story all over again, your heart starts to burn like theirs did. And maybe just even for a moment, you'll tell people about it. I just saw the most marvelous choir.

I just heard the most marvelous song. And I heard the most wonderful truth. And I kind of pressed in to see it.

And it was all just about God coming to the earth in the form of a baby. But you see, December 26th, that moment is over. And on December 26th or 27th or January 1st, whenever it is, you've got to go back to work again.

So the shepherds returned. So I can just see them going back and probably really excited for maybe a day or two or three or maybe a week or two. I don't know how long, but eventually sitting on the cold ground again with your stick and looking at the sheep and kind of that other reality comes and tries to swallow this great truth that they had just seen, this great wonder that they had just witnessed.

And the question must have been in their heart, as it is in many people's hearts at Christmastime, how does this apply to me? And it is such a good feeling. When I was a child, I used to have that thought in my heart. When I was about five, I remember Christmas Day.

Everybody was so nice on Christmas. And I wondered, why can't they be like that all year? Why do people just smile at each other on the street and wave and visit each other's home and everybody is happy and everybody is telling good stories? And it's just like they take off those clothes on December 26th or 27th and they just put on their regular old work clothes and go back and they don't even greet each other on the

street anymore. And I found it odd when I was a child.

I was thinking, why does Christmas have to end? And maybe you're thinking that tonight listening to me speak and listening to the songs tonight and the prayers, maybe you are feeling something in your heart. Maybe there's something about the story that's actually stirring you. But you say, well, but I got to return to the hospital where I'm tired, as in William's case, and I'm burned out and everybody I'm working with is burned out.

And Christmas was nice and it made me feel good and it stirred my heart. But what does it really mean to me? And so that's where we finish in chapter 2, verse 20. So that's probably where 2020 is going to finish.

A lot of people really going back to work if they even have work, maybe having come through the Christmas season where we're given just a little wee glimpse of hope that's ours in God, having heard the songs and seen the videos and listened to the testimonies and the stories. But we have to return and go back to what it was like before the messenger first appeared to us. Now, that's where it finishes in 20.

But in 21, you see something is happening here. It says, and when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child, his name was called Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was consumed in the womb. So 2021 is where the transition takes place.

2021 is where we, in 20 we hear the message, but in 21, the messenger is moving to his mission. The plan of God is fully engaged. The greatest event in the history of the world is about to transpire.

And everything is moving and everything is working just the way God said it would. And so this is my message to you in 2021. As the year, as Christmas season is here and your heart is glad and we're moving into the subsequent year, the plan of God for you is going ahead at full speed.

Nothing has stopped. If you've opened your heart to the... See, these shepherds opened their heart to the Christ child and they would have really no idea how this was going to work out. They knew what they had seen was supposed to give them great joy and it was good news and it was for all people, but they had to go back to work.

And they must have wondered, so what did we see? And how does it apply to us? And what's it going to do for us? And where is it going to bring us? The reality is that baby that was in that manger was the son of God and he was sent by his father on a mission. And he was going to go and walk among the people. And as he did as a baby, he was going to endure our frailties.

And then he was going to take upon himself our struggles and our mess. And he was going to wrap himself in the swaddling clothes of our failure when he went to the cross. He was going to open his arms and embrace us.

And everyone who calls out to him, he promised that he would be God to us. He would save us. That means he would wash away all of the stain of our failure, which the Bible calls sin, and our disobedience, which the Bible calls sin.

He would wash the stain of it all away and he would come and indwell us just as he indwelled that human body in that manger. He would indwell us in our mess. He would indwell us in our weakness.

He would indwell us when we can't change ourselves, we can't feed ourselves, we don't see a way forward. And he was going to do something for us, not just in time, but for eternity. He said, I go to prepare a place for you that where I am, there you may be also.

If it were not so, I would have told you. In my Father's house there are many mansions, and I go to prepare a place for you. And there's a version of the Bible that says, in my Father's house there are many rooms.

Well, I prefer mansions. You can have your room if you want it. I'm going to have a mansion when I get there.

Praise be to God. In my Father's house there are many mansions. We're going to live with him, not just in time, but for all of eternity.

Now, your job may still be tough. And yes, you may still be a shepherd, perhaps for the rest of your working career. I don't know.

But I do know, if you will open your heart to the Son of God, he will forgive your sins. He will indwell you and change you from the inside out. And you will be turned into another person.

Behold, he said, I make all things new. And that's what he will do for you. He will make you into a new man, a new woman.

He'll give you a new mind and a new heart. It doesn't mean you're going to be doing a different job. It doesn't mean you're going to be living in a different home.

It doesn't mean that your circumstances necessarily around you and the exterior are going to change. But there's going to be a change on the inside. And that song that you heard, that the shepherds heard, that was only in the heavens, would one day, if they opened their heart to Christ, be in their heart.

It would be a song that this world doesn't give and the world can't take it away. It would be a song of joy that only comes from the hearts of those who know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. And tonight it can be your song.

If you will open your heart. You know, it's wonderful to come to the Christmas season. It's wonderful to be invited to see productions and plays and hear songs and hear the story of Christ all over again.

It's nice the feeling it brings in our heart, to be able to be kind to others and maybe they could be kind to us. But it doesn't have to end on December the 25th, this year or any other year. Christmas doesn't have to end.

God is willing to plant it in your heart. And it can be Christmas for you every day for the rest of your life. I promise you this in Jesus' name.

There'll be this inner joy. There'll be this inner song, this inner hope, this inner witness, that even the momentary sufferings of this world, as the Apostle Paul says, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that God promises is going to be revealed in us. There's a hope for you if you'll open your heart to God tonight.

And as we always tell people at Times Square Church, it's as easy as ABC. Admit that you need a Savior. Admit that you can't save yourself.

Admit that you're as helpless as that baby in that manger. You can't change the way you are. You can't speak any different than what your natural body allows you to do.

You can't see a way forward. And in many cases, some of you say, like, that's me. I've just blown my whole life.

And I don't know. I feel so helpless. I feel so hopeless.

I feel like I'm stuck in a cave, and I don't know what to do about my future. But just admit your condition. Stop trying to save yourself because you can't save yourself.

And believe that God, in his mercy, sent his son into this world. And as I said, not as a giant, not as a perfected 10-foot warrior. He sent him in as a child to prove to you, to prove to you that he's willing to walk with you, to prove to you.

He said, I'm going to come as the weakest of humanity so that nobody can say that I'm too weak for God to use me or I'm too weak for God to receive me or live inside of me. He said, I'm going to start right at the bottom so that there's nowhere to go from there but up. And everybody will have to know that I'm willing to give you life.

If you will just believe that I came, went to a cross, and died for you so that you can have eternal life. And if you will confess Him with your mouth, it's not difficult. It's not a formula.

It's just you saying tonight or today, I believe. And I invite you. As you invited me into the cave, the shepherds could say, where you were born, I now invite you into my life so I can be born again, so I can have new life, so I can receive the Spirit of God, so I can have hope for my future and for my eternity.

I was 24 years old when this happened to me. I was an angry man. I was selfish to the core of my being.

I was fearful. I felt hopeless. I was drinking and taking tranquilizers to try to handle the pain that was in my heart.

And one day somebody came to me and told me what I'm telling you. I remember thinking, oh, God, could this be true? And I remember it wasn't even so much the forgiveness of my sins, as important as that was, but he told me, he said, the Bible says if anyone is in Christ, he becomes a new creation. The old things in his life pass away and all things become new.

He said, Carter, that's what it means to be born again. You start all over again. You died because you sinned, but in Christ you can be made alive.

And if you'll open your heart to him, he'll make you into a new person. And he'll take you and give you a new life. And he'll make you what you could never hope to be.

And he'll give you what you could never possess. And he'll take you where you could never go. And I so wanted to be a good father.

I so wanted to be a good husband. I so wanted to have purpose in my life, but I didn't know how. I was like the baby in the manger, in a sense.

I couldn't change myself. I couldn't speak other than what I had become accustomed to speaking. Matter of fact, the cursing in my mouth was getting worse all the time.

I couldn't control my temper. I didn't know what I was going to do with the future. It was on May 12, 1978, I was on the way to work as a police officer in uniform, and I pulled over on the side of the road.

I remember the street. It was called Island Park Drive. I pulled over to the side of the road, and I put my car in park just for a minute, and I said, Jesus, if what Irv, the cop who told me these things, his name was Irv, and this was my prayer.

If what Irv has told me is true, I invite you into my life. To be my Lord and Savior. I give you my life.

I give you my future. If you will come and take me, you can have me. And I just went to work.

I didn't feel a thing. Some people talk about they feel tingles or they feel all kinds of stuff. I didn't feel anything.

I didn't see angels in heaven. I heard no song. But I went to work, and I worked my shift.

I went home. I went to bed. As God lives, as God lives, I got up the next morning, I put my feet on the floor, and I knew I was a different man.

And I don't know how I knew. I just knew. Something had changed inside of me.

I felt a life source inside of me that I had never known before. I felt hope. I felt like I had a future.

I felt like there was a purpose for my life that I didn't understand yet, but God would reveal it to me as the days went on. And I've been all over the world now. I've flown as much as the angels in the chapter 2, and I've been all over the world telling you this simple message, and here it is.

What Jesus did for me, Jesus will do for you. It's still good news of great joy to all people. I thank God that he came and took up residence in my life.

And if you will open your heart, he will do that for you tonight. So I'm going to just lead you in a simple prayer before we go to the communion table tonight. And if you will pray this prayer, I promise you, I promise you, Jesus will receive you.

He doesn't want perfect people. He wants people who are a mess. He doesn't want people who have it together.

He wants people who have nothing together. You are the ones he came for. He came to save you.

He came to change you and bring you home. So pray this simple prayer with me tonight. Lord Jesus Christ, if what this pastor is telling me is true, I open my heart to you, and I invite you into my life to be my God and my Lord and my Savior.

I believe that you died for me, that you are the Son of God, that you were raised from the dead. After three days in the grave, as proof to me that I too will be raised from death and brought into life, I give you my life because you gave me your life. Thank you for loving me.

Thank you for wanting me. Thank you for coming to me. From this day forward, you are my God.

Jesus, you are my Lord. And I will, as you give me strength, I will follow you all of my days. And I know tonight, because you told me, that when I die, heaven, where you are, will be my home forever.

In Jesus' name, amen. Raphael, can we come back with the worship team? There's going to be a number on the screen. Loretta will put it there shortly.

And this number is a number you can text in. And just text the word decided. Just text the word decided, and somebody from Times Square Church will get in touch with you.

By text or email or a conversation by telephone, if you want to talk to somebody and have prayer. But we will get in touch with you. And we'll help you.

We'll help you as best as we know how to grow in the understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And where do you find this place where it's Christmas every day in your heart? And how do you stay there? And how do you live there? You'll learn all of these things. Love you so much.

God bless you. And we're going to come back for communion in just a moment. Pastor Tim is going to lead us in communion tonight.

But I'm going to ask you. I'm going to ask you. Get some bread.

Get some juice. And let's have communion together. And let's celebrate you tonight.

I see somebody out there. I don't know who you are, but I see somebody out there. You really just sincerely prayed that prayer.

And the Bible says that the angels in heaven are rejoicing over you. You've come to Christ tonight. And so those angels that were singing above the shepherds, singing that song of glory to God and on earth peace and goodwill towards men, they're singing it about you tonight.

Love you. God bless you so much.

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