

## The Holy Ground of Christmas, Part Two

*Luke 2:8-20*

Last week, we began talking about “Holy Ground Moments”—those times in our lives when God intersects with our routines, and we know without question that He is there with us at that moment in time. There are several I could point to in my own life, and I hope you can, too. But let me tell you about one that happened to me just this morning.

My cell phone rang, and I could see on the screen that it was my daughter. But when I answered, there was the sweet little voice of my granddaughter, saying, “Merry Christmas, Papaw!” That in itself was a Holy Ground Moment, but it got better.

After I talked to her for a few minutes, she handed the phone to my daughter, and we talked. I tried to visualize what their Christmas morning must have been like as she described the usual excitement you would expect in a household with two small children. My son-in-law was videoing the morning’s activities, and as things were winding down, he said, “Everybody say goodbye to the camera!”

My six-year-old granddaughter said, “Wait a minute! I want to say one more thing. All these things are nice, but let’s don’t forget why we really celebrate Christmas!”

For me, when my daughter told me that, it was a Holy Ground Moment!

Perhaps you remember a moment like that in your own life. A Holy Ground Moment is not necessarily a moment when you say “WOW!” but it is a point in time when you are vividly aware of the Presence of Almighty God, when you sense that He is real, that He is with you, and that He loves you.

You were going about your usual business, when suddenly you found yourself in the midst of a special experience that made you sharply aware of the majestic presence of God at that point in time, in that place, at that moment.

Where is Holy Ground? All around us! Certainly we should view this sanctuary where we meet for worship as Holy Ground. Your home could be Holy Ground. The streets of Utica and the roads of Hinds County are Holy Ground if we would only open our eyes and ears to our Heavenly Father.

We come to the closing hours of this year engaged in a celebration of the birth of our Savior, and in the Gospels which tell us all we know about that glorious event, we find that Holy Ground Moments come in many different varieties. Last week we discovered three of them: **The Holy Ground of Promised Joy**, vv 9-14, **Urgent Curiosity**, vv. 15-16a, and **Amazing Discovery**, vv. 16b-17a. But wait! There's more:

## **4 The Holy Ground of Spreading Truth, vv. 17b-18**

The first response of the shepherds was quite natural and appropriate. Verse 17 tells us that when they had seen the Baby Jesus, *“they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”* Those who heard their story were amazed at what the shepherds had told them.

If the first observers of the manger could not be silent, how much more difficult it should be for those of us who have experienced the Cross! The arrival of the Lord God into our world, breaking through the barrier which separates the seen from the Unseen, the temporal from the Eternal, the human from the Divine, was such a monumental event that the shepherds could not keep silent.

Without a doubt they did not fully understand what they saw that night, but that did not keep them from telling it. These shepherds had no formal training in how to share their faith in the Messiah. They were not professional religious people who were paid for telling it. They had been on Holy Ground, and as a result, could not help but spread the truth.

It is an awesome thing to watch as the Spirit of God takes hold of a person's life to the extent that that individual becomes a channel through which the truth can be spread to others. Things begin to happen where the only explanation for them is “God is here and doing a marvelous thing in our eyes!” The Truth spreads, and as it does, lives continue to be changed by the Power of Jesus Christ.

Now some of us may see that happening in someone else's life and say, “Well, he's finally gone off the deep end! He's turning into a religious fanatic, telling everybody he sees about Jesus.” Listen carefully: when the Truth about the Lord Jesus Christ spreads from one human being to another, then to another, and then to another, that is Holy Ground.

## **5 The Holy Ground of Private Pondering, v. 19**

Those who heard the shepherds' story were amazed, but the Scriptures do not record that they responded any further than that. Apparently they did nothing more than say, "That's great!" and go on about the business of their lives. A slight ripple of astonishment ruffled the surface of their souls for a brief moment or two, and then was gone. They apparently were unaffected by what they heard. Just like a lot of us today, when we hear the most amazing story in the history of the world week after week—and yawn.

But Mary was different, as we might expect. Verse 19 tells us that she "*treasured up all these things,*" a phrase which literally reads that she "kept on keeping together" all the things which had happened and which had been said about this Child born to her. One commentator suggests that she may have kept a Baby Book of sorts. And why not? It is even suggested that she may have shown it to Luke years later as he was writing this Gospel bearing his name.

Then the verse tells us that she "*pondered them in her heart.*" There the phrase literally reads that she "set them side by side for comparison." She took the things told her by the angel Gabriel back in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, and in her mind laid them side by side with the things the shepherds had said when they came to the stable that night.

The shepherds would tell the story, but Mary would keep silent—why? As the mother of this special Child, it would have been inappropriate for her to claim that He was the Messiah. Others would have to do that for her. If she had done so, it would have merely served to glorify herself, or at the very least, would appear to be boastful. She would keep quiet, and allow God to work out His own timing and method for the disclosure that her son Jesus was the Son of God. She would trust the Lord God to know what He was doing.

This is a Holy Ground experience we cultivate for ourselves. The truth will never seize us, nor will Christ take a sovereign grip on our lives, until we have treasured the truth about Him and the ways He has revealed Himself to us in our hearts. There is a definite place for public worship, study and prayer, but none of these counts for much without the private ponderings of the heart alone with God. A Christian who never treasures nor ponders is at best a shallow example of what God can do to an individual.

We're talking about a secret brooding on the Word of God which allows God's Spirit to plant His Word deep into our beings, and that Word, hidden away,

treasured away in our hearts, transforms us day by day. Those times when we are able to pull aside and ponder the deeper truths as God has revealed them to us are Holy Ground Moments.

## **6 The Holy Ground of Glorified Routine, v. 20**

We read in verse twenty that “*the shepherds returned.*” What that literally means is that they went back to work. They went back to the routine of their lives in tending the flocks. They went back to doing what they knew how to do, what seemed most logical for them to do. They drop out of the pages of Scripture at this point and we never hear from them again, yet we can be assured that their lives would never be the same again. In fact, they may have gathered around their campfires with other shepherds on other nights, and told and retold the story again and again, the wonder never losing its luster through the years.

They may have said something like “It was a night just like this one, when we were watching over the flocks during the night. I was standing right about where you are now, when suddenly we were bathed and surrounded by an overwhelming Light, the glory of which I had never seen before, nor have I seen it since.”

And perhaps they would go on to describe as best they could the appearance of the first angel, and the impact of his words on them, and the glorious sound of the celestial chorus. They would tell of their hurried trip to Bethlehem, and of their discovery of the Baby in the manger, just as the angel had said. And they would give glory to God each time they told it.

In fact, verse twenty tells us that as the shepherds went back to work, they literally continued to glorify and praise God for all they had heard and seen. So when we say “Glorified Routine” we do not mean that the routine of watching over the needs of sheep suddenly had more importance than it deserved. We mean that the commonplace was glorified in the sense that God was present in the midst of their routine as never before.

The same can happen to us today. Holy Ground Moments are not confined to those times when the Bible is open on our laps, or on a desk before us. Those experiences with God do not come only when we are praying alone in the woods, or while watching a beautiful sunrise. They do not happen just on Sundays in the church building.

In fact, if our relationship with Christ is real at all, Holy Ground Moments should happen even in the routine of our lives, as we recognize that Christ is present with us as we figure accounts, answer the telephone, use our computers, pay the bills, change the diapers, study for that test, mow the lawn, hammer the nails, make that sales call or send that email.

So you see, Christmas is not just about love and warm and fuzzy feelings about family and friends. It's not just about helping those who are less fortunate, and it's not just about international missions. The real story of Christmas is how God broke through into human history, becoming one of us that He might die on a Cross to pay for our sins.

It's about God coming to walk alongside us in our everyday lives, leading us and guiding us and yes, sometimes convicting us of sin. It's about God reaching down to demonstrate His love and mercy to sinful human beings, that we might know eternal life.

For that reason, Christmas is Holy Ground. Sometime during the day today, make sure that you stop all the activities long enough to whisper a "Thank You" to your Heavenly Father.

And perhaps, in your Holy Ground Moment, God the Father will tell you how very, very much He loves you. God longs to break through into your life at this moment. Will you open up yourself to Him, that He may come in?