

# LUKE 2:8-20 | RESPONSIVE LIVING (CHRISTMAS EVE)

RESPONSIVE LIVING

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DECEMBER 24, 2016

IF YOU'VE SPENT ANY TIME IN CHURCH AT ALL, OVER THE YEARS, THEN YOU KNOW WHAT A RESPONSIVE READING IS. THERE ARE TWO OF THEM IN THE SERVICE THIS EVENING.

THE MINISTER SAYS A LINE, AND THE PEOPLE RESPOND. MY LINE IS IN REGULAR TYPE, YOURS IS IN BOLD FACE TYPE, NOT ONLY TO DIFFERENTIATE THE TWO, BUT ALSO FOR EMPHASIS.

GENERALLY, THE READINGS ARE A PORTION OF SCRIPTURE, OFTEN ONE OF THE PSALMS, AND THEY ARE JUST LONG ENOUGH TO TELL A SHORT STORY; SHARE A THOUGHT; OFFER INSPIRATION.

SOMETIMES, THEY ARE A PRAYER, OR A PARTING WORD OF BLESSING.

IN A SENSE, THIS IS WHAT WE SEE IN OUR PASSAGE FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE FOR THIS EVENING. IT IS LUKE'S TELLING OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY.

IT IS WRITTEN RESPONSIVELY – FIRST THE ANGELS, THEN THE SHEPHERDS; THEN THE SHEPHERDS – THEN MARY; THEN MARY – THEN THE SHEPHERDS AGAIN;

IN THIS RESPONSIVE READING THE PARTS KEEP CHANGING.

AND, (AND THIS IS THE BIG DIFFERENCE), INSTEAD OF ONE PERSON SAYING SOMETHING AND THE OTHER PERSON RESPONDING BY SAYING SOMETHING BACK;

IN THE CASE OF LUKE'S TELLING OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY – ONE PERSON SAYS SOMETHING, AND THE OTHER PERSON **DOES** SOMETHING.

IT'S NOT SO MUCH A RESPONSIVE READING, AS IT IS **RESPONSIVE LIVING**.

THE ANGELS SPEAK:

"DO NOT BE AFRAID; FOR SEE – I AM BRINGING YOU GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY FOR ALL THE PEOPLE; TO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVID A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST, THE LORD.

THIS WILL BE A SIGN FOR YOU: YOU WILL FIND A CHILD WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHES AND LYING IN A MANGER."

AND THEN A WHOLE HOST OF HEAVENLY ANGELS JOIN IN: "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN, AND ON EARTH PEACE AMONG ALL."

THEN, THE SHEPHERDS, INSTEAD OF SAYING SOMETHING BACK, GO IN SEARCH OF WHAT THEY'VE BEEN TOLD.

THE ANGELS SPEAK – THE SHEPHERDS GO.

AND FINDING THE CHILD IN A STABLE IN BETHLEHEM, JUST AS THE ANGELS HAD DESCRIBED – THIS TIME, THEY ARE THE ONES WHO SPEAK.

"WHEN THEY SAW THIS, THEY MADE KNOWN WHAT HAD BEEN TOLD THEM ABOUT THIS CHILD."

AND THIS TIME, IT IS MARY WHO ACTS: "TREASURING THESE WORDS AND PONDERING THEM IN HER HEART."

THE SHEPHERDS SPEAK – MARY TREASURES AND PONDER.

THEN, ASSUMING MARY AND JOSEPH SAID SOMETHING: TOLD THE SHEPHERDS WHAT GOD HAD TOLD THEM ABOUT THEIR CHILD, PERHAPS; OR HOW THEY WOUND UP IN A MANGER; OR AT THE VERY LEAST, THANKING THE SHEPHERDS FOR COMING;

THE SHEPHERDS LEAVE, RETURNING TO THEIR FLOCKS BY NIGHT, GLORIFYING AND PRAISING GOD FOR ALL THEY HAD HEARD AND SEEN, AS IT HAD BEEN TOLD THEM.

MARY AND JOSEPH, AND THE ANGELS, AND GOD, SPEAK – AND THE SHEPHERDS GO, PRAISING AND GLORIFYING GOD.

IT IS **RESPONSIVE LIVING**.

AND THIS IS THE AIM OF CHRISTMAS; OF THE COMING OF CHRIST INTO THE WORLD; OF HIS BIRTH, HIS LIFE, HIS MINISTRY, EVEN HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION – **RESPONSIVE LIVING**.

IT'S WHY JESUS TAUGHT THEM (AND US), EXAMPLED FOR THEM (AND US), A WAY OF LIVING TOWARD GOD – SO THAT WE MIGHT **LIVE RESPONSIVELY**.

IT'S WHY CHRIST COMMANDED HIS DISCIPLES TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS; WHY HE COMMISSIONED THEM TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS; WHY HE INSTRUCTED THEM TO BUILD HIS CHURCH – **RESPONSIVE LIVING**.

GOD SPEAKS – WE ACT!

CHRIST SPEAKS – WE DO!

THE CHURCH PREACHES – WE RESPOND!

WE SHARE GOD'S WORD – IN HOPES, THAT THE WORLD HEARS AND DOES.

"TALK IS CHEAP," THEY SAY, "IT'S WHAT YOU DO THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE."

"A PICTURE (PRESUMABLY PORTRAYING SOMETHING REALLY GOING ON, SOMETHING ACTUALLY BEING DONE) IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS."

"IF YOU'RE GOING TO TALK THE TALK, YOU'VE GOT TO WALK THE WALK."

"PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS..." WE SAY.

OR AS THE LETTER OF JAMES SAYS IT: "FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD."

TONIGHT: WE SAY THE WORDS; PRAY THE WORDS; READ THE WORDS; SING THE WORDS; PREACH THE WORDS;

THE WORDS HAVE MEANING AND POWER! THE WORDS ARE TRANSFORMATIVE AND INSPIRATIONAL!

THE WORDS HAVE TAKEN ON FLESH, AND LIVE AMONG US!

SO, THAT WHEN WE LEAVE HERE THIS EVENING – WE CAN **LIVE THE WORDS;**

**IN RESPONSIVE LIVING.**

THEOLOGIAN HOWARD THURMAN WROTE THIS POEM ABOUT THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS:

***THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS***

***“WHEN THE SONG OF THE ANGELS IS STILLED,***

***WHEN THE STAR IN THE SKY IS GONE,***

***WHEN THE KINGS AND PRINCES ARE HOME,***

***WHEN THE SHEPHERDS ARE BACK WITH THEIR FLOCKS,***

***THEN THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS:***

***TO FIND THE LOST,***

***TO HEAL THOSE BROKEN IN SPIRIT,***

***TO FEED THE HUNGRY,***

***TO RELEASE THE OPPRESSED,***

***TO REBUILD THE NATIONS,***

***TO BRING PEACE TO PEOPLE’S HEARTS,***

***TO MAKE A LITTLE MUSIC IN OUR HEARTS...***

***AND TO RADIATE THE LIGHT OF CHRIST,***

***EVERY DAY, IN EVERY WAY, IN ALL THAT WE DO, AND IN ALL THAT WE SAY.***

***THEN THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS.***

***LET IT BEGIN WITH ME."***