

The Shepherds' Joy About Jesus Luke 2:8-20

Slide 1

A few years back a survey was conducted to learn which characters from the advent story most people could name.

How many of you think it's Mary? Joseph? The wise men? Anyone for Herod? Surprisingly, the shepherds came out on top.

This tells me that we have become too comfortable with the Christmas story. We have romanticized it so much that we just skim over it on a superficial level.

Counting shopping days and stressing about all the things to do has caused us to neglect the Nativity and what it really means.

It reminds me of the little girl who misquoted John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only forgotten Son.*"

The music this morning helps us remember that the baby, Who was born in Bethlehem, was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who brought great joy. This is why we can sing *Joy to the World* and mean it

In fact, I find it interesting that God chose to send His Son's birth announcement to shepherds.

Luke doesn't tell us much about who they were since he didn't use any descriptive adjectives. All Luke says about them in Luke 2:8 is: "*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby...*"

It could be that Luke assumed, when he used the descriptor "shepherds," that everyone knew the type of people about whom he was talking. Since, by the first century, the status of shepherds had changed.

Instead of being a noble profession where in the past you found the patriarchs, now they were usually made up of the lowest class of people, coming in just ahead of the lepers.

In the *Talmud*, a collection of interpretations and insights from rabbis, these words were written: *“No help is to be given to heathen or shepherds.”*

Therefore, for us to understand why God chose this class of people to receive and spread the good news, we need to learn something about them.

Slide 2

First, shepherds were considered ceremonially unclean and because of this and the nature of their work they were unable to attend any religious services. As such, they were often isolated and forgotten.

Their flocks needed to be constantly moved in order to find grass and fresh water. This resulted in shepherds never staying in one place for long.

Because of this constant movement, they were suspected of being thieves causing them to be treated with contempt and mistrust.

Thus, being considered unreliable, their testimony was never allowed in court.

And, since they lived away from society, their lifestyle made them unappealing. Lacking positive role models, they were brash, used foul language, and were ready to fight at the drop of a hat.

Yet, God entrusted the greatest message ever sent from heaven to this bunch of smelly, uncouth individuals.

Now, this wasn't so unusual, was it? God has always worked wonders using the forgotten, the despised, and the lowly.

From the very beginning of His time on earth, Jesus came to those who were outcasts. Matthew 9:12-13, *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick...For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Jesus reached out to sinners like Zacchaeus and Levi, prostitutes and the demon possessed, strangers and Samaritans.

Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, *"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth... He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things... so that no one may boast before Him."*

Luke doesn't say, *"Now there were in the same region scribes keeping watch over their scrolls."*

No! God came to the most undeserving, to the neglected and marginalized in order to show His love and power.

The Shepherds help us see that God has a message for sinners just like us. Everyone matters to God. That's why the announcement of Christ's birth went to a bunch of uneducated outcasts.

As such, when we look at the shepherds' response, we see lessons that we can apply to our own lives.

Slide 3

The first lesson we learn from the shepherds is that they were attentive to their jobs. Luke 2:8, *"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over the flocks at night."*

They were so committed to their career that they never left their work. They not only worked the third shift, but they also pulled the first and second as well. This was a 24/7 job.

In fact, one of the shepherds would literally lie across the entrance to the evening corral to make sure none of the sheep got out and no predators entered.

Understanding this gives new meaning to John 10:9 when Jesus said, *“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”*

As God came to those who were attentive at the jobs, likewise today, whatever God has called you to do, be attentive to it and do it with excellence.

Colossians 3:23, *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”*

You don’t have to clean yourself up or act like someone you’re not. If you smell like a shepherd, let Jesus wash you up. If your sins are wiping you out, allow Jesus to lift you up.

Heaven chose to bring this message to everyone that’s messed up, to low achievers as well as the successful.

We were created in the image of God as an original masterpiece and the signature of the Creator was inscribed on our soul.

Slide 4

Now, while they were being attentive to their responsibilities, they were suddenly awed and frightened by an angelic appearance.

Luke 2:9, *“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”*

God's Shekinah glory lit up the sky and caused them to quake in their sandals. This is a good example of how God meets us where we are, but in so doing He also brings us to our knees.

Whenever we come face-to-face with God's holiness, we should fall apart because of our sinfulness. Peter had this response in Luke 5:8 when he said to Jesus: "*Get away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.*"

The shepherds were also terrified because they didn't know if this was an angel of judgment. Perhaps he had been sent as payback for their raunchy jokes, bad language, or sticky fingers.

Maybe they thought their sins were catching up with them and now they would be vaporized. Whatever the case, they were scared and it took a lot a shepherd to be terrified.

Slide 5

Now, filled with terror and awe, the shepherds hear and accept the message of "*good news of great joy.*"

Luke 2:10, "*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.'*"

The angel calmed them down by telling them that he's bringing good news of acceptance, forgiveness, and hope.

This phrase "*good news*" is literally the word from which we get "*evangelize,*" but this is more than good news, it's "*good news of great joy.*"

The Greek word "*great*" here is "*mega*" which means exceedingly large, loud, and mighty. It's a superlative of the greatest degree.

Wycliffe translates it this way: "*I evangelize to you a great joy.*" Joyless faith in Jesus is a contradiction in terms!

I also want you to notice that word “*you.*” This message was for the whole world, but it must become deeply personal as Paul explains in his letter to the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 2:13, *“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”*

So, after getting some more specifics, a whole regiment of rejoicing warrior angels fills the sky, praising God.

Luke 2:13-14, *“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

We know that the shepherds accepted this message because in verse 15 we read, *“Let’s go to Bethlehem and see...”*

God’s good news is a gift that must be received, and once received it will stimulate your life.

Slide 6

That’s why these shepherds didn’t just accept and enjoy the message they received, they acted upon it.

Luke 2:16, *“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.”*

The phrase *“hurried off”* meant they left in haste. The idea is *“come on, hurry up, let’s go!”*

This is pretty amazing in itself because shepherds normally did nothing quickly. They were patient men, accustomed to moving slowly through the pastures.

The Bible's clear that acceptance must lead to action, or as James 2:17 says, "*...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*"

They could have doubted or delayed but instead they decided to act, and the first thing they did was go to Bethlehem. They wanted to see this baby with their own eyes.

I don't know how long it took them to find the stable or how long they stayed, but I do know they didn't pull up a bale of hay and make themselves comfortable.

They knew that they were managers of an important message so they left and shared. And the message they shared had nothing to do with seeing angels, Mary's magnificence, or Joseph's job.

Jesus was the center of the message, as it should be ours, so once they saw their Savior, they headed out to herald the good news.

Look at verse 17, "*When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*"

The word "*spread*" means to "*make known in such a way that people can understand.*" We're here today because they couldn't keep quiet. There comes a time that after seeing, we must be involved in sharing.

Slide 7

What's also amazing is that after they had fulfilled their task, the shepherds returned to their same boring job, but they weren't the same on the inside.

Luke 2:20, "*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*"

This is why, after the Christmas holidays when we must go back to the same old routine, we should do so with rejoicing.

Notice something else. The shepherds didn't write a book, go on a speaking tour, appear on Oprah, or launch a ministry called "A Shepherd's Story," they worshiped Him, Who they saw.

Which is different than a lot of people today who worship their work. Someone once said, "*We tend to work at our play and play at our worship.*"

When a person is genuinely converted, he or she will praise God. Therefore, allow yourself to adore Immanuel as you glorify and praise Him for all you have seen and heard.

Slide 8

Conclusion

The shepherds were changed forever by what they saw, and you can be as well if you follow their example:

- Be attentive to what God has called you to do
- Be awed by God's message to you
- Accept the gift of good news
- Act on what you know to be true
- Adore Immanuel 24/7

Do you want to take on the role of the shepherds or, will you just plant yourself like a tree and be as unmovable as a rock?

Jesus was born to the whole world, but He also was born "to you." In fact, God declared that Jesus was born to YOU and, because of this, Christmas must become your story, too.

Luke 2:11, “*Today* [that means right now] *in the town of David a Savior* [one who forgives sins] *has been born to you* [personal]; *he is Christ* [the long-awaited Messiah] *the Lord* [your master and Leader].

I close with three questions:

- Is He “Savior” to you?
- Is He “Christ” to you?
- Is He “Lord” to you?

Corrie Ten Boom once said, “*If Jesus were born one thousand times in Bethlehem and not in me, then I would still be lost.*” It’s time today to make sure that Jesus is born in you.

So, go and spread the good news and as you do, invite a friend to church next Sunday.

Tell them about our Cantata presentation and then invite them back to our New Year’s Eve service on the 31st, too.

In other words, Go Tell!