

Fear Not, Just Come
Luke 2:8-16

Slide 1

It wasn't the world's oldest profession, but it was close! I mean you do know what the world's oldest profession is, don't you? That's right, farming.

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain the oldest was a farmer, thus making farming the world's oldest profession. What were you thinking?

Abel the younger brother was a shepherd making that the world's second oldest profession.

If there's one scene that seems to shout Christmas it would be the shepherds on a hillside staring in wonder at an angel choir in the sky.

We all know the story and Christmas wouldn't be complete without the keepers of sheep pressed in tight to see the One Who would be called the Lamb of God.

Although they weren't lead characters, the shepherds were part of the chorus in the production of the first Christmas.

Think of a Broadway musical. When they cast a musical, they cast the male lead, then the female lead, and finally the supporting roles. All those roles had names and were highlighted in the program.

Then there's the bulk of the players. They're called the Chorus. Even though their names aren't in lights, you can't have a musical without the chorus.

If you just had the leads, you wouldn't have a musical, you'd just have a small ensemble.

In the same way there were the leads in the Christmas story, i.e. Mary and Joseph, the angel Gabriel, and the baby Jesus. They got top billing.

Then there were the supporting roles: the innkeeper, King Herod, and the Wise Men. They got second billing and finally you had the chorus. That was the angels and the shepherds.

If you were making a playbill for that first Christmas, they would be listed in a group after all the others in the play. It would simply say, *“and the shepherds.”*

Over the past three messages we’ve looked at the various “Fear Nots” or “Do not be afraid” that were mentioned in the Christmas story.

We discovered that they were all delivered by messengers we call Angels.

The first was in the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah, when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, the man who would become the father of John the Baptist, the man who was instrumental in introducing Jesus to the world.

We find Gabriel’s message to Zechariah in Luke 1:13, *“But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.”* My theme that week was *“Fear Not, Just Believe.”*

In week two we looked at Mary’s encounter with Gabriel and these words in Luke 1:30-31, *“But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.”*

In that message, our theme was *“Fear Not, Just Trust.”* We saw how Mary trusted God with the details of how she would become pregnant as well as the immediate and long-term ramifications of her decision to trust Him.

Then we looked at Mary’s fiancé, Joseph who was told in Matthew 1:19-20, *“Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”*

That week’s topic was *“Fear Not, Just Obey”* and because Joseph obeyed, he provided Mary with a husband and Jesus with a father. He willingly paid the price that obedience required.

Today I’m taking you out in the fields.

Luke 2:8-10, *“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”*

So, here’s our last fear not, *“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”*

Slide 2

The angel began by saying, *“I Bring You…”* Of all the people in and around Bethlehem that day, the angels didn’t appear to just anybody, they appeared to somebody.

So, who were the somebodies to whom the angels appeared? I know you're probably thinking, "*Shepherds, duhh.*" Well sure, but what does that mean today?

For most of us, the closest we'll ever come to a shepherd is wearing a wool sweater or eating lamb chops.

Because of that, when we think of shepherds, we immediately shift to the Christmas story romanticizing who they were and what they did. But really, they were just guys who watched sheep.

There probably wasn't an intensive training program for the job and they probably weren't anywhere near the top of the economic heap.

In fact, they wouldn't have been near the top of the social heap or even the religious heap.

The problem was their job. Even if the shepherds were inclined to be religious, the demands of the flock were too great.

All the rules and regulations of Judaism, with the various hand washings and other parts of the ceremonial law, were out of their reach, so they could never be "Good Jews."

Now, it isn't enough to know who they were, but it would be a good thing to know who they weren't. The biggest surprise is that they weren't anyone special.

I mean if I was God, Creator of all things, Master of the universe and I was announcing the birth of my Son, I'm not sure that shepherds would've made the short list or for that matter the long list.

Kings, emperors, or potentates would've been the ones on my list, not keepers of sheep.

But these guys were just ordinary people with ordinary jobs. Nothing special, just a bunch of shepherds doing what shepherds do, watching their flocks.

However, it seems that God has a special place for shepherds. Abel, commended for his offering, was a shepherd.

Moses, who led his people of Israel out of slavery, was a shepherd. David, Israel's greatest king and the writer of the psalms, was a shepherd.

Now, there're those who've speculated that even though they were shepherds they may not have been your everyday, run of the mill shepherds.

Culturally we're told that when morning or evening sacrifices were made at the temple, an unblemished lamb was needed, therefore the temple authorities kept their own private flock of sheep.

Historically, we're told that these sheep would've been pastured near Bethlehem.

If this was true, then there's a pretty good chance that these shepherds were in charge of the flocks from which the temple offerings were chosen.

If that's the case, then the birth of the "Lamb of God," Who would take away the sins of the world, was first announced to those whose job it was to take care of the temple lambs who were sacrificed for peoples' sins.

Into the ordinary lives of ordinary men was injected an extraordinary event.

If you think your life isn't special enough for God to take an interest in, then you'd be wrong, because He does.

Remember the words of Jesus in Luke 12:6-7, *“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

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As I read these verses that tell the story about the shepherds, it dawned on me that this is actually a look at how most of us became Christians.

You may think, *“I don't even like sheep and there were no angels involved when I became a believer.”*

Perhaps not but bear with me. Luke 2:9-11, *“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”*

The first thing we discover is that the shepherds were told about Jesus. We all know the story; the shepherds were in the field watching their sheep when suddenly an angel appeared with a message.

“The Messiah is here!” and then that angel was joined by a whole flock of angels who were proclaiming the goodness of God.

In its most literal sense, the word “angel,” as used in the original language, simply meant messenger.

Now that doesn't negate who appeared to the shepherds that first Christmas because these weren't just messengers; these were Heavenly Messengers.

Luke tells us in Luke 2:13, *"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God..."*

Now most of us, when we first heard about Jesus, didn't get a visit from an Angel in the traditional sense, and if you did, great, but the majority of us only got an ordinary messenger.

We see a great example of this in John 1:40-41, *"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)."*

Andrew heard about Jesus from John; then Simon heard about Jesus from Andrew. Who was it that told you about Jesus for the first time? Who was your angel?

For most of us, we didn't just stumble into Christianity. I mean it does happen, and when it does it makes a great story.

For example, Billy Sunday was a professional baseball player for the Chicago White Stockings (later changed to White Sox).

One Sunday afternoon in 1886 he and some of his fellow players had a few beers and were wandering through the streets of Chicago where Sunday heard a street preaching team from the Pacific Garden Mission.

The rest is history. Billy Sunday was saved and went on to become the Billy Graham of his time, or more correctly Billy Graham became the Billy Sunday of his time.

Over the course of his ministry, Sunday preached to a 100 million people and recorded over a million converts.

Most of us had someone, a friend, family or a co-worker who brought the message and invited us to come.

Paul spelled it out in Romans 10:14, *“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”*

I like *The Living Bible’s* paraphrase: *“But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?”*

And so, on a lonely hillside outside of Bethlehem, the Angels came and told the shepherds about Jesus.

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So, not only did they hear about Jesus, the shepherds came to Jesus.

Luke 2:15-16, *“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.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.”*

The reality is that the Shepherds could’ve heard the message and thought, *“Well that was interesting”* and then simply returned to their sheep. But they made a conscious decision to leave the everyday and venture into the eternal.

Simon Peter could’ve listened to what his brother Andrew told him and then gone back to fishing instead of going to meet Jesus.

It's not enough to hear the message unless you actually respond to it. Everyone has that choice; the choice to respond to the claims of the gospel or reject the claims of the gospel.

There're some today who've heard the message over and over again, and yet their response is the same as King Agrippa's in the book of Acts.

Maybe you know the story and maybe you don't. When Paul was hauled before the authorities, including King Agrippa, for preaching, he launched into his story and his conversion experience.

Then he said to Agrippa in Acts 26:27, *"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."* Agrippa looked at him and responded in Acts 26:28, *"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.'"*

Two thousand years ago, *"almost"* wasn't good enough for Agrippa and it's not good enough today. Just think, he missed it by that much.

If you're going to become a believer, you must first make a conscious decision to come to Christ in order to follow Him, *"Yes, I'm going to do this."*

For the shepherds that meant physically leaving the fields and their flocks and coming into Bethlehem; then finding the stable where Jesus was.

Today it means that, for a little while, we too must leave the everyday and venture into the eternal, accepting Who Jesus is and embracing His claims and the grace and forgiveness He offers.

John spelled it out in his gospel. John 1:12, *"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

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But the shepherd's story doesn't end in the stable, Luke 2:17-19, *"When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."*

The shepherds told others about Jesus. I love this. They couldn't contain what had happened in their lives and wanted everyone to know about it.

Isn't that what normally happens when we make a new discovery? Whether it's a new restaurant, a movie, a book, or a musical artist. We want to tell those we care about what we discovered.

D. T. Niles, a Sri Lankan preacher, summed it up this way: *"Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."*

The problem is that we've made evangelism into some mysteriously difficult thing that only professionals or special people can do.

Listen again to how Andrew did it. John 1:40-41, *"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)."*

He just told his brother what he had experienced. He didn't hand him a tract or lead him down the Roman Road, he just told him, *"Hey, I met Jesus"* and if we keep reading, we discover John 1:42, *"And he brought him to Jesus."*

In his book, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, Thom Ranier and his colleagues interviewed several hundred people in both, the US and Canada, who don't attend church.

In doing so, they made some surprising discoveries, one of which was that 82% of unchurched are at least "somewhat likely" to attend church if they're invited.

Perhaps I need to pause here to allow that to sink in, maybe I need to repeat it. 82% of unchurched are at least "somewhat likely" to attend church if they're invited.

If you don't remember anything else from this message hang on to that. 8 out of 10 of your friends and co-workers would be at least somewhat likely to attend church if you invited them.

What's an invitation? For many of the unchurched it simply means being asked. For others it would include an offer to meet them at the front door to show them around.

But in either case, it goes back to a simple premise, invite them and there's a pretty good chance that they'll come.

An atheist once told William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, *"I don't believe in your God; I don't believe in your Bible; I don't believe in your hell. But if I did, I'd crawl across London on my knees across broken glass to warn them!"*

Therefore, there can only be one of two reasons for why we don't tell people about Jesus. Either:

- 1) We don't really believe that what we've discovered about Jesus is all that important or,
- 2) We really don't care about people's eternity.

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Conclusion

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.”*

Seeing Jesus impacted the shepherds’ daily lives. Did you catch what happened? They went back to work, but they didn’t leave their experience behind them.

Many people are quite content to leave Jesus either in the manger or on the cross but there’s no room in their everyday lives for Him.

He’s supposed to make a difference in our lives, such a difference that our entire life is changed.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”*

How does that look in our lives? In Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*, Romans 12:1 reads, *“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.”*

If you’re one person when you’re in church and another person when you’re at school or work and yet another one when you’re with your family, then you’re wearing a mask at least some of the time. 2000 years ago, in the Greek theatre, all actors wore masks. There was a Greek word that was used for actors, and it literally meant a *“mask wearer.”*

That word was hypokrite, the same word translated into English as hypocrite. Two thousand years ago that was a neutral word, it isn't today.

Our encounter with Jesus needs to affect who we are and how we live. You can't just take Him as a fire escape from hell and continue to live like you always lived.

If He doesn't make a difference on this side of eternity, it's doubtful that He'll make a difference on the other side.

After the shepherds encountered Jesus they went back to their flocks. They didn't stay at the stable or even in Bethlehem; they went back to the hills where their sheep were waiting.

Our witness to what Jesus has done in our lives will be played out not in church but in our daily lives: How we deal with our family, our job, and our finances.

"What would Jesus Do?" became a cliché twenty years ago, but the question that really needs to be asked is: *"What does Jesus want me to do?"*

At this time of year, we give gifts to people we love, how about giving a birthday gift to Christ for the same reason?

You don't even have to go to the store or shop online. He tells us what He would like for a gift, so we don't have to guess, and you don't even have to wrap it.

John 14:15, *"Jesus said 'If you love me, keep my commands.'"*