

Text: Luke 2:8-20

Title: The Shepherds' Perspective on Jesus's Birth

Truth: Once you see Jesus, you will want to tell others. When you hear of him, you ponder Him in amazement.

Date/Location: Sunday December 25, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

Over the years, I have written several messages on how the first Christmas looked from the perspective of various people who were there: Joseph, Mary, Zacharias, Simeon, the wise men, and Herod. In this message, I am going to revisit the shepherds in more detail than I have before. Then I hope to consider Anna in another message, the angels, Elizabeth, and even John the Baptist.

This message will hopefully build up your faith and not be merely an academic exercise. But that depends on *your* perspective on Christmas.

Text

The Angelic Announcement

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

The Shepherds Go to See Jesus

¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

¹⁷ Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸ And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

I. The Shepherds See the Angels, v. 8-9

- A. It was at night, while shepherds were tending their sheep. We would like to think that they perhaps were taking turns guarding the sheep in the rock-walled fold. But the text specifically says that they were living out in the fields, keeping watch over the sheep at night. The night setting served to highlight the bright glory of the angelic visitor against the dark, hopefully starry sky.
- B. One angel from heaven—not “the” Angel of Yahweh from the Old Testament, but another angel, came to make an announcement to these shepherds. He may have been Gabriel, who had made two earlier announcements recorded in chapter 1 (1:19 and 1:26). But the Bible does not specifically say the name of this angel.
- C. Naturally, because angel visitants are very uncommon, and never had occurred to these shepherds in their lifetimes, they were very afraid. There is no shame there—just wisdom. They were “trembling in their boots” scared.
- D. Note carefully this fact: God did not send angels to Herod, or to the Roman governor, or to the Caesar, or to the Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, chief priests, elders, or San Hedrin, or to the wealthy people of the Jewish nation. God sent the angels to *shepherds*. In the commonly-held social credit system, they were very low—speaking in modern terms, they were the lowest of blue-collar workers. They were looked down upon as dirty, poor, and so forth.

Yet God sent the angel to tell *them* of the salvation that He was providing through the Messiah. See 1 Cor. 1:26-27 for more on this idea of God taking the message to the lowly. You can tell a person is proud if they do not make significant room in their hearts for Jesus.

II. The Angelic Proclamation, v. 10-14

- A. There was no need to be afraid, however, because the angels were not bringing a message of judgment (as in other parts of the Bible, like Genesis 19, or Rev. 14:6-11). The good news about Jesus Christ is first and foremost a message of good tidings and of joy. It is a message of salvation, of the Messiah, of Him as Lord. Jesus concurs in John 3:17—“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”
- B. These tidings are to all people—all families of the earth—not just to those people who share ethnic heritage with the Messiah. Yes, the Jewish people also are greatly impacted by His coming, but He has other sheep not of the Jewish fold that He is going to bring together (John 10:16).
- C. He will be a Savior. He will do *something*—not specified by the angel but which we know well—which will provide for the saving of humanity from the predicament of separation from God because of sin. As low as you might have gone into sin, or as far away as you have strayed from God, or even at this moment as tangled up in wrong things as you are, Jesus can rescue you. That is His *specialty* (see Isa 59:1-2).
- D. The “city of David” is an unmistakable reference to Bethlehem, and the shepherds collectively would have figured that out quickly. Bethlehem is Israel’s “breadbasket,” the “house of bread” which in turn was the birthplace of the “bread of life” (John 6:33-35, 48-51).
- E. I pause here to marvel. Why? There was a question all through Jesus’s ministry about His identity. Is He the Messiah, or is He not?
 - 1. John 4:25 – the woman at the well knew the Messiah was coming, but she did not know it was Jesus.

2. Matthew 26:63 – The high priest demanded Jesus tell whether He is the Christ, the Son of God.
 3. The disciples took a while to figure it out. See Matthew 16:16, 20; Mark 8:29.
 4. John 12:34 shows that the crowds had some confusion about the Messiah’s role. But they seem to have some idea that Jesus was claiming to be the Christ = Messiah.
 5. John 9:22 - The leaders had set a policy that if anyone should confess that Jesus was Messiah, he would be excommunicated from the synagogue.
 6. Had the news about the angelic visit to the shepherds been spread abroad initially (it was) *and* kept in local and institutional memory for all those years (it was not), no one would have had to ask if Jesus is the Christ. They would know because the angel told us ahead of time. The angel said that the Christ = Messiah was born *that very night* in Bethlehem!
- F. The angel also told the shepherds that the Christ was the *Lord*. This is a powerful witness to the deity of Jesus Christ. The angel who had just previously been bowing before the presence of the Son of God in heaven now announced that this One had come to earth.
- G. We talked about ‘signs’ in our recent series in Genesis, particularly at chapter 17 with the sign of circumcision, the sign of the rainbow, and the sign of the Sabbath. In this case, the sign is not the sign of a covenant, but of a Person. The attire and location of the person—swaddling cloths and manger—were meant to uniquely identify this little baby Messiah. The cloths were not too unique, to be sure, but the manger certainly was. What mother would put her baby in a manger?

The word *manger* can refer to several things—a feed trough, stall, a structure with a place for domestic animals to be housed as well, an animal enclosure, or a “crib” – not a baby crib but a “a barred or slatted structure for the feeding of hay or other bulky fodder” (Britannica.com). The slatted structure of the animal feeding crib looks like a baby’s bed with slatted sides.

H. Now the angel is joined by a large number of his angel coworkers, and they bring the praise of heaven down to earth. They ascribe glory to God in the highest—God is the highest, and his glory is the highest too. And to the earth they wish peace. The issue of whether it is “good will toward men” or “peace toward men of good will” I will leave for another time. In any case, we can be sure that the news of joy and gladness at Christmas do indicate tidings of peace with the God of heaven. Only those who are of truly good will, saved people, will enjoy that peace. Yet all humanity can and should be able to recognize this event as a serious olive branch from heaven, more than a gesture, but an extended hand looking for fellowship.

III. The Shepherds Visit the Baby, v. 15-20

- A. The sheep-herders did not sit around looking at one another for long. They figured that the angel told them truth, and it was a perfect time to go and see the great sight of the Messiah. So, they hurried on their way and hunted around for the baby until they found him, in a manger, just like the angel had said.
- B. No doubt they expressed worship and told Mary and Joseph what had happened. Those new parents would not be surprised too much that an angel had made a visit, because they themselves had experienced an angelic visitor as well. They experienced that several times during the young life of the child. They might have been somewhat taken aback that their baby was the subject of such a broad announcement, and this would have troubled their minds when they found out from the Lord that Herod was seeking the child to destroy Him. The news was widely known, so it may be difficult to get out of town unnoticed.
- C. This is because the shepherds told everyone they ran into about this. After all, it was news of great joy *to all people!* They did their part. The hearers were amazed at this news. They did not treat the shepherds as if they were a bunch of crazies, perhaps because there were several of them, eyewitnesses of the events. In accordance with the “two or three witnesses” principle of the Law, they could not dismiss what happened because it was firmly established by those eyewitnesses. Mary stored this news away in

her heart for later processing—in fact, she undoubtedly held onto it until the day of her Son’s crucifixion and beyond.

- D. What could the shepherds do but continue praising God and honoring Him for everything that they had experienced that night. They would never forget, and you can imagine how they would tell the story around the campfire to their coworkers, and to their children and grandchildren.

Conclusion

We are like the shepherds. We recognize we are lowly in the eyes of the world, and yet greatly privileged to be given the Christmas news of a Rescuer who will save His people from their sins. Therefore, we make widely known what happened to everyone we can—and to our children and grandchildren as well. The fact that the angels visited and told us that the Messiah was born to be our Savior is tremendously important. It is news that is second to nothing. These are the Christmas tidings of great joy to all people!

MAP