

** All scripture referenced in this sermon are from the New King James Version*

Luke 2:8-15

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 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. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

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

“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

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.”

1. 500 years of recorded silence
 - a. Gabriel Bursts on
 - b. Zacharias

Luke 1:12-17

And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

1. Zacharias
 - a. Troubled
 - b. Fear
 - c. Joy, gladness, many will rejoice
 - d. Set apart / Samson / Holy Spirit / Elijah
 - e. The Goal
 - i. Turn to the Lord
 - ii. Fathers to Children
 - iii. Disobedient to wisdom of the just
 - iv. People prepared for Jesus
2. Mary
 - a. 6 months later
 - b. Gabriel
 - c. “For with God nothing will be impossible”
 - i. Virgin will conceive
 - ii. God in Human flesh
3. Joseph
 - a. Dream Angel / Gabriel
 - b. Matthew 1:21 “for He will save His people from their sins”
4. Shepherds 9 to 8 months
 - a. Gabriel finishes
 - b. To Shepherds

Luke 2:8-9

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

1. The Shekinah glory is the Hebrew name given to the **presence of God dwelling on the earth**. The word "shekinah" does not actually appear in the Bible, but in Hebrew it can mean "He caused to dwell" and it was the term given to a divine visitation of Yahweh.

Ezekiel 10:17-19

When the cherubim stood still, the wheels stood still, and when one was lifted up, the other lifted itself up, for the spirit of the living creature was in them.

Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

2. Fear

Luke 2:10

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.

1. Good News / **euangelizō**
 - a. Great Joy
 - b. All men

Romans 5:17-18

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

Luke 2:11

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

1. Location
 - a. Bethlehem
2. Savior
 - a. Man's greatest need
 - b. Unfulfilled
 - c. Addictions
 - d. Rescue
3. Christ
 - a. Anointed / Holy Spirit / Oil / Authority
 - i. Priests
 - ii. Kings
 - iii. Messiah
4. Lord
 - a. Lord Capital L
 - b. Paul's Epistles
 - c. Lord of lords, King of kings
 - d. Must be yours to be saved

Romans 10:9-12

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

1. Is He?
 - a. Of Heaven
 - b. Of the world
 - c. Of you
 - d. Of your future

Luke 2:12

"And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

1. Not swaddling cloths
2. A manger
 - a. Not the usual
 - b. A special manger in Bethlehem?

Luke 2:13-14

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

1. Heaven breaks loose
 - a. Praising God
 - b. God gets the Glory
 - c. How could it happen
 - d. Peace
 - e. God's way to bridge the gap

1 Peter 1:12

To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

Let our joy be living water from those sacred wells which the Lord himself has digged; may his joy abide in us, that our joy may be full. Of Christ's joy we cannot have too much; no fear of running to excess when his love is the wine we drink. Oh to be plunged in this pure stream of spiritual delights!

- Charles Spurgeon

“Shepherds” (Pastor Drew spoke on “Angels”)

Craig Crawshaw

(my study on Angels will follow below)

** All scripture referenced in this sermon are from the New American Standard Bible Version*

The Biblical account of the Christmas shepherds is confined to the gospel of Luke in only thirteen verses, and yet what a memorable part of the Christmas celebration they hold. They continue to witness to us across the centuries.

***Luke 2:8-20** In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger.”*

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as he lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

SHEPHERD WITNESS FROM SCRIPTURE

“In the same region” was probably north toward Jerusalem. Hundreds of lambs were needed for sacrificial slaughter in Jerusalem at the temple. It has long been speculated that these shepherds were guardians of the lambs that would become the sacrifice for sins at the temple. Thus, their awareness of a need for a Savior as final atonement for sin would have been especially high. You might not be continually preparing lambs to be sacrificed for sins, as were these shepherds. But may your awareness of a need for a Savior be ever before you, acknowledging the sacrifice of Jesus as your only provision for forgiveness of your sin.

Shepherds were the lowest in society. And the night shepherds would have been the lowest of the low. These shepherds represent for us God’s special attention and love to those whom society shuns. You might not be numbered among the “rich and famous.” But God has a special love for all who seek Him with a humble heart, as did the shepherds.

***1 Peter 5:5b-6** Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.*

God got the shepherds’ attention through supernatural means – an angel “suddenly” appearing out of “thin air.” The shepherds’ reaction? – understandably, terror. Sometimes God gets our attention through spectacular means – disaster, disease, disability or even an angel encounter. He wants our attention. When unusual or difficult circumstances come your way, get in the habit of asking God if He is trying to get your attention, and stop to listen to His still, small voice. There might just be a message of “good news of great joy!” Remember God is the giver of good, not of doom – even in times of loss.

The message, audibly given by the angel, was one of “good news of great joy.” It was for all, not just for the shepherds, though they were the first recipients. Verse 11 gives the great news: A Savior has been born. He is the long-awaited Messiah and Lord of all. He is born “for you” – a personal promise, as well as a universal one. And the city location is given – in “the city of David” = Bethlehem. Some respond especially well to the need for a Savior and Lord of their life, as did the shepherds. Let the shepherds witness to you that many are ready to receive the message of a Savior “born for you.”

THE “TREASURE HUNT”

Then the angel gives them a “treasure hunt” clue. This is how they would find the baby: (1) he will be wrapped in strips of cloth (not uncommon, but indicating parents of poverty, as opposed to a more common blanket) and (2) lying in a manger – an animal’s feeding trough – far more rare. This was the key clue. God often leads us by “clues” if we are open to see them as God’s leading. But it may not have been as difficult for the shepherds as we might think. Just north of Bethlehem on the road to Jerusalem, near the field that the shepherds would have had their flock graze, was a high tower in which was essentially a “clean room” for the sheep that needed to be as ceremonially clean as possible for sacrifice. There was a manger that was kept relatively clean, and the new lambs were born here. And to keep them as unblemished as possible they were wrapped in (ready?...) swaddling clothes – strips of cloth.

You might ask – this sounds amazing, but is it in the Bible? The answer is “yes.” In Micah, the same book we find that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (5:2), we find this Scripture:

Micah 4:8 *As for you, tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it will come – even the former dominion will come, the Kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.*

And even the lowly shepherds might well have known this Scripture, that would have given them yet another clue as to the location of the baby in a manger wrapped in strips of cloth.

MIGDAL EDER

“Tower of the flock” in Hebrew is “Migdal Eder,” the place where the royal flocks were raised and cared for. We first hear of this tower of Eder in Genesis, when Jacob and wife Rachael journey from Bethel to Bethlehem.

Genesis 35:16-21 *And they journeyed from Bethel; and ... Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor. ... It came about as her soul was departing, that she named [her son] ... Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried in the way to Eprath (that is Bethlehem). ... Then Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.*



Migdal Eder, as it might have looked. This is another similar tower in Israel.

Hundreds of years later, David, the youngest son of Jesse, was born in Bethlehem. And as a young boy he was a shepherd. And since the tower of Migdal Eder was only a short distance north of Bethlehem in the verdant fields where sheep would graze, David very probably spent many days around Migdal Eder, and likely tended sheep that were being prepared for sacrifice.

What a perfect and prophetic place for Jesus to be born – nearby to the shepherds and away from the census crowds, and in a relatively clean manger environment, where the shepherds would have understood the “treasure hunt riddle” of the angels quite clearly.

You will remember that Mary and Joseph found no room in the Bethlehem inn. For a relatively small village, how many inns would there have been? And what room would be available during the busy time of census? That they were directed to nearby Migdal Eder is very possible and probable. Especially since the hay of the manger there would be relatively clean, unlike other mangers. And there would be plenty of “strips of cloth” available in which to wrap the baby.

THE SHEPHERDS’ RESPONSE

The shepherds immediately followed the clues and found the baby in the manger, relating to Mary and Joseph the amazing story of what had prompted them to come. This gave Mary further assurance of the supernatural occurrence of this birth, as she pondered this in her heart. We too should respond as soon as God leads, and not delay. How often do we feel the tug of the Spirit to serve God in a certain way, yet ignore it or put it off? Let the witness of the shepherds be to respond immediately and enthusiastically to what God in your heart prompts you to do.

The shepherds did not, however, “ponder this in their heart” as did Mary. They could have gone back internally excited but externally the same. But when they returned as enthusiastic and vocal representatives of this miracle gift of God. To praise God is to tell God directly how great He is in giving this gift. To glorify God is to reveal God to others of how great He is. The shepherds were the first “missionaries” of the good news of Jesus. May we continue in that tradition! The shepherds witness to us of how we are to respond to having met Jesus!

SUMMARY

The shepherds are witness to us of:

- ✓ HUMILITY OF PERSON
- ✓ RESPONSIBILITY TO TASK
- ✓ ATTENTIVENESS TO GOD’S INVITATION
- ✓ DILIGENCE IN SEEKING AND FINDING THEIR SAVIOR
- ✓ VOCAL ENTHUSIASM OF TELLING OTHERS

ANGELS (given by Drew, but also prepared by myself)

The Biblical account of the Christmas angels coming to the shepherds is confined to only seven verses in the gospel of Luke exclusively. And yet they have become a beloved marvel as a critical part of the Christmas story. Carols aplenty have been written about them, and they appear on thousands of Christmas cards and in thousands of Nativity scenes. You really can’t tell the Christmas story of the shepherds without the angels. But what do the angels teach us? What is the witness of the angels to us?

***Luke 2:8-20** In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”*

Truth is, the one “angel of the Lord” gets six of the seven verses, and the multitude of angels gets all of one verse in the Bible! And that multitude, which typically refers to a number 1000+, only appear for a short time before they go back in to heaven and the shepherds are off to Bethlehem. In Hollywood terms they would be considered as “bit” players, with only one line and screen time of but minutes! And yet in the scope of the Christmas story, and in their witness of God’s magnificence and the import of their message, they are huge!

THE SCENE IN HEAVEN

Can you imagine the excitement and amazement among the angels in heaven when the news got out that the Son of God, the Prince of Heaven, was going to become a man child? And when the word was that He was leaving in order to provide salvation for the human race, the stir would have risen to a fever pitch.

***Peter 1:10-12** As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.*

What angel or angels would be chosen to announce this news? Every angel would have wanted that assignment, since their chief role was to serve those whom God had chosen to be saved.

***Hebrews 1:12** Are [angels] not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?*

We don’t know for certain who was chosen to be the “angel of the Lord” that made the initial announcement to the shepherds, as the name is not given. But it is a good guess that it was Gabriel, who is named in Scripture as the one who came to both Zachariah and to Mary in Luke, Chapter 1. And how many angels would have been hoping to be a part of the angel multitude that visited the shepherds?

***Revelation 5:11-12** Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads . . .*

A myriad is 10,000. So myriads of myriads would be 10,000 times 10,000 which would be 100 million at least in heaven. And if each of the billions of people on the earth truly have one or more guardian angels assigned to them, then the number of angels would number into the billions. The Luke 2 angels that joined the announcing angel was a “multitude” which is typically a thousand. So, what a special privilege it would have been to be one of the billions who were chosen to be sent to the shepherds that Christmas night!

THE WITNESS OF THE ONE

First of all, the announcing angel said to the shepherds, “Fear not” or “Don’t be afraid.” This was the first thing out of the mouth of every angelic visit in the Christmas story. Clearly, seeing an angel would have been a frightening encounter. But more than appeasing fear, I believe “fear not” was also meant to convey to not fear the unknown, or God, specifically. Yes, God is to be “feared” in the sense that He is the Sovereign of the universe, who holds our lives in His hands. But we are not to be afraid of Him. I sense that the angel’s “fear not” was conveying that God is love. And the angel’s next words confirm this, as he says “I bring you good news of great joy.” Dearly beloved, when God is on our side we have nothing to fear.

This “good news” is for “all the people” – everyone on the earth. God’s salvation is not for the few, but for any and all who will accept His gift of salvation. That the miracle birth was to be in Bethlehem, was a confirmation of

the Micah prophesy regarding the birthplace of the Messiah.

***Micah 5:2** But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.*

The angel's witness to us here, is that God's Word is to be trusted and accurate down to the smallest detail. That this child would be Savior, Christ and Lord is a triple witness. That He is Savior speaks of His coming to save from the curse of sin. That He is Christ affirms that He is indeed the long-awaited Messiah. That He is Lord confirms that He is the Son of God, Lord of all, come down to man. That He is "for you" indicates the personal nature of His salvation. This gift of God is for each, as well as for all. He is indeed a "personal Savior." Billy Graham, in his book "Angels," states that he could preach a dozen sermons on this angel announcement to the shepherds, as it is so poignant with revelation.

THE WITNESS OF THE MANY

To highlight this "good news of great joy" there was a visible and audible display of magnificent proportions. The hillside was filled with a thousand plus angels praising God.

First, don't miss the glorious praise to God: "Glory to God in the Highest." The angels' witness here is that extravagant praise to God is always appropriate, and especially when it is in response to His gracious salvation through Jesus. May we never fail to give glory to God in all things – it is the chief aim of man!

Secondly, within the praise was a precious promise we sometimes miss: through this Child there will be God's supernatural peace on those with whom God is pleased. And we can assume that God is pleased with those who accept and receive this Child as the Messiah and Lord that He is. Yes, this promised peace often brings an inner tranquility, to be sure. But I believe the peace the angels promise has more to do with the peace of relationship between God and man made possible by the sacrificial life blood of Jesus that would be given at His death.

***Colossians 1:19-20** For [aa]it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in [Jesus] and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*

So don't miss the witness of the angel multitude: extravagant praise to God and promised peace to all His children. May your Christmas be filled with praise and peace!