

**Introduction:**

- Each week we will be adding to the Nativity out front as you come in. It is a reminder of the people who were a part of the nativity. And it serves to bring us into the Christmas story. We are all part of the Christmas story. We may not be the main character but we are part of the story.
  - Does anyone know what the Word nativity means? It means birth, or the event of being born.
  - It comes from the Latin word Nativus. It was actually St Francis of Assisi who created the first nativity scene in 1223 AD and it became a Christmas tradition.
- We are going to look at the Sheperds *"That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep."* (Luke 2:8, NLT)... *"When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them."* (Luke 2:15-20, NLT)
- According to Luke's gospel, the angelic announcement of the birth of the Savior of the world did not come to important dignitaries or kings, but to shepherds tending their flocks in the middle of the night. While the recipients of the message were certainly important to God's plan it does cause one to wonder "Why Shepherds?" or for that matter, "Why me?" Cause you see, like the shepherds you too are a recipient of the same message. The bigger question is what are you going to do with it?

**I. Who Were These Guys?**

- A. Who were the Shepherds? Personally, I like these guys and they are my favorite characters of the Christmas story. Why? God is giving hope to the lowest group in the social order of the day. Let me interject...you can be at the top end of the social totem pole but if you have no hope you feel just like these guys look.
1. Shepherds were not always seen that way, as social outcasts. Abraham, Moses, and David – were shepherds. One of the most loved psalms speaks of God as a shepherd, Ps 23. By the time Jesus was born, shepherds had suffered several centuries of bad PR. They were poor. They lived outdoors. They were not refined. They were not educated. Worst of all, they smelled like sheep. The technical term used in Jesus' day to describe shepherds and other less than acceptable people was "'am haaretz" – meaning "common folks," or "people of the land." Being classified "'am haaretz" was no compliment in Jesus day.

2. They were the low end of the importance spectrum. They were not exactly the lowest social class in the bucket but could sure it from there. They were also considered to be the furthest from God. So the last place you would expect God to reveal His glory was among a bunch of these wool chasing, tick picking, social castoffs.
- B. The Shepherds were considered not worthy for God. Mary was righteous, Zachariah and Elizabeth were righteous, Joseph was righteous...nothing like that is said of the shepherds.
1. Understand, shepherds in 1st Century culture, were ceremonially unclean - always (manure and dead animals) - They were excluded from temple worship.
  2. Although they provided animals to be used in the temple worship, they were excluded from it. There were things they could do that was provided for in the law that would make them acceptable for worship, but this would require them to leave the sheep...which they couldn't do.
  3. At the time of Christ, worship was associated with the temple. Therefore, if you couldn't go to the temple you couldn't really worship God. So the shepherds lived in this spiritual dilemma.
  4. You can see how they were looked down on in the culture. Always unclean / never worshipping in the temple / cut off from the presence of God / They were the group always on the outside looking in. Even their appearance probably looked a bit rough. Shepherds lived with the sheep - slept among them - slept out in the open air - They looked and smelled rough.
  5. So you can see why culture considered shepherds not worthy of God. BUT, what is so great about the Christmas story is although culture considered them unworthy, God chose these lowly shepherds to be the first ones to know about His Son!  
There is hope! No one is too far from God!
- C. Many people today consider themselves not worthy for God (too far from Him)
1. Many people look at themselves like I'm sure, shepherds looked at themselves. "I'm not fit for God" All the wrong things I have done in my life has makes it impossible for God to ever want me.
  2. Have you heard someone say: "You don't want me coming to church. If I'd walk in there the roof would cave in on me...OR, "God would probably ZAP me." All these comments indicate a belief that I've gone too far - I've done too much -It's too late - There's no hope. God wants nothing to do with me. This is entirely not true!
  3. The truth is that God loves us even while we have no intention of following Him. Rom. 5:8 *"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."* (NLT) Jesus coming as a baby was a demonstration of

God's love so that He could die on a cross for our sin. What makes us acceptable to God is not our behavior, but accepting forgiveness through Jesus.

4. The angels showing up to the shepherds is proof that no one is too far away from God. No one has traveled too far - done too much - no one is beyond the realm of God's great love. The Shepherds give me hope because God reaches furthest out to make sure everyone will hear the message...Savior, Messiah, Lord is born today!
  - a) "I have not seen a sinner yet who did not like a baby."
  - b) Babies capture our attention.

## II. What Did They See And Hear?

### A. They saw Angels

1. Big Angel appears first.
  - a) Radiance - Gr. *lampo*, to shine. Light speaks of revelation. Think of this: God outshines the sun. That is revelation at its apex! 1 Tim 6:16 God is *wrapped in unapproachable light!*; James 1:7 says that God created all the lights in heaven. Light is the antithesis of darkness. Jesus is transfigured-Light! Second coming Luke 17:24 Jesus comes with light like lightening. Paul in Acts 16:13 says that he and the men with him saw a blinding light. The radiance speaks of God's presence (Moses veil), and it speaks of revelation.
  - b) Don't be afraid - *I have good news that will bring joy to all people.* Euangelian - Good news that must be proclaimed. It is the announcement of a victory! When the news is announced it brings joys because it has to do with victory! le. A runner returns to the city to announce that the army has won! Announcement of victory that results in joy!

### B. What did they hear?

1. What is the announcement? A nativity! A birth! The birth of the Son of God!
  - a) Savior - *soteria, sozo*, =salvation, healing, deliverance, protection.
  - b) Messiah - Gr. *Christos* - the anointed One! Anointing implies authority. Since Adam, Israel has been waiting for Messiah!
  - c) Lord - *kyrios* - Lordship combines both power and authority.
2. Here is your sign - Here is how you will find him...you will find this baby in Bethlehem, snugly wrapped up in strip of cloth and lying in a manger. The shepherds (the lowlifes, the commoners) are given an invitation to go see Messiah!
  - a) This baby is in a manger! Oh wow! He is one of us!
  - b) For a shepherd that is good news...it means that this baby is approachable.
  - c) God goes to those who are furthest out in darkness reveals Himself to them and then lets them know that Messiah is approachable. This is a message of hope! God is approachable. So many people want to stand off away from God because they see Him as unapproachable. The shepherds now see Him as

approachable. He is not in a temple built by human hands he is in a manger where animals feed.

- C. Sky full of angels appear next. KA BOOM! Heaven armies break out in full on worship! They are singing a new song. It is the greatest light show on earth! Ever!
- D. God did this for 'the common folks!' To bring them near.

**III. What Did They Do?** What matters is what we do with the revelation that we have received.

- A. First, it is obvious that they had faith. The angel said, *Don't be afraid*. They weren't. They believed what they were seeing and hearing. They perceived that God was actually talking to them.
  1. *"So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ."* (Romans 10:17, NLT)
  2. *Whosoever will believe* has no social limitations. It is for everyone...who hears!
- B. They acted on what they had seen and heard.
  1. Vs 15 *Lets go to Bethlehem*.
  2. Vs 15 *Lets see this thing that has happened!*
  3. Let's go! Let's See! Those are both faith responses.
- C. They told everyone what had happened and what the angel said about the child.
  1. They instantly became proclaimers. They did not stand of soap box with microphone. They told who so ever would listen to them.
  2. People were astonished! Gr. Thaum - to wonder, to declare wonderful. It created awe in that it transcends human experience. But to those who could receive it. It brought about great joy! More people would get astonished if believers just talked about the good things God is doing and saying in their lives.
- D. They rejoiced: they went back to their flocks glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen. They are worshiping but they are not in a temple! They weren't acceptable for the Temple but they were for God.
- E. They returned to their flocks. For most people life does not change when we meet God. How we live life changes because we are changed.

### Conclusion:

- "Commoners" found out that God does not lie. *It was just as the angel had told them*. vs 20
- Those who were far off were brought near through a loving God who initiated conversation with them and invited them to know Christ.