

Lessons from the Nativity Story: Shepherds

When God shows up, things change. Many people come to faith in Christ because they were searching yet for others God shows up and turns their world upside down.

He doesn't always work the same way or in the same timing, but He's always working and the goal is always the same: reveal the truth, a need for a Savior who is Jesus, save them, and call them to where He wants them to go.

Today we look at this miraculous lesson from the way the shepherds respond to God in the nativity story.

Luke 2:8-20 (HCSB)

8 In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 Today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. 12 This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a feeding trough."

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

14 Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people He favors!

15 When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

16 They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the feeding trough. 17 After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, just as they had been told.

This account of the shepherds begins with some guys, just doing their job, minding their own business. And then an angel shows up.....wouldn't you have loved to be there?

Shepherds were not well liked or highly thought of. Unlike the wise men we looked at last week, shepherds were not educated or respected. In fact they were outcasts, they were dirty, some say they had a reputation for being thieves and were not exactly welcome in town.

You would think these would be the last people that God would announce Christ's birth to.....yet they are first!

1 Corinthians 1:28 (HCSB)

28 God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something,

God is not like us.....and He's not supposed to be.....we are supposed to be like Him. What I see Him do is things that are unexpected. I see Him using people for great things that others would disqualify or reject. I see Him showing Himself to a people that the rest of the town wants nothing to do with....

Who are the shepherds in your life, in your workplace, school, community? Do you reach out to those who are unwanted by others? Because God did.....and does!

Take note that they were not even looking for the Messiah. Again, unlike the wise men, the shepherds were uneducated....they were not seeking the Messiah. They were just working, minding their own business, keeping to themselves.

But they had a heavenly experience. God sent someone their way, to show them the light. Could God be sending you to someone, and outcast who is minding their own business, to show them the light?

These shepherds, here they are working, it's night time....I don't know what it was like but they are in their fields.....just a shepherd and his sheep. It's probably quiet, it's pretty dark, the only light is from the moon and the stars. Think how peaceful that would be. I don't know if they were dozing off, talking to the sheep, or just looking into the sky. Then BAM this angel appears!

Then he says "Do not be afraid!".....Now I would think "do not be afraid? Are you kidding me? You scared me half to death, what are you doing here?"

The angel continues...."I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" Did you catch that? All the people. The news of Jesus is good news and it's great for ALL the people, no matter how low or how high the revelation of Jesus will bring great joy.

The news the angel proclaims is good news and great joy for all the people. This includes the shepherds. But then he makes it personal. He says "Today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David."

This news is for everyone, but today Jesus was born for YOU. This speaks of a relational God. He's here for everyone....even YOU. No matter what you feel about your self worth, Jesus came for YOU. It's not debatable, it's a fact.

Luke 19:10 (HCSB)

10 For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

Who is lost? Those who walk in darkness who do not have the light of Christ.

John 12:46 (HCSB)

46 I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me would not remain in darkness.

Everyone who believes in Jesus will not remain in darkness. People like to self evaluate but Jesus is the evaluator and He says His coming is good news and great joy for ALL the people. YOU just have to make the decision to follow Him, He already chose you....just as He chose these lowly shepherds!

One angel comes, reveals the birth of the Savior, Messiah, and Lord to the shepherds. Men, working, minding their own business, not looking for God but they had an encounter with an angel of the Lord, a carrier of God's Word.....and they received this word.

They received the Word about a Savior. And look at what happens next:

Luke 2:13-14 (HCSB)

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

14 Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people He favors!

I read that and I can't help but think of this verse:

Luke 15:10 (HCSB)

10 I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents."

Now I can't tell you with certainty that these shepherds were saved but I can tell you what I see following the announcement of the Savior to these men. The angels suddenly appear, possibly thousands of them, maybe 10's or 100's of thousands appear praising God.

And they say “*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*” Glory to God in the highest doesn’t mean glory in the highest way or degree but to the highest realm or place....heaven.

Glory to God in heaven for what is taking place on the earth. A Savior is born. There is salvation on the way for the sinner, the unwanted, the unworthy.

Peace on earth, goodwill toward men....not global peace, not everything is great, but peace with God through His Son who is the Prince of Peace....who by His death that was to come, would reconcile sinners with the Father:

Romans 5:1 (HCSB)

1 Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not come to bring peace on earth, He came so that we may have peace IN HIM.

These shepherds hear the Word of God through the angel, the angels rejoice for the peace that comes in accepting Jesus.....and I believe they also rejoiced at the shepherds reception of what God had done.

Luke 2:15 (HCSB)

15 When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Man this is good stuff! The shepherds became sheep! “*Let’s go STRAIGHT to Bethlehem.*” Notice they have the truth revealed, they have a heavenly encounter, then they went to Mary Ann’s or Joe’s after the service and ignored or forgot what had happened.....NO. They acted on it. They did not delay, they did not question, they did what didn’t make sense.....they went straight into town where they weren’t even wanted.

These men left their sheep. This was a 24/7 job they had, it was important for them to be out there otherwise they would not have been out there at night. But an encounter from heaven will do that to a person. Revelation of God’s truths will do that to a person. What makes sense to man goes straight out the window as do his plans. An encounter from heaven will change the way a person thinks!

They went straight to Bethlehem to see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. They just had an encounter with who knows how many thousands of angels and they don’t even mention the angels.....they mention what the Lord has made known to them.

That is what made them go. They were drawn by a God revelation. It's God Himself, not angels that are the source of genuine revelation.

Psalm 119:105 (HCSB)

105 Your word is a lamp for my feet
and a light on my path.

Word here in the Greek is dabar (da-var) meaning speech, word, saying, utterance. Certainly this includes the bible but it also includes any way that God speaks.....revelation. God revealing things to you is a lamp for you feet and a light on your path.

This is what the shepherds found on that night. God's revelation to them lit a path straight to where God was calling them.....to the feet of Jesus. And when God called....they went....in a hurry!

Luke 2:16-19 (HCSB)

16 They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the feeding trough. 17 After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them.

They received the revelation, they went where they were called, and they shared the message with those they encountered. They were not ashamed. They were not even liked or wanted in town, but when God get ahold of you, you don't care what other people think. You just respond to the call.

What revelation has God given you?

Where is God calling you today?

Are you willing to go?

And are you willing to tell those you encounter about the goodness of God?

The shepherds did.....

Luke 2:20 (HCSB)

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, just as they had been told.

The shepherd's lives were changed that day. The day the Savior was born. The day God spoke to them and revealed His Son.

Outcasts.....called in by God. The lowly.....lifted high by and encounter from heaven. The unimportant.....the first to know of Christ's birth, therefore the first to respond to it.

God has something for you today. Regardless of how you feel about yourself, He has great and mighty things for you.....starting with a chance to know Him.

We all need Jesus, that's why He came for all. Would you receive Him today?

Will you answer His call and follow Him?

Will you share His love with those who do not know it?