

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Sermon: 4th Sunday of Advent: The Shepherds and the Company of Angels.
 Scripture: Luke 2:8-21
 Rev. Steve Filyk
 December 21, 2025
 Opener: Angels we have heard on high #147
 Candle Lighting Hymn: Hope is a Star
 Before Sermon: Infant holy, infant lowly #143
 After Sermon: While Shepherds Watched #138
 Choir: "When the Angel's song is silent"
 Closer: See amid the winter's snow #168

Do you ever catch yourself singing
 or maybe even dancing
 as you walk through your neighbourhood,
 ride the bus,
 or stroll down our city streets?
 Or do you stop yourself...
 just in case someone's watching?

This past summer there was a couple times
 I saw a young lady
 Grooving to her own music
 As she was walking up the hill on Columbia Street.

The first time I saw her,
 I'll be honest — I wondered what was going on.
 The second time I saw her,
 I realised she was simply enjoying her walk
 in a way most of us are too self-conscious to try.

My kids and I call her 'Dancing Girl'.
 She is known for grooving across the city.
 When I searched 'Dancing Girl' Kamloops
 I found that other people have noticed her as well.
 One post about her had 752 likes and 62 comments.

Comments like this:

"I see her all the time. She is absolutely incredible.
 If everyone was as positive and full of life as her,
 we would be living in a different world."

Or like this:

"I don't know about you guys,
 but, I think everyone could use someone like her in our lives.
 Bravo lady.... I don't know you, but I love you."

So how about you?
 Do you ever catch yourself dancing or singing
 Down city sidewalks.

Or are you like me?
 Too worried what others might think of you?

Today we are jumping ahead in the Christmas story.
 Today's reading follows the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

It all happens quietly, seemingly unnoticed.
 Jesus is "wrapped in cloths
 and placed him in a manger,
 because there was no guest room available for them."
 (Luke 2:7)

But today's reading tells us
 That this birth isn't unnoticed.
 God is just allowing the Holy Family
 To take a beat before making a big announcement
 And sending guests to Jesus' birthday party.

In those days "it was customary in the Roman Empire
 for poets and orators to declare peace and prosperity
 at the birth of one who was to become emperor.
 In that familiar pattern,

but from heaven,
comes the good news of joy and peace..."
(Craddock Luke 35)

But this announcement
Is made to unlikely recipients:
Shepherds.

While shepherds could always
Claim the likes of Moses and King David
As predecessors,
And while shepherding was a then-common image
For leadership,
Shepherding wasn't regarded as a desirable profession.
And shepherds weren't seen as respected people.

Shepherding wasn't well paid.
It was solitary and lonely work
With a tough schedule that kept its workers
From religious observance.
"[Most] people of status throughout the empire
viewed shepherds as lowly and sometimes as rough,
unclean or even dangerous."
(CBSB 1744)

But its shepherds to whom today's angelic birth announcement is made.
Not to King Herod in his palace in Jerusalem.
Not to the Roman Prefect in Caesarea Maritima.
Not to the priests living comfortably in Jericho.
Not even to the mayor of Bethlehem —
if Bethlehem had a mayor.
God makes Jesus' birth announcement to shepherds
Who were camped in the outskirts of Bethlehem.

An "angel of the Lord appeared to them"

Trumpeting that: "Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you;
he is the Messiah, the Lord."

Just in case they think they are having
Some sort of mass hallucination,
They are given a sign.
They will find the baby
"wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger"

At the end of this message
An entire company of angels then appear
Singing songs of praise to God
And blessings of peace on the people.

Have you ever wondered why shepherds
Were the recipients of this message?

Why of all the people that could have been invited
To Jesus' first birthday party,
That they were included?

By including those who are often overlooked
It highlights what the angels said in their announcement
That this good news is "for all the people".

It also foreshadows the kind of ministry
That Jesus will engage in.
Jesus hasn't come to pander to the rich and powerful,
But to proclaim a kingdom that is for
"the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame"
(Luke 14:13,21)

But I also wonder if the announcement is made to shepherds
not just because of who they are

But what they will do.

They aren't the kind of people
who will keep quiet
about something this astonishing.

We are told that they
hurry off to find the baby Jesus
the angels had mentioned.

And we are told that "When they had seen him,
they spread the word
concerning what had been told them about this child..."

It is also noted that "The shepherds returned,
glorifying and praising God
for all the things they had heard and seen..."
(Luke 2:17-20)

You may not have noticed this,
But the behavior of the shepherds
Mimics that of the angels.
They share the good news,
and sing God's praises.
Those shepherds are the earthy counterpart
Of God's obedient messengers in heaven.

PAUSE

Presbyterians aren't exactly known
for our bold evangelical witness.
God has done great things for us — truly.
But we tend to keep those things...well-behaved.

Why is this?
Maybe unlike the shepherds

We are worried about what others think about us.

They knew they were despised.
It made no difference to them
If others thought they were drunk or deluded.
But we feel we have something to lose.
We don't want to be strange or different,
Or regarded as something less.

I recall a member of this congregation
Who has now gone on to her reward,
Saying that she didn't want her neighbors
To think she was one of those religious freaks.

But just consider this fear for a moment...
What is the point of hiding who you are
to gain another person's approval?

And maybe more importantly...
Why will anyone think you have good news to share,
If you sound and behave exactly like them?
Douglas Murray, the British author and journalist
was interviewed alongside theologian Tom Wright on
A podcast I subscribe to called "Unbelievable?"

While Tom is an Anglican scholar [and committed Christian],
Douglas Murray is an agnostic.
This is what Douglas shared:

"I not only was brought up in,
but afterwards sought the church as it was...
its jewels and gems of the King James Bible,
Book of Common Prayer, and much more.

And it's been my experience..
that one has observed the church giving up its jewels

and becoming something else...

My fear is constantly the church is not doing
what so many of us on the outside would like it to do,
which is to be preaching its gospel,
to be asserting its truths and its claims...

Everything in this boring, monotone,
ill thought out and shallow dialectic.

And I am, so as I say, I'm a disappointed, non-adherent".

[From Unbelievable?: Classic: Do We Still Need Christianity? Douglas Murray vs N. T. Wright, Nov 25, 2025
<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/unbelievable/id267142101?i=1000738402598&r=620>
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Douglas Murray is giving voice to something
many people outside the church are saying.

And it's a hard word to hear —
not because it's hostile,
but because it's disappointed.

His point is this:
the more the church tries to sound like everyone else,
the less anyone expects us to have
good news worth hearing.

The churches that are growing
aren't the ones that have tried to be relevant, current.
They are the ones offering the world
something it can't get anywhere else —
forgiveness, hope, mercy,
and joy that doesn't depend on circumstances.

This doesn't mean being strange for the sake of being strange.
But it does mean being unafraid

to live as people who believe
that something extraordinary has happened in Jesus.

Back to Dancing Girl.

The first time I saw her,
I wasn't sure what to make of her.

The next time, I found myself smiling.
She isn't hurting anyone.
She isn't forcing anyone to watch her.
But she is expressing something in her soul.
She's it into public view —
and people are noticing.

That's not such a bad description
of the shepherds that first Christmas.

They didn't tone it down.
They didn't keep it private.
They shared what they had seen.
And they went back to their fields
glorifying and praising God.

Maybe the invitation for us this Advent
is not to become louder —
but to become freer.
Freer to rejoice.
Freer to speak.
Freer to live as people
who have good news
and aren't afraid
to let it be seen.

Amen.