

# Unusual Guests

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Preacher: Rev Thomas McNeil

[ 0 : 00 ] It's great to be back and to be with you again. It's been quite some time since I was here, and it is good to be with you.

It's been great for us at Calderwood to be able to continue to pray for you, continue to see what God is doing in your midst. And it's been great for us to be able to release Cal to you and to be able to just encourage you and bless you over the course of this period.

So be assured of our ongoing prayers, be assured of our ongoing love towards you as brothers and sisters in Christ. And just now, I'm going to read the first of our scripture readings for today.

It comes from Luke chapter 2, and we're going to begin at verse 8. Words that are very familiar, I'm sure, and words we'll be very familiar to hearing at this time of year.

Luke chapter 2, and at verse 8. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

[ 1 : 05 ] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and 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 among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

[ 2 : 20 ] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary, Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Amen.

Well, as has been our pattern over this Advent season, we've been getting different folks in the congregation to record little short videos for us, but just help us to think a little bit about the theme.

And this week, it was Jeanette's chance to do that. And so, we're going to watch just now a few moments from Jeanette. Hello, I'm Jeanette from Bellsville Baptist Church.

Surely nice to be with you today. Without causing unnecessary offence, who have been your most unusual visitors, and why? Well, the most unusual visitor I've ever had might surprise you.

[ 3 : 41 ] Because I'm going to talk to you about a wee four-year-old boy who came to me one night for an overnight. And I was expecting this little darling to turn up.

My house was already full of children. And we were all excited because this new boy was coming to stay overnight. He came through the door. And we all welcomed him.

Introduced ourselves to him. And he was so happy to see us. But then I said to him, what would you like for supper? And he said, I would like a Carlsberg.

And all the children are looking at each other and saying, what's a Carlsberg? And I was taken aback. And I said to him, I'm sorry darling, I don't have anything like that in this house.

But I can give you something else for your supper. What is a supper? That was a real drama to me. Because I thought every four-year-old child would know what supper was.

[ 4 : 47 ] It was a big shock to our system as a family. Even although we'd fostered for 19 years, this was a new aspect to everything for us.

Anyway, I went upstairs to settle some of the children to bed. Danny went out to put his car in the garage. Came back down the stairs and found Christopher with a hammer and a nail.

Going to hammer a nail and in my living room wall. And I said to him, Christopher, what are you doing? He said, I'm looking for a place to hang my coat. And much as I smile to myself as I think about him, do you know, there's millions of children like that in our world today.

And it's quite sad to think that at this time of the year, there'll be a lot of these children living in homes where their mum or dad can't look after them properly.

And they won't know what Christmas is all about. And I just wanted to think about them for a wee while. He was my most unusual visitor. And although he was coming for an overnight, he stayed with us in total three years on and off.

[ 6 : 01 ] But he was a darling. And he learned me a lot of lessons. And also, I taught Danny and I a lot of it streetwise, ways-wise, ways, ways-wise or whatever.

Because we didn't know half of what went on in the street until we met Christopher. And then, Christopher taught us a lot of things. A lot of things. And he was four years of age.

He still wasn't at school yet. So remember these children tonight when you're thinking about them. Remember them. He's a wee darling and I loved them. But, it was hard.

It was hard. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were unusual gifts. What has been your most unusual gift? The next thing you're going to ask me about, the unusual gift.

Well, once again, I'm going to talk about Christmas. Because when you're young, you look for your Christmas list, maybe now. In our day, we did to get a Christmas list.

[ 7 : 07 ] We just got maybe a stocking and one big thing and one wee thing. However, this Christmas morning, I had a wee sister that was born three days before Christmas.

So my mum was still in bed nursing her. And I was 11 years of age and my brother was five. And, my mum had said to me the night before, Jeanette, I've got no money and we've got no food.

And to put you in the picture, my dad had gone away and left us. So, I said, well, what are we going to do, mum, about Christmas? And she said, I don't know.

And she started to cry. And I was, said, don't worry mum, it'll be alright, we'll be okay. And I got up in the morning, Christmas morning, and my wee brother came running through saying, Jeanette, Jeanette, Santa's not been.

And I said, oh, I said, maybe he's a wee bit late. He'll be coming, but he's just maybe a wee bit late. Okay, well I'll look for him coming out the window.

[ 8 : 21 ] I said, no, I think we'll have some breakfast first. But needless to say, we didn't have any breakfast because there wasn't anything in the house to eat. Anyway, the district nurse who was looking after my mum came round to see us Christmas morning.

She came in and she said, well Ian, Jeanette, what did you get for Santa? And I said, well, it hasn't been yet Nurse Davidson. And strangely enough, this nurse, Davidson, had the same surname as what we had.

And I thought, now that's a strange thing, Nurse Davidson, and that's our name, Davidson. Anyway, she said, alright, okay, that's fine. I couldn't even make the nurse a cup of tea because we had no milk, no sugar, nothing.

Anyway, she went away after attending to Anne and my mum. And she came back later on that day with a big box of messages with a present for me which was three cotton handkerchiefs in a wee box and a wee toy gun for Ian and a wee rattle for my three-day-old sister.

And I was thrilled to bits. That was not the usual present I would have got. That was not what I was expecting to get for my Christmas was three wee cotton handkerchiefs.

[ 9 : 48 ] But that Christmas learned me a lesson that a lot of children get nothing at Christmas and their mum and dads maybe can't do anything about it. At that time it was my mum that couldn't do anything about it and she was heartbroken for us.

But God sent us an angel in Nurse Davidson and she was wonderful. And every Christmas I remember that Christmas in particular. When did you realise that Jesus is Lord and begin to worship him?

Now I want to tell you about how I came to know the Lord. I always came along to Bells Hill Baptist Church where I was a wee girl. I went to Sunday school and I went to the church services and I went to anything that was on mostly Saturday night social tea nights and things like that that were on.

I would go along to that. I also belonged to the girl guides in St Andrew's Church. I also went to the West Church Dramatic Club and I went to one of the wee mission halls beside us in Bells Hill as well.

But one night in particular I was 13 years of age at the time I had just turned 13 the week before and one of my neighbours asked me if I would like to go to a wee mission hall with them in Motherwell.

[ 11 : 11 ] And I said I would. I said that would be good I would like to do that. So I went with them to this wee mission hall and there would be maybe about 30 people there. It was a Saturday night I remember.

It was a wee green tin hall where Asda big supermarket is in Motherwell now. That was a wee green tin mission hall. And I went in there where Mr and Mrs McLaughlin took me and their family.

And we had a nice night and it was just a man who was actually what we would call a deacon that was there that took the service. But boy was he in fire for the Lord.

And he spoke I can't remember the verse or the chapter he spoke about or anything like that. But I remember him telling us you know about God but do you know Jesus as your saviour?

And again this was in November. So everybody had Christmas decorations up and everybody was talking about Christmas. so I listened to what he had to say and he spoke about knowing Jesus personally as my own saviour.

[ 12 : 29 ] And if I didn't know him I wouldn't go to heaven. And that struck a chord with me because I thought well I go to the church every Sunday and I'm a good person so why would I not go to heaven?

But he explained to me that I was still sinful. Whether I went to church or not I was still sinful because I didn't know I hadn't asked for my sins to be forgiven.

So that night the spirit touched me and spoke to me and the tears were tripping me and I remember it well going out to the front when he asked if anybody wanted to come out.

I went out to the front on my own and I was all nervous. excited and all things at once I can't describe how I felt.

I was happy and yet I didn't know what was going to happen. So he took me aside and he prayed for me and the tears were tripping me and the spirit filled me and I was so full of joy and happiness and gladness.

[ 13 : 33 ] You would have thought somebody had just given me a million pound. I was so happy. I was so pleased that I had given my heart to the Lord. And I don't know what happened after that because I went home myself on a bus.

So I don't know if Mr. and Mrs. McGlocken were going somewhere else. I can't even remember that Pat. But I remember standing waiting in the bus at Motherwell bus stop and my face was a picture of happiness.

I was smiling all the time. I was looking in all the shop windows smiling at myself. I was so so happy. And I have been honestly I have that happiness still in my heart today because I know Jesus is my saviour.

And if you don't know him please you know about him no get to know him personally your life will change completely. Thank you. Thanks very much Jeanette for that.

What the video doesn't show was she was absolutely freezing because we're in here during the week so but it's good to hear what the Lord's done for you and what the Lord continues to do for you as well.

[ 14 : 44 ] We're going to take it our next reading and it's found in the book of Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 to 12. Again a well known passage at this time of the year. but Matthew 2 verses 1 to 12.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king behold wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying where is he who has been born king of the Jews for we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.

When Herod the king heard this he was troubled and all Jerusalem Jerusalem with him and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They told him in Bethlehem of Judea for so it is written by the prophet it and you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared and he sent them to Bethlehem saying go and search diligently for the child and when you have found him bring me word that I too may come and worship him and listening to the king they went on their way and behold the star that they had seen when they had rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

[ 16 : 27 ] When they saw the star they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy and going into the house they saw the child where Mary his mother and fell down and worshipped him then opening their treasures they offered gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh and been warned in a dream not to return to Herod they departed to their country by another way.

Let's pray let's join our hearts together in prayer. Heavenly Father we thank you for that testimony that we heard of Jeanette's.

Father we thank you for the way in which that night that November night she heard your word and she heard your voice and that inner prompting of your spirit and she she surrendered her life to you and she enthroned Jesus Christ as king of her life.

And Heavenly Father we thank you that for each of us who believes in Jesus we too have that same story that same moment when we heard your voice when we heard the spirit's prompting and we made that decision to enthrone Jesus Christ as king of our lives.

and we thank you as we've heard already this morning that Jesus Christ the man lived and died and rose again and ascended to your right hand and from there he was given the name that is above every name he is Christ the Lord he is the king of kings he is the lord of lords and at his name every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is lord of all and it is that Christ it is that Jesus that we worship today and father we bring all glory and all praise all honor and all majesty to you the one who would send your son into this world even for the least of these even for the least of us even for me lord you would send your son from the wonder of glory from the splendor of your heaven into this world which lord is broken which is not filled with your perfect love which is not filled with your perfect peace which is not filled with your abundant joy but yet

[ 19 : 55 ] Jesus came willingly that he might be able to restore humanity to yourself that peace might come into our hearts that joy might come into our hearts and so lord for all that you have done for all that you have done for us we say thank you and we praise your holy name amen well this morning as we have a little bit of a think about unusual guests our passage this morning was talking about unusual guests who came to visit the baby Jesus and with his mother Mary and Joseph and I wonder who were the first people to come and visit you in hospital or who were the first people to come and visit your children when you gave birth in hospital

I'm guessing it was probably somebody you knew I'm guessing it was maybe you know your own parents that came to see your grandparents or maybe it was your grandparents that came to see you you know your first visitors in hospital I know when we had the boys a six year old and an 18 month old so when they were born and you know we were over in over in Wishall General and you know boys were born and doing alright and everything had settled and everything had calmed down you know you're on the phone and this is obviously pre-COVID days when you could have visitors in hospitals and all that kind of thing and on the phone to mum and dad and I was saying you know giving them the good news and the first question they ask isn't it is when can we come over when can we come over and visit and they came over and they met the little one it was their grandparents were the first ones to meet our little ones anybody your first visitor a complete stranger would be a bit unusual wouldn't it if the first person to come and visit you if you'd just given birth was a complete stranger somebody you'd never met before somebody who just turned up and just came to visit you that would be really really unusual very odd but what we see is the first visitors to Mary and

Joseph were not people that they knew were not people that they had met before they were not relatives or family friends they were very unusual very unexpected guests but you see when we see those first guests when we see those first visitors who came to see Mary and Joseph we actually get an insight into who Jesus came for we actually get an insight into the gospel itself as to why Jesus came when we see the visitors that were invited to come and meet the baby Jesus so we've read Luke chapter 2 and Matthew chapter 2 we've seen the shepherds on the field by night and of course the first visitors that we see in the passages that we read were not visitors to Jesus but they were visitors to the shepherds it was the angels in the skies they were the first visitors in fact they were visitors to planet earth because these are angels that have come from the realms of glory as the carol would say and they came to earth and they appear on a hillside to a bunch of shepherds out at night watching their flocks and these angels appear and you kind of feel sorry for angels sometimes because they're the guest that comes and they don't get this great big welcome instead the shepherds respond in fear in fact any time in the bible you see angels appearing the first thing they've always got to say is don't be afraid you know it's the first thing we've got to say you can understand it don't you

I mean if we were confronted with an angel this morning I think we would be full of fear as well but these shepherds who would normally live out in the fields out past Bethlehem and they would be protecting their flock fighting off wild animals doing the hard work that shepherds would do to protect their flock these men are brought to utter fear when they're met with these angels but the angels say don't be worried don't be afraid it's okay it's okay we come with good news we come with good news good news of great joy good news of great joy well what is this good news that they bring well they tell us that this day in the city of David a saviour is born who is Christ the Lord and we're just singing it there and I'm so grateful that

David chose that song because those words that speak of who is this child they go on and they tell us that it's the king you see that's what the angels said when they declared that it's Christ the Lord what they're saying is that this baby who's been born is a king Christ that word means anointed one anointed king the king has been born when when Matthew is speaking and telling us his account of what took place and what we see in Matthew 2 is it tells us that the king the the wise men say where is he who has been born king of the Jews you see these wise men that came from the east when they saw that star they came to

[ 26 : 18 ] Bethlehem and they asked where is the king that's been born to the Jews you see they understood that this baby that was born this Christ was the king and this is the good news this is the good news that has come Matthew as he writes his account goes further he talks about the fact that from Bethlehem a ruler has been born he describes this king that has been born and you oh Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people you see what the shepherds and what the wise men discovered that first Christmas that this baby who was born was the Christ the anointed king he was the one who was a ruler who would shepherd his people but you see this king doesn't come the way that kings of his day came nor did he come as kings of our day come when somebody is born into the royal family in our country we've seen in the past few years haven't we royal babies being born and it comes with great announcement doesn't it there's a special kind of plaque was put up outside

Buckingham Palace to announce the birth of the little baby and the press from right around the world are gathered outside this prestigious hospital and it all comes with this great pomp and ceremony because royalty has been born well royalty is born here in our passages this morning but we find that royalty being born in a manger we find that royalty being born in an outhouse of an inn but the announcement is far from shoddy the announcement comes in the form of angelic beings filling the skies singing glory to god in the highest and you see this king doesn't come as kings of his day came either you see the people of the day were used to emperors and rulers rising to power but they rose to power through violence they rose to power through conspiracy they would one emperor would overthrow the other emperor and that emperor would choose his successor but that successor would overthrow him with violence and conspiracy and palace intrigue you don't get any of that in this ruler in this ruler he comes in this lowly state to

Bethlehem's manger and these angels tell us that he has come to bring peace he's not like the other rulers who rule by conquer and violence whose aim is conquest no this is a ruler who has come to bring peace peace to all that god is pleased with the angel said glory to god in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased the note of great joy is not only that he is a peace bringer but he is also the means by which we will receive that peace he is the one who has come in order to bring peace between god and man he is the one who has come to secure that everlasting peace forever his good news his great joy this is a day that changes the course of all of human history when god's son comes into the world in order that he might save the world and the angels tell us that it's great news for all the people all the people not just some of the people not just a handful of people not just the wealthy people but all the people and when we look at these unexpected guests we see that the angels really do mean what they say because you see who do they appear to they appear to the shepherds think about that for a minute you know they don't appear to the religious rulers they don't appear to the chief priest they don't appear to the wealthy in society they don't even appear right in the middle of a city or right in the middle of a town where everybody could see them where do they appear they appear out in the hills where there's just a bunch of shepherds sitting in a field one cold night with their sheep now you know farmers in today's society aren't exactly outcasts you know my sister-in-law's father's a farmer you know he's not an outcast in society but shepherds 2,000 years ago where they lived out in the fields with their flock they were outcasts they were seen as people who they very rarely come into the town because they were seen almost as if they were unclean they were anonymous we don't look doesn't tell us the name of the shepherds doesn't tell us who they are they're just these anonymous shepherds they're outcasts they have no name and they would be poor and they were seen as being ceremonially unclean these were far from the elite of the political and religious life of Israel these were lowly shepherds angels but God sends the angels to them remember the angels didn't get lost and get confused no it was deliberately done that way that the angels would appear to these shepherds that these angels would appear to them and would reveal what

God has done and these shepherds went off and they went to Bethlehem and they found the baby with his mother and father and they told Mary all that the angels had made known to them and they returned Luke tells us glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen these angels appeared to the lowly shepherds and our story finishes with these shepherds praising and glorifying God for all he's done and all they've seen but it's not just the shepherds that are surprising guests because then we get we three kings of Orient are you know the Christmas carol there's only a bit of a problem we don't really know there was three of them we're just guessing there was three because there was three gifts we don't really know there was three and they weren't the kings so it doesn't tell us in Matthew's account that these people were kings it tells us they were wise men they were people from the east which is interesting because it means they weren't they weren't of the

Jewish family they weren't they weren't Jewish people these were foreigners these were foreigners traveling from another land coming from the east what strange unexpected guests that you would have people from outside the nation of Israel you'd have foreigners coming in and they weren't kings but instead the word that we have in our account is magi they were the magi from the east magi is the root of the word that we use for magic these were these were astrologers wizards you might want to say they were pagan specialists in the supernatural and they get invited as the unexpected guests at the manger quite incredible these were people who were far far from being part of the nation of Israel ethnically religiously but yet

[ 36 : 17 ] God reveals his son to them he reveals it through the star that appears in the sky that they follow and then when they come to to to Herod and they come and inquire where is the king of the Jews you see actually you can see this for yourselves we don't have time to look at this in detail this morning you can look at this yourselves later on in Matthew chapter 2 in the verses that we read there are only two kings mentioned Herod and Jesus there's only two kings mentioned in our passage Herod and Jesus it's a story of two kings one who ends up being the savior of the side of the children it's a story of two kings but you see they come to Herod and Herod summons the religious leaders and they open up the prophets of the old testament to find out where this baby is going to be born and scripture reveals that the baby would be born in

Bethlehem and so these magi travel on to Bethlehem and they too fall down and worship and you see what we see is that when Jesus reveals to the shepherds in the form of the angels when Jesus is revealed to them what we see is that Jesus is a savior for the lowly and the outcast and then when the wise men come on the scene the magi come on the scene what we see is that Jesus is a savior for the sinner and the searcher because these wise men from the east they weren't part of that religious family that religious line that Jesus has come to but remember what the angels said we come with good news of great joy for for what for some of the people is that what it says in your bible no for all the people even the shepherds even the magi from the east and these shepherds and these magi they act as a visible demonstration of what the angels said that it really is for all the people but is that really right did

Jesus really come for all the people you can look again at this as well yourselves but the very beginning of Matthew Matthew opens up his gospel with a big list of names it's called a genealogy a big list of names don't know if you know anybody and if you've ever met somebody that likes to name drop and I don't know if you've ever met somebody like that you know love to tell you what party they've been to and who they spent time with what famous person they used to work with or you know that kind of thing just love to drop a name into the conversation just to show that they're well connected well Matthew starts his gospel with a big list of names to show us how connected Jesus is the problem is if Matthew was trying to show us what a great list of people Jesus is connected to he does need to do a very good job because you see Matthew's list of names contains people who had a bit of story a bit of reputation but not always the most moral of people you've got murderous kings in that list of names you've got leaders who led the people astray in that list of names you've got prostitutes in that list you've got people that came from outside the land of

Israel who didn't belong to that ethnic people you've got all kinds of people in there and Matthew starts off his story by saying hey here's the family of Jesus not a pretty bunch but you know I've got news for you 2000 years on the family of Jesus still isn't a pretty bunch maybe I'm just speaking for myself still not a pretty bunch because I'm a sinner I've messed up I've got it wrong so so many times but yet the angels said that it's good news for all the people and you may be sitting there thinking really is that really right you may be sitting there thinking I'm not a religious person I'm not a religious person is this really good news for me or you may be sitting there thinking you know



I've messed up and you may be sitting there thinking Thomas you don't know how many times I've messed up is this really good news for me you may be sitting there thinking do you know I've got a reputation and it's no a reputation for always being that nice always being that kind I've got a name and a reputation and it doesn't anyone that flatters me but you know God revealed his son to the shepherds to the lowliest and the outcast and he revealed his son to these wizards from the east pagans far from God and God revealed his son to them and in both cases they fell down and worshipped and sometimes you might find yourself thinking am I just too far from God

[ 42 : 49 ] I've done too many things I've sinned too much I'm just not religious enough well if the shepherds and the magi can fall down and worship and glorify God then so can any one of us and that's true if you're here this morning you're not a Christian yet and you're in that place of just thinking I'm just not worthy to fall down and worship I'm just not worthy to have Jesus come into my life I'm just not worthy to call him king well neither were the shepherds neither were the magi neither was I it's also a message for those of us who are Christians for those of us who are in the church who might be tempted to sit there and think oh you see that person they're beyond saving there's no hope for that person you know their reputation you know what they've done you know the things they've said you know the people they've hurt well there was still hope even for the shepherds and the magi and there was still hope for me and there was still hope for you because the truth is that in the family of Jesus there are a lot of unexpected guests a lot of very unusual guests but they all have one thing in common they bowed down and they worshipped

Jesus for who he is king of kings and lord of lords and they asked him to come and to forgive them and you might feel as if you're the unexpected guest at the party but if you've accepted Jesus as lord of lords and king of kings and he's forgiven you your sins you might be unexpected but you are most definitely welcomed it is good news of great joy for all people and it is a message of good news and a message of great joy that we've got to proclaim a message of salvation for anyone who would believe we're going to watch a video just now a song is going to play and the chorus of the song says make room make room in your hearts and I want you just to take time just now as this plays to watch it to listen to it and to be challenged by it and if you haven't made room for Jesus in your life if you haven't made him king ask him to forgive you of your sins perhaps even just during this song silently in your heart you might just want to pray to him and tell him that you want him to be king of your life that you want him to forgive you your sins and that you want to follow him for the rest of your lives let's watch this just now