

The Common Man

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Preacher: Paul Hay

[0 : 00] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we are gathered here to honor you. During this season of giving, we remember the greatest gift of all, your Son, Jesus Christ. We are filled with wonder that he would leave the glory of heaven for a manger and a cross.

Help us to be ever mindful of the great cost of our salvation. You offer it to us as a free gift, but it costs you, your only Son. We're also mindful of the fact that for many this season is not a season of joy.

Many are lonely and depressed as they miss the loved ones that should be around them at this time. Many are suffering ill health and cannot enjoy all the festivities. Many cannot even be here or any other place of worship at this time of celebration.

Father, we pray that you would be the God of all comfort and the Father of the fatherless at this time. We also pray that you would guide us to the people that need your comfort.

While the angels came to the shepherds and announced peace on earth, we acknowledge that there is little peace on earth. The area around which your Son walked is an area of great turmoil.

[1 : 11] And that is not the only conflict in this troubled world. We pray that you would guide the leaders of this world into decisions that promote peace and harmony rather than warfare and division.

May the peace that passes understanding reign in our hearts as we celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace. In his name we pray. Amen. It's interesting.

Often when we think about the birth of Christ, we think about the supernatural. The virgin birth, the angel choir, the magi coming, all those kind of things.

And we often forget that the actual birth was quite normal. I remember one of my professors used to say that the more correct term is virginal conception.

Because it was a conception of Mary as a virgin that was a miracle. Of course, that's humanly impossible.

[2 : 12] A virgin cannot conceive and bring forth a male child. But it happened. But the actual birth was common and ordinary.

You would think that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords would be born in a palace. Would be born to rich and influential parents.

But that wasn't the case. He was laid in a manger. A feeding trough of cattle. Nothing special at all. Shepherds and wise men came to see him, but others ignored him. And it's also interesting and fitting with the idea that Jesus came for the common man.

For ordinary people like you and me, that the first people to come and see Jesus were simple men of the field. Shepherds couldn't keep all the regulations that were laid out in the laws, moral law and all the regulations, because of their simple demands of their job.

[3 : 24] So they're despised by other people like the priests and Levites and others. They're also considered unreliable. It was said that they couldn't give testimony in a court because they had a reputation for dishonesty.

Now, these particular shepherds were not that way. They would be seen to be good, ordinary people. Let's read the passage, Luke 2, 8-20.

And there were shepherds leaving out in the fields, keeping watch over the flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were terrified. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid.

I bring you good news that would cause great joy for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Lord, this will be a sign to you.

You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in the manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace on whom his favor rests.

[4 : 32] When the angel left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger.

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what he had told to them about his child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. It's said that, because this was near Bethlehem, that this could have been the temple flock that they were looking after, but we don't know for sure.

But even if it was, the people, the shepherds in charge would have been despised by a good number of the people. They weren't that special.

They were the opposite end of the spectrum. And it's very interesting, that's who Jesus came for. One of the things they kept saying about Jesus is that he was eating with tax collectors and sinners, eating with the despised people of society.

[5 : 44] And he said, yes, it is the sick that need a physician. Can you imagine if you came to your doctor and your doctor said, I don't want to see you because you're sick? It wouldn't make any sense.

But Jesus came to bring salvation to those that need it, those who knew that they weren't righteous. Today I want to look at some of the characteristics of these common men, these ordinary people. when the shepherds came, when the angels came to the shepherds, they were terrified. It's interesting how often you find that in the Bible.

The first time people get a vision of God or an angel appears, what's the common reaction? They fall on their knees in fear.

They cry out like Isaiah, woe is me for I'm undone. And we call it in Revelation when John, the apostle, was the closest one to Jesus, called the disciple whom Jesus loves.

[6 : 46] Jesus appears to him after, on the island of Patmos. John falls as if he's dead. He's so frightened. That's what it's like to be a manifestation of God.

But the angel said, don't be afraid. I'm bringing you good news, which is for all people, for everyone. For everyone. That Jesus came for everyone.

The people normally would mean the people of the land, the people of Israel, and Jesus first came to the people of Israel. But he came for everyone. We say God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

All of us. These shepherds were watchful. As if they were keeping watch over the flocks at night. That's an interesting thing because normally you think of shepherds would be out in the fields during the day and they'd be in a sheep pen at night.

Also, you know, kind of interesting, the temperature would have been fairly warm for them to be out at night and not home in a nice warm bed.

[7 : 51] So those kind of two factors seem to indicate that we've got the date all wrong. that Jesus was probably born in the springtime during the lambing season because that's when the shepherds would be out at night watching their flocks.

But it didn't really matter. I still think it's a great thing to celebrate Christmas. You may have noticed the pictures in the back. I collect nativity scenes and I've got pictures behind them of a little over half of the ones I have.

Because I really think it's a great time to celebrate. And I love to celebrate this time of the year because otherwise December can be a pretty dreadful, boring time.

I remember when it says in the Lion and the Witch and the Wardrobe that Narnia was a terrible time because it was always winter and never Christmas. Think of what that would be like to be always winter and never Christmas.

Christmas makes winter so much more bearable, so much more wonderful. These shepherds were watchful. Do you think we can be that watchful? It's interesting the kind of job it would be.

[9 : 05] They'd be watching out and the job could be boring at times. You know, it's like being a security guard or a firefighter.

Sometimes you can go the whole day and nothing happens. But when something does happen, boy, you have to be ready. And it can be dangerous. The shepherds were the same way. If a lamb were to give birth, they'd have to be ready. Or if a lion or a bear came, like David talked about this very area where he killed the lion and the bear that were trying to go after his sheep. You have to be watchful. Careful. We need to be watchful. There are many admonitions in the Bible to be watchful and to be vigilant. And then the angel came and announced, the Messiah has come. It's interesting, the Messiah and the Lord. Two titles are given to Jesus. The Messiah literally means the anointed one. And kings and priests were anointed and so on.

[10:13] But they're talking about this is the one special anointed one. The Messiah, the long promised one. And the Lord is often used in the Bible to refer to God himself.

So these shepherds were given an incredible privilege, unprecedented event in human history to worship the birth of the king, the long promised Messiah, the king of kings and lord of lords.

But what a strange sign. The angel says, this is how you'll know that what I'm saying is true. You're going to find a baby in Bethlehem wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Now babies at that time were usually wrapped in cloths. So, but there's only one of them, only one baby that would be found in a manger, a feeding trough for cattle.

That's the one you would find. And then after that, a great company, a heavenly host appears and praises God and announces peace to those on whom God's favor rests.

[11:16] Interesting, the word for host is an army term. A huge group of soldiers. And here's this army of angels announcing peace on earth to those in whom God's favor rests, to those who know the glory of God.

The glory of God announces peace. And how do the shepherds respond? Very quickly. They were pious men. Everything to indicate they've been long waiting for the Messiah.

They would have been really surprised that they would have been the first to hear the good news.

You would have thought that the good news would come to the high priest or to the king.

But to shepherds? And in English it doesn't quite convey the urgency that they said, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing.

And it does say, so they hurried off and ran off. And the word found indicates that they searched.

Now, Bethlehem was a small town at the time, so it wouldn't have taken long, but they would have searched the whole town or at least searched enough until they found the manger and Jesus lying there.

[12:30] And then the message would have been confirmed. It's clear. The Messiah has come and you're the witnesses of it. And we're responsive. Now, all of us hear the message.

All of us have the Bible. But not all of us respond. Some people hear the good news of the gospel and they can't believe that God's salvation is offered free.

They say, oh no, I must earn it in some way. It's like often when you try to give a gift to somebody or rather they want to pay for it and that's quite common kind of reaction. People think that nothing is free.

Other times people think, well, like Augustine, they want to say, well, I want to turn, but not yet. I want to wait. I don't want to repent. I want to live my life first and then later on confess.

But that's not the way the shepherds did it. They responded immediately and quickly and went out and searched for the child and the message was confirmed.

[13:35] They were responsive and they were worshipful. The shepherds were not only the first to hear the good news that Jesus was born, first witnesses, they were also the first preachers.

Verse 17 says, when they'd seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child. He spoke to others about it. They couldn't keep it in. It was great news.

And they also praised God. It says, So they were amazed at what the shepherds had said to them.

Now, remember, these were not learned men.

They were shepherds at the bottom of society. But they could still tell others. Some people think, well, I'm not a Billy Graham. I'm not a great evangelist.

How can I tell others the people of good news? What they did is some stats and they checked things out. The vast majority of the people that came forward at Billy Graham Crusades were invited by someone else.

[14:33] They were brought there. We do. All of us have a role in leading people to Christ. They were excited. They praised God.

They returned as changed people. They went back to their jobs. But they returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they'd heard and seen which were just been told that.

That's what we need to be like. Like these simple, ordinary people. Ordinary, like us. But Jesus came for us. These shepherds were faithful.

They were responsive. And they were worshipful. And that's what we need to be. I'd like to close with a poem I wrote for this Christmas season called, Jesus came for you.

Jesus came to us as a stranger. He had no bed but a manger. Shepherds were the ones God would choose to be the first to hear the good news. Some wise men came from far away and wise men still seek him today.

[15 : 34] The chief priests never came to see him. King Herod wanted to kill him. Jesus came for humble shepherds. He reached out and touched the lepers. He ate with despised tax collectors and others whom we would ignore.

Jesus came for people like you. It's amongst poor people he grew. He had no place to lay his head when upon the earth he tread. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the greatest gift of all. The gift of your son Jesus Christ. And we are especially grateful that Jesus came for us. there is no way we deserved the gift of your son Jesus Christ.

Not at all. We are just simple ordinary folk. We are not special. But Father, we would pray that we would be like the simple ordinary folk the shepherds.

That we would be watchful. That we would be responsive when we hear your word. That we would listen and respond. That we would be worshipful. all on our knees before the great wonderful miracle.

[16 : 45] The birth of your son and our savior Jesus Christ. In whose name we pray. Amen.