

Christmas Eve 2025

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[0 : 00] Let me pray for us and we will find ourselves back in Luke chapter 2.! Father, we come to you on this night with all the anticipation,!

Tomorrow we look ahead to a day where you will return for your people. And in the meantime, prepare our hearts. Help us to look to you and long for you.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. The story begins in 1670. Set in, it's spelled Cologne, but I know it's pronounced Kuhn, Germany.

The choir master at the cathedral, the well-known cathedral there in Kuhn, was trying to find a way to keep children calm and quiet during church.

To do so, he commissioned a local candy maker to make sugar sticks for children. In order to justify giving out candy at church, he requested that they be made with a crook to signify the staff of a shepherd that would help the children remember the shepherds who visited baby Jesus in the Bethlehem manger.

[1 : 40] So begins the story of the modern candy cane. Incidentally, in researching this, one of the earliest patents filed in the United States for the candy cane, or a candy cane machine, was actually here in Chicago in the early 1920s.

The candy cane was an idea to help children remember the shepherds that visited the baby Jesus. This evening, I would like us to remember the shepherds as well, certainly.

But more than the mere fact that the shepherds visited the infant Jesus, my desire is to impress upon you a desire to imitate the shepherds.

See, the shepherds are an example for us as we approach Christmas Day. The birth of Jesus, according to Luke chapter 2, is recorded in a single sentence in verse 7.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. In such a way, the Son of God enters the world.

[2 : 59] One sentence. Unremarkable. But it wouldn't go unnoticed. The birth announcement was certainly unusual.

How would you imagine announcing the arrival of Jesus? In modern times, these days, birth announcements usually begin with immediate family.

Mom and dad need to know, so I'll shoot them a text. Baby James arrived safely. Just so you know. We want relatives and loved ones to be the first to know.

When my first child arrived safely, it was not a loose acquaintance or an unfamiliar stranger that I told. But it was those who were near and dear.

Loved ones and family. It's newsworthy only to those who are close to you and can celebrate with you. We see it even in the birth of John the Baptist.

[4 : 01] When John the Baptist was born, it was a celebration among family and neighbors and friends. This is the strangeness of the birth announcement of Jesus.

It went to complete strangers. Shepherds were keeping watch over their flock by night.

Though the birth announcement would go to strangers, it would come in the most extraordinary of ways. And I want to recount it a little bit, but I've got to focus in on the shepherds.

Beginning in verse 15. An angel would appear and surrounded or accompanied by the glory of the Lord. Fear would ensue. But the announcement would be...

Three titles would be given to this baby. The Savior. Christ. The Lord. He would be the one to deliver.

[5 : 05] He was the expected, anticipated one. He was the ruling one. And the announcement would be one that would be good news of great joy for all people.

A single angel delivered the message. But shortly thereafter, an entourage would appear in the heavens of sorts. A host of angels.

An army of angels. The humor is found in the heavenly army actually pronouncing peace.

Amen. The angels return and the shepherds respond in verse 15. And it's in verses 15 to 20 that I want to zoom in on tonight. The shepherds are instructed, instructive for us.

Firstly, the shepherds seek. In response, the shepherds resolve to enter town and to seek out the baby. The Bible is clear to let us know they do so in haste, with urgency.

[6:12] We are to sense this rapidity. They were in a hurry to move from the fields to the city. The curious mind in me would like to inquire, well, so how long did that actually take for you guys?

Bethlehem had burgeoned in the recent days because of the decree for the individuals in the region to come and register. It's the middle of the night. Do you go door to door?

Do you go stall to stall? How do you even find the one you're in search for? There's no newborn ward. There's no signage that says newborn's here.

Was it just a sense that you had? Did the angel guide you? The text doesn't answer that. Because for the rider, that's not the main point.

Instead, the rider wants to emphasize to us that the shepherds found the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger just as they had been told.

[7:16] What was said by the angel was seen by the shepherds. What was announced to the shepherds, their eyes could attest to.

There. There he was. What we said is what you see in that manger, in the city of David, in Bethlehem.

A savior. The Christ. The Lord. There, in that little manger he lay.

The miracle of Christmas is that God condescended and came near. And the invitation of Christmas is for you and I to seek him out. As the shepherds sought the infant, we too are exhorted to seek.

To seek the one whom the angel announced. The shepherds seek. Notice shortly after, the shepherds share.

[8:29] Verse 18. The shepherds not only sought out the baby Jesus, they told others. They were, in Luke's gospel, the first evangelists.

They are the first in the book of Luke to be those who share the message of Jesus to others. It's subtle, but we shouldn't miss it in verse 18. Verse 17 and verse 18.

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

The text seems to imply that even Mary was there, was counted among them. The shepherds received the good news of great joy. But they would also be those who share the good news of great joy.

You see, the news they received was not irrelevant news. Much of the news I consume these days is informational and distant. Has nothing to do with me.

[9:29] It has little effect on me. They are conversational pieces. They are outcomes of sporting events. They are international policies. Maybe local happenings or celebrations.

But what if you had news that had a direct effect on everyone? What if you carried a message that applied to all?

See, there is news that matters to little and few. And then there is news that matters. I think, well, I mean, in recent years, my mind drifted towards the economic stimulus packages in 2020 and 2021. I remember those days. Individuals would receive funds from the federal government for relief and help. And you would share the news.

Did you hear? Every individual gets X amount of dollars. Did you hear? Relief is coming. Did you hear? Help is being provided. And you would talk about it nonstop to whoever you could talk about with a mask over your mouth.

[10:42] But why would you talk about it? Because it was news that applied to everyone. See, it's worthwhile to be shared because it is good news.

And in the same way here for the shepherds, regardless of who. The Bible actually doesn't tell us how many people they shared this message with. But I could only imagine it went far beyond this text.

Because it was good news of great joy for all people. There is no recipient in all the world who hears such news of a baby born for them that should not hear the announcement of peace that

comes from this child.

Savior Christ, Savior Christ, the Lord. In the manger lays a Savior, Christ, Lord.

Good news of the gospel ought to always be shared. The shepherds seek. The shepherds share.

And lastly, they celebrate.

[11:57] I know it doesn't start with an S, but it alliterates, I think. The shepherds celebrate in verse 20. They return to their fields, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

Their encounter leaves them filled with jubilant praise, for they beheld with their very eyes him who is Christ the Lord. It must have struck them that they were recipients of a sacred and spectacular announcement.

Consider this. Unnamed shepherds were vessels of good news. They were not prominent. They were located towards the bottom of the scale of power.

They lacked social privilege. Certainly, they did not embody prestige. They were peasants. They were plain. And it would turn out they would be perfect recipients of good news.

It was not announced to the named Caesar Augustus, the emperor. It was not announced to Quirinius, the governor.

[13:18] It was not even announced to the high priest or the religious order of the day. It was told to unnamed shepherds. Dispelling any thought, any idea that you might have that Jesus is for the elevated and the elite.

No, it would be good news and great joy for all. For you. For me. For the world.

And this is the beauty of the birth announcement. It came to shepherds who were strangers.

They were summoned to visit a newborn son of a couple they knew not. Yet by faith, they went to see a child in whom they were unfamiliar.

And their lives changed. And this is good news. Why? Why? Why? Because some of us sit in this room tonight.

[14:22] And you've heard a story of a manger. Born a babe. Savior. Christ. The Lord. And he's but a stranger.

I don't know him. I've never met him. I've never seen him. But you've come in earshot of an announcement. And as the stranger shepherds wandered toward the child.

The Bible is inviting you. The Bible is inviting you also as a stranger. To come. And behold. The child. That you may come and see a stranger.

A savior king. But our prayer is that in time. He becomes a personal savior. The bringer of peace. And pardon.

That your heart will abound. That your heart will abound in celebration. Glorifying and praising the one who saves. Verse 21 concludes this little section.

[15:29] Tells us that as was the custom. The baby was circumcised on the eighth day. And it's in verse 21 that we receive the name of the child. Mary has already been told the name of the child.

In chapter 131. What the name was to be. And we find here that he received a name. A name not given by Mary.

A name not to honor Joseph. But it's a name given by angels. It's heaven's name. Jesus. It's the name above every name.

Jesus. It's Jesus. That name that encapsulates his very purpose. We call him Jesus. Because he will save his people from their sins. We call him Jesus.

The name that demons recognize and tremble. Jesus. The name of the baby. Wrapped in swaddling cloths. And laid in a manger at his birth.

[16:29] Jesus. The name of the man. Wrapped in linen cloths. Laid in a tomb at his death. Jesus. Who is Christ. The Lord.

Jesus. The source of all joy. To the world. And if. Little children. Or even grownups.

In case you forget the name. You can turn. Your candy cane upside down.

And there you have it. J is for. Jesus. Well let us pray. And let us.

Sing. To this Jesus. Father we thank you. For Jesus. A baby born in Bethlehem.

[17:31] But in that manger. Bound up in him. Is salvation. Is the promised one. Is the anticipated one.

The ruling one. Father as we look to him. We pray that our hearts. Would abound with joy. That it would overflow.

With joy. That your spirit. Will erupt in us. Joy. For unto us. A child is given unto us. A son is born.
That will save us. From our sins. Father we thank you. Set our hearts aright. As we anticipate
tomorrow.
We ask these things. For his namesake. To be with you.