

The Shepherd's Joy About Jesus

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Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning again, and welcome to Faith. We're so glad that you're here together with us today. And we are in the season that some call Advent as we're preparing for celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And I think most people are fairly comfortable with the Christmas story. Maybe so familiar sometimes that maybe it's become part myth, part legend in our minds. And as we're preparing for the end of the year, preparing for the Christmas season, may not really think too much about the reason for the season as we are hurrying about trying to get gifts and everything for the end of the year. While many people, I believe, neglect the reason for the season and don't realize that Christmas is more than gifts, more than decorations and lights and trees. It's about Jesus Christ. And the shepherds heard about the good news, about the gift that continues to go on and on. And because of this gift, we have a reason to have joy during this Christmas season, not only this time, but throughout the year. And I find it very interesting that God chose to use a group of shepherds to be the messengers of this great gift. But when you think about it, isn't that the way God does things so often? He chooses to use those who are sometimes neglected and sometimes those who don't have much stature in society. Really, we're not told very much about the shepherds. Luke didn't use any adjectives to describe them. Luke 2.8 just simply says, and there were shepherds out in the fields nearby. And that's how he talks about them. As we open our Bibles this morning to Luke chapter 2, that's where we will be primarily today. Luke chapter 2, verses 8 through verse 20. We're going to read that section. It's a rather long section. But as we're preparing in the next few weeks, coming closer to the day that we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, we're going to be looking at the preparation of that time. Luke chapter 2, verse number 8 says,

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men. So it was when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste, we're going to see that was unusual for a shepherd, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying God, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told them. Let us pray. Lord, use this time this morning. Use your word and the message that you give us from your word today to help us to learn from these shepherds and to learn from their actions and their example, how we can make a difference and how we can prepare for this time in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Throughout the history of Israel, shepherding was a fairly noble profession. Abel, the first shepherd, was to have had this job. And then those who followed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and then David was a shepherd. As a matter of fact, God himself, he calls himself a shepherd and he calls us sheep.

Now that, by the way, is not a very good thing, so to speak, because if you know anything about sheep, if you've read Keller's book on the Bible explanation of sheep and shepherding, sheep are

dirty, smelly, and not the brightest of animals. And in so many ways, it fits the way shepherds work their sheep and the way sheep respond to their shepherd. But by the time we get to the first century, shepherds had become the lowest class of people. Well, almost the lowest class. The only class lower than shepherds were lepers. And that's about where in society shepherds were. As a matter of fact, in the Talmud, which is a collection of interpretations and insights from the rabbis during that time, we read these words, That is how shepherds were relegated, or to which shepherds were relegated in society. And in order to understand the unusual concept of God's angels bringing this awesome message to a group of shepherds, here's a little bit we learn about shepherds. Well, the first thing, they were considered ceremonially unclean. And what that means is shepherds, because of the nature of their work, were not allowed to attend any religious services. Secondly, they were isolated and forgotten because their flocks needed to move around to find good grass and to find water. They never stayed in one place for very long.

[6 : 56] So they were usually out there in the fields, isolated, never got to know anyone for any length of time. They were also treated with contempt and mistrust. You know, the way many people think about gypsies, you know, they come in town and they steal or they scam people, and then they leave. That's the way shepherds were considered. As a matter of fact, shepherds were not allowed to testify in court because their testimony, they were considered unreliable. And so a shepherd couldn't testify in court because they figured, you know what, they lie anyway, and they steal, and they're just next to a leper.

And so shepherds were not even allowed to testify in Jewish court. They were known also to be brash and bold. Because they spent so much time in the field, separated from cultured society, they were known to have fairly foul mouths, and they would fight at the drop of a hat. So those are shepherds. And so these are the kind of guys that God chose to give the news of baby Jesus.

And you think, well, why choose this rather crude or rather uncouth group of guys? Well, God chooses to do things the way he wants to do it. And who are we to ask why? But that's a little bit about shepherds that we know. God entrusted this message to a bunch of smelly shepherds. And as a matter of fact, not so unusual because God chooses to reveal himself and to show his power to people who are very low in society, who don't seem to have very much to offer. And that's who God sometimes and very often chooses to work his miracle through. Everyone matters to God. And the only announcement, announcement of God's birth, goes out to a bunch of uneducated outcasts. And what a strange way to save the world. And as we briefly look at the response of these shepherds, I think what we see in verses 8 through verse 20 is something that I believe if we learn a little bit about how they responded, and if we apply those to our lives, I believe it would be very, very important. The first thing that we see as we read the account of these shepherds, the first thing that we see is they were attentive.

They were attentive. The first thing we see about the shepherds in Luke chapter 8 is they were attentive to their job. They were busy doing their job. Verse number 8 says, now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields keeping watch, keeping watch over their flock by night. They were so committed to their career that they never left work. You know, they took midnight shift. They took first shift. They took second shift. Shepherding was a 24-7 job. You know, you didn't clock in and clock out.

[10 : 07] But shepherds stay the entire time with their sheep. In this verse, we see that they were faithful. They were keeping watch. Notice that God comes to a group of guys who were attentive to their job.

They were doing their job to the best of their ability. They weren't slackers. They, he met them right where they were. And I believe likewise, I believe we are to be attentive to what God has called us to do. Whatever that is, if it's a parent, worker, wherever it is, whatever it is that we're doing and God has called us to do, I believe we are like the shepherds to be keeping watch and to be attentive to whatever it is that we're doing. Colossians 3 23 tells us, whatever you do, do it with all your heart, working for the Lord, or as unto the Lord and not for men.

First of all, they were attentive to their jobs. They were attentive to what they were doing. Secondly, they were awed.

It wasn't commonplace for them. They were awed by what they heard. They were awed by what they saw. They were attentive to their responsibilities that they were given. And they are suddenly awed by an angelic announcement in Luke chapter 2 verse number 9.

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. They were awed, and they were afraid by this sight.

[11 : 45] God's Shekinah glory shows around them and causes them to quake in their sandals. And they were afraid and awed, and they come face to face with the holiness of God and God's messengers.

And every time we see God, either through an angel or through a presence of Jesus or God revealing Himself to His people, people always fall apart because of their sinfulness.

We see that in Isaiah chapter 6. We see Peter respond the same way in Luke chapter 5 verse 8 when he said to Jesus, Get away from me, Lord. I am so sinful.

And that's the way we respond to the glory of God. Now, they could have also been terrified because they didn't know if this was an angel of judgment or not. But they were awed, and they were afraid.

I wonder, when was the last time you and I were just simply in awe of God? Awed at God's presence?

[12 : 52] Awed at the work of God in our life or the work of God in someone else's life? Do we really marvel at the Messiah? Messiah? And, or has it become, or has He become so commonplace to us that we take Him for granted?

Do we marvel at the Messiah? Has it been a while since you've hit your knees before Him? They were awed and they were greatly afraid.

What happens when angels appear to men? People tended to worship them. What happened by the same token when God appears to people and, or revealed Himself to them?

They awed and they worshipped. So they were attentive to their jobs. They were awed. But next we see that they accepted the message.

They heard the message. They were awed by the message and the messengers and they accepted the message. They were attentive, shepherds, filled with awe and fear and now they accept the message of the good news of great joy that we see in verses 10 through 15.

[14 : 05] Notice, Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be the sign to you. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes 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, good will toward men.

So it was when the angels had gone away from them into heaven that the shepherds said to one another, Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass which the Lord has made known to us.

So the angels calm them down, let them know that the angel is bringing them good news of great joy, acceptance, and forgiveness, and hope.

You know, we would have a lot to fear if Christmas never took place, if the birth of Jesus Christ never took place. we would have so much of which to be afraid. Afraid of death, afraid of everything because we would have absolutely no hope.

[15 : 29] Literally, the Greek word that is used here of good news is the word from which we get the English word evangel or evangelize.

And where we see great joy, that is the word mega in the Greek, and really is large, loud, mighty. It's a superlative. It is good news of great, super, awesome, spectacular joy that the angels give. As a matter of fact, Wycliffe translates it this way, I evangelize you, I evangelize to you a great joy, which is literally what the angels said.

So Wycliffe in Wycliffe's Bible, translated it this way, I evangelize to you a great joy. And we need to understand this, that a joyless faith in Jesus is a contradiction in terms.

[16 : 31] Let me say that again. A joyless faith in Jesus is a contradiction in terms. if we know Christ, if we know Christ in full forgiveness of our sin, and we are part of the family of God, there will be joy, because we have a lot to be joyful for.

And so we bring you good news of great joy. And while this message is for all people, what did the angels say?

the angels said, do not be afraid, for unto you is born this day.

And so what he's saying is, we have so much to be joyful for. And after getting a few more specifics, a whole regiment of angels come and fill the sky, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest on earth, peace, good, will toward men.

And we know they accepted the message, because in verse number 15, what we see is, what happens? They said, let us go now to Bethlehem.

[17:41] And so they heard the message, they accepted the message, and then they decided to go. We read, let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.

So, how do we receive the message? Do we receive it? with great joy. 1 Thessalonians 2.13, For this reason we also thank God without ceasing.

Notice how Paul writes this, Because when you receive the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God which also effectively works in you who believe.

God's word. So, how do we receive it with joy? Do we receive it as the word of God? It is not just great literature, it is the word of God.

So, the shepherds hear the message of God and they decide to go to Jerusalem which brings us to the next point. That is, not only were they attentive to their jobs, not only were they in awe, not only did they accept the message, they did something about it.

[19:02] They acted. They acted. These shepherds didn't just accept and enjoy the message and say, what a cool message. God chose us to receive the message.

And often believers will do that. Followers of Christ will do that. Say, this is a great message. This is such an awesome salvation that God has given us and just enjoy it among ourselves.

But they received it and they acted upon it. Look at verse, let's look at verse 16 together. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.

They heard the message. They received the message and they acted on the message. They heard off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger.

The idea was, hurry up, let's go and look for this baby that he's told us about. Now this is pretty amazing. Because shepherds rarely did anything in a hurry.

[20:03] Because think about it, sheep don't move very quickly. So they had a lot of patience. It might have taken them days to move across a field.

So they just kind of moseyed along with the sheep. And so for shepherds to do anything in a hurry was rather uncharacteristic. But pretty much they said, hey, let's hurry and go to Jerusalem.

So they scoot off to Bethlehem. So they scoot off to Bethlehem. And the Bible is clear that acceptance and action is important.

James 2.17 says faith by itself is pretty worthless, right? Because acceptance needs to lead to action.

Because faith without works, James says, is dead. It's worth nothing. So they could have doubted, or they could have delayed, but instead they decided to act, and they decided to move.

[21:09] So they went and saw. The first thing they did was bounce to Bethlehem. and they go and they wanted to see the baby with their own eyes. A baby born in a smelly stable.

Wouldn't have been a problem to these shepherds because they were accustomed to the aroma of sheep. And so it wouldn't have been a problem for them. But check out the irony. Unclean shepherds come to a smelly stable to see the Holy of Holies lying on a bed of hay.

that's who God chose to receive the message. And that's how God chose Jesus to come into this world. And then they left and they shared the message.

I think it's striking that they didn't pull up a bale of straw and just sit around and adore. God gave them a message and they went and they shared the message.

And notice their message as we go on. Their message didn't have anything to do with the beauty or the magnificence of Mary or Joseph or the scene.

[22:24] They simply went and shared about the Messiah. They went and shared about Emmanuel. Look at verse 17. Now when they had seen him they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child.

So the message was about Jesus. The message was the Messiah. The message was not about how cool it was to get a message from God. The message wasn't about how ironic it was for the Messiah to be born in a stable.

Those were all parts of the story but the main message of the story was Jesus. The Messiah had come. And so they acted. They acted.

Then we see that they did adore the Savior. You know what's interesting here is that the shepherds eventually went back after going out sharing the message they went back to their boring jobs. But they weren't the same on the inside. And it's the same for us. In a few weeks we'll celebrate the birth of Christ. we'll be full of awe full of adoration excuse me and we'll go back you'll go back to your jobs we'll go back to our routines but we don't have to be the same on the inside.

[23 : 50] And what I also find interesting is the shepherds didn't write a book they didn't go on a speaking tour they didn't start a new ministry called a shepherd story start a website start a ministry and with a click here to donate they did none of that.

They went back to their jobs. No matter what our jobs are no matter how boring or no matter whatever they are we can go back changed and go back to being attentive to whatever it is that God has called us to do but be different on the inside.

Look at verse 20 Then the shepherds returned. They went back to their job. They went back to their sheep went back to the field. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told them.

They didn't just wonder about what they saw they worshipped him who they saw. So they were worshipping the Savior. They went they spread the message they came back to their jobs and they worshipped.

A clear evidence I believe of trusting Christ as our Savior is adoration. We adore him whom we love and who has given us salvation.

[25 : 15] You know someone has observed and I've heard it put this way many of us worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship. I think for many that might be true.

Worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship. When a person is genuinely trusting Christ I believe he or she will be praising God. We'll be worshipping him with all of our being.

We need to allow ourselves this Christmas season to adore Emmanuel, glorify him as we spend time with our families, as we spend time doing whatever it is that we do and part of it's going to be the hustle and the bustle and dealing with the crowds as we are out and about.

But remember there is a reason for this season and we can return to the same place on December the 26th, turn to the job, return to wherever, but be different on the inside.

The shepherds were changed forever by this message and I think we as well can learn from them if we follow their example. Be attentive to what God has called you to do.

[26 : 29] If you take out your connection card you find there are some next steps for us. First thing is be attentive to what God has called you to do.

Whatever ministry God has called you to do, whatever job God has called you to do, whatever task God has called you to do, be attentive to that. And continue to be awed by God's message for you. Do you realize God continually gives us messages each and every day through His Word, through others, and continue to be awed by His message. Sometimes God will give you a message through someone else.

Sometimes I haven't always been, I've been a little bit dubious about what people will say, maybe a stranger. I've been in conferences before where I've been in an elevator with someone and someone says, just kind of out of the blue, says, I believe God has given me a word for you. And they'll say something. Okay, take that with a grain of salt. But who's to say that God, that people who really are listening to God's Spirit couldn't prompt them to give a word of encouragement or whatever to us.

[27 : 47] So God can sometimes give a message. Through other believers. Maybe someone notices that you're a little bit down or a little bit discouraged. And the message might be, trust God.

God has something good for you. It could be, or the next step, act on what you know to be true. Act on what you know is right and what God has called you to do.

And then adore God. Adore Him. 24-7. Christmas is history, but it can become your story as well.

And as we go out and about, we can share with others and ask them the question, is He your Savior? Is He Savior to you? Is He Christ to you?

And is He Lord to you as well? Let us pray. Father, during this time, let us spend our time adoring you, receiving and accepting the message, and acting upon it.

[28 : 54] We thank you, Father, for what you're going to do this Christmas season. We thank you for those that you've placed around us. Help us to be making a difference in others' lives around us. And may we glorify you in all we do. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.