

Christmas Day

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn with me back into the Bible on page 857, that lesson that was read by Chloe. Thanks so much, Chloe, doing that for your sister who wasn't able to be here this morning, I think.

Is that right? Yeah. So page 857 is our text for this Christmas morning. In 1926, Agatha Christie wrote a book where the author used the literary device known as the unreliable narrator. Christie, the mystery writer, narrated her story through the perspective of someone thought reliable but actually unreliable. She wasn't the first to use it, but she certainly popularized it from there on out.

I can't help but wonder, what if an author reversed that literary device? That means that the author uses a narrator who people think is really unreliable but actually reliable.

So let me introduce you to the writer Luke, who's actually a very reliable narrator, but he used a people group others believed unreliable but actually reliable in one instance.

[1 : 12] Luke, a physician committed to details. He didn't apply to or incorporate the devils in the detail. No, God is actually in the details. He uses none other than the shepherds to tell the birth story of Jesus Christ.

You see, the shepherds in the Roman world were like children and women and slaves and foreigners regarding their word not reliable in narration. They were unable to give witness in a court of law.

In other words, these shepherds were not believable. They were invisible. They were unworthy and stigmatized. Who knows, maybe even the shepherds were not believed by their families.

Yet one night the Lord spoke to them through a company of angels about the Savior's birth. And they were convinced of it. I wonder what the spouses, the children, maybe even their parents said to them when they arrived home that night and gave an answer to, well, what was work like today, Dad?

Could the shepherds even answer? And if so, were they even believed? Well, apparently God believed in these shepherds, even if others counted them as unreliable.

[2 : 23] And so this Christmas morning, I want to look at this Christmas story and how God intervenes by a glorious announcement. He induces real belief and he inspires a response to this child that was born.

So first, intervenes with a glorious announcement is what God does. Our Christmas reading today begins with, when the angels went away from them into heaven. Now, before verse 15, a heavenly host appeared to the shepherds while they were minding their own business, in addition to their flocks.

They were earthly-minded people, but they were also heavenly-focused with all the stars above them. They weren't imagining what happened when suddenly angels came upon them.

And the angels made a birth announcement like none of us can imagine. And the effect was fear. But the cause was the glory of God, in verse 14.

And the glory of God came upon them. And they saw and heard the glory of the Lord, all to announce the birth of this newborn Savior.

[3 : 33] Now, why would God make a birth announcement like this? And I've got 12 answers to that question. He didn't gasp. I'm only going to give you one, just so you know.

Might be relieved of that. Though Dan, he's, over the next kind of weeks, one at a time, is going to share all 11 with you. And you can just text him at 3 o'clock in the morning at 0-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9.

No. So all seriously. This is just one explanation, though I know there are many. God loves the element of surprise. The big surprise. The big surprise in this incident is that God made known his

glory to these shepherds.

No one really believes shepherds, but God gets his goodness and his truth and his beauty in through these unlikely vessels. So God surprises and he shocks the world with the unbelievable, discriminated, or stigmatized shepherds who become instruments of his grace to grip the world with this salvation story.

It's this shock, this surprise, this glory. And the world was under a tyranny of Roman rulers like we've never really seen, though I know we think that we're under some terrible tyranny right now.

[4 : 47] But God intervenes and takes the initiative to make his glorious birth announcement to these shepherds. This birth announcement is God's shocking intervention.

It's like spiritual defibrillators. And he includes it to this humble and the poor like shepherds in this glorious story that we read today. Well, God doesn't stop with an intervention by a glorious announcement.

His intervention is actually for belief. And so he not only reveals himself in this glory of God, but he reveals himself to the shepherds so that they might believe in God.

So we move from intervention then to induction. I know you hear induction, you're thinking about induction of labor, induction of birth. It's not about that. It's about induction of belief.

So let me ask you, what induces belief in your life? We live in a cynical age, which isn't new in this past year or past decade or even past generations.

[5 : 50] I remember reading about cynicism and suspicion when I was in university. And there's something that inclines us to doubt. And that's not all that bad at times, because even easy believism is no better than cynicism.

However, while the shepherds were not held in positive high regard in their day, they were no fools either. They weren't inclined just to believe anything that came their way.

They didn't have to take anyone's word because no one actually took their word either. They didn't make a difference to people. They were alone in the world and alone that night of the birth of Jesus. So the angels make this glorious announcement. And the shepherds experienced something personally that impacted them. And so moved were they that they took action saying to one another, let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

What made them think they could do this? In a word, belief. Belief. That's what belief does. It moves people to action.

[7 : 02] After they observe, notice, believe what they've seen, the shepherds, in this case, they are induced from this announcement now to adoration. And off the shepherds go to see this person made known to them.

They didn't say, well, I'll believe it when I see him. But because I believe, we believe, let's go see him. They took God at his word and they believed.

We're told the message from the angels moved them with haste in verse 16. Without delay, they decided to take action based upon what the Lord had made known to them. Verse 15.

And the Lord's message to the shepherds is what induced their belief followed by behavior. I wonder if you've ever had that experience. God speaks to you maybe by a spirit, not like angels, but the Holy Spirit.

And either through the reading of the Bible or a still small voice or maybe even a sign. And if you're like me, and I hope you're not like me, you don't say, well, later or tomorrow. No, the shepherds said tonight.

[8 : 12] Let's go now. And so they did. So this announcement is not only an intervention, but it induces real belief for real life, as it did in the shepherds, and so for us too.

But it also inspires a response to this child who is the Lord. So this isn't all that the shepherds said. They then travel to a little town.

They turn up at the local birthing center, which is a barn with a trough. And after knocking on one door after another, just as they were told, they found this normal, although not normal, child with his parents uniquely placed in a feeding trough.

That's how they knew they found the right place. And while it was kind of like a scavenger hunt, let's not call it that, let's call it a savior hunt. Later, the savior would say, seek and you will find.

And so the shepherds did just that. But they didn't go just to behold, gaze, consume, or confirm their belief.

[9 : 21] No, belief isn't just looking like driving by some nice Christmas light display. Belief demands something from us, which the shepherds demonstrate.

The shepherds' belief turns to this bold proclamation or let's call it a confession like we just did in the creed. The shepherds were so gripped by the grace of God that they just couldn't hold back. And so verse 17 reads, they made known the saying that had been told to them concerning this child. They made known. And just as it was made known to them in verse 15, now they make it known.

They confess it. They tell it to others. Kind of like go tell it on the mountain. You know that hymn that follows like this.

Go tell it on the mountain over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain. Then Jesus Christ is born. And the following stanzas are about the shepherd. What were the shepherds told that they then in turn told boldly to others as their response to this belief induced in them, inspired?

[10 : 29] Verse 11, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior. Who is Christ the Lord? That's the same Lord that actually revealed this birth announcement to them.

It's just perplexing. That's what the shepherds made known because it was made known to them. That's what happens when God fills people with his spirit. They tell it out.

God has such confidence in this message of salvation that he convinces and inspires us to confess this Christ child born in Bethlehem on that day.

That he is Christ the Lord. God has such confidence in his message in means of salvation. He used shepherds to deliver the message Christ the Lord is born.

You know, it's kind of like God uses the cleanup crew after the World Cup football championship games to endorse his message. He doesn't use the MVP.

[11 : 28] He doesn't use Messi. He used those who clean up the mess actually afterwards. That's how much confidence he has in this message. He'll use anyone who will boldly confess and proclaim it.

That's how much he believes in this message of salvation, of sin, separation from him. And in the face of doubt and cynicism, the shepherds gossip then the good news of saving grace through the child who is Christ the Lord.

So where does this leave us this Christmas morning? There are five responses. Again, I'm only going to talk about one of them, but the mother ponders and treasures these things in her heart.

The shepherds praise and glorify the birth of the newborn king. However, there's one other response if you see it there and you look down. But some wondered when they heard the shepherds' narrative.

These unreliable narrators who are now reliable. Some just wonder. They don't doubt. They don't dismiss. But wondered.

[12 : 36] They were puzzled. They were perplexed. They were curious. These unreliable messengers caught their attention. And maybe you're wondering as you wandered in here this morning.

So here's another Christmas carol for you that may be coming to your mind. That I wonder as I wandered. Let me leave you with just then the first stanza of that carol.

I wonder as I wandered out under the sky. How Jesus the Savior did come for it to die. Poor, ordinary people like you and like I.

I wonder as I wandered out under the sky. I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

Amen.