

Jesus - The Good Shepherd

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock!

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great 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 unto 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.

[1 : 2 8] Amen. Let's continue our worship through song and a hymn, While shepherds watch their flocks by night.

The Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. With that, a whole host of angels appear in the sky, praising God.

Afterwards, the shepherds rush off to Bethlehem and find everything, just as the angel had told them. And of course, we could make a quick mention about the wise men and the villain of the peace, Herod.

But shepherds and sheep figure prominently in the Bible, not least as we heard in the story of the Nativity. Right at the beginning of the Bible, we read that our first parents, Adam and Eve, had two sons.

Cain, who grew crops, and Abel, who kept sheep. Sadly, when in time the brothers brought an offering to God, we are told that Abel sacrificed animals from his flock, and Cain brought from the produce of the ground.

[2 : 3 9] But God favoured Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's. So, not long after, Cain, in anger, killed his brother. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all kept flocks of sheep too, living a nomadic lifestyle as they travelled around with him, seeking pasture.

When a severe famine arose in Joseph's day, he and his sons, with their flocks and shepherds, went to live in the land of Egypt at the invitation of their brother Joseph, who out of envy they had sold as a slave, but under God's providence had risen to great prominence in Egypt.

But because, according to Genesis chapter 46 and verse 34, shepherds were for some reason detestable to the Egyptians, Pharaoh gave them the land of Goshen to live in.

Many years later, when the children of Israel had grown greatly in number, a Pharaoh arose who enslaved them and subjected them to harsh labour.

It was during that time that Moses fled Egypt, when Pharaoh found out that he had murdered an Egyptian, who he saw beating a fellow Israelite. He went to live in the land of Midian, where for the next 40 years, 40 years, he worked as a shepherd, was tending the flock of sheep that belonged to his father-in-law Jethro.

[4 : 11] Until the time that that Pharaoh died, and God appeared to him in the burning bush and sent him back to Egypt to deliver his people from bondage. The new Pharaoh refused to let the people go, even though God sent a series of plagues upon the Egyptians.

However, after the tenth and last and most devastating plague of all, the death of the firstborn males in Egypt, Pharaoh finally relented.

So taking all their goods and sheep and cattle, the people left and journeyed towards Canaan, the land that God had promised Abraham that he would give to his descendants.

On the way they stopped at Mount Sinai, it was there that they received the law of God, the Ten Commandments, written in stone, and a whole series of laws governing and regulating conduct, dietary obligations, and religious practices.

A priesthood was instituted, whose main duty was to offer up animal sacrifices to God, on behalf of the people. A lamb used in sacrifice had to be without spot and blemish, and its blood shed to make atonement for sin.

[5 : 28] The innocent, therefore, suffering for the guilty. Annual feasts were instituted, one of the most important ones being Passover, when each family would sacrifice a lamb that would then be roasted and eaten with unleavened bread, and bitter herbs, to commemorate the exodus from Egypt.

When Moses, at God's command, told the people to sacrifice a lamb and spread its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses, so that when God executed his final judgment on Egypt, the destroying angel would pass over them and not harm them.

These acts, though important, of course, prefigured a greater sacrifice that was to come. After a long period of wandering in the wilderness, brought about by their disobedience to God, eventually, under Joshua, the people passed over the Jordan and entered the land of Canaan.

And for about the next 400 years or so, a series of judges governed the nation. As long as they followed the Lord, they had peace. But when they turned to idols, he allowed their enemies to oppress them.

But when they repented, he raised up a deliverer for them. One such deliverer was a man named Gideon, who delivered Israel from the Midianites. When an angel told him to fight the Midianites, he asked God for a sign.

[7 : 01] He said, If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have promised, look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.

When he got up the next morning, the fleece was soaking wet and the ground dry. The following day, he asked God to do it the opposite way round, and he did.

It can be legitimate sometimes for a Christian to put out a fleece to the Lord. That is, to ask for a specific sign to confirm, perhaps, for instance, a course of action we feel that God is asking us to take.

Samuel, who was also a prophet, became the last of the judges because by then the people wanted a king. Although God was their king, they wanted a human king like the nations round about.

God told Samuel, they have not rejected you, they have rejected me. Nevertheless, he gave them a king and chose Saul who reigned for 40 years.

[8 : 15] At first he did well, but when he disobeyed God's specific instructions to him through Samuel, on more than one occasion, God eventually rejected him as king.

And he sent Samuel to the home of Jesse to anoint one of his sons as kings to succeed Saul. Jesse had eight sons, all of them imposing young men, but God told Samuel to anoint David, the youngest of them, telling Samuel, man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

David himself was a shepherd. Shepherds may have been detestable to Egyptians, but in Israel, the term shepherd became a metaphor, a symbol for a ruler.

After the death of Saul, all the tribes of Israel came to David to anoint him as king. They told him, the Lord said to you, you will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.

Asaph, the author of Psalm 78, says that the Lord chose David, his servant, and took him from the sheep pens, from tending the sheep, he brought him to be shepherd of his people, Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance.

[9 : 36] And David shepherded them with integrity of heart. God deliberately called Israel's rulers shepherds because he wants all rulers to exhibit the same characteristics as that of a shepherd because the care of a shepherd for his sheep most closely resembles God's own care for his people.

Having been a shepherd himself, David understood that. And having experienced God's care for himself throughout his life, he composed arguably the greatest of all the Psalms, Psalm 23, and we know there's 150, which is so simple and yet so sublime that many Christians know it of by heart.

You could probably repeat it to me now. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leaves me beside still waters.

He restores my soul. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and staff comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[11 : 01] See, I had to prove that. I could do it too. A shepherd will care for his sheep, lead and guide them to good pastures and protect them from their enemies.

Tend to the sick and injured, discipline the unruly and seek out the lost. Our own shepherds work long hours in all weathers. It's hard work.

In winter, they will trudge through deep snow to feed the sheep and in spring they are busy with the lambing whilst protecting them from stray dogs and other predators like crows, for instance, who will often attack a newborn lamb.

They are always watching over them. If only our own leaders had a shepherd's heart for their people. But instead of leading the country to pastures green, it feels like we are being neglected by a Prime Minister who, it would seem, prefers to be fated on the world stage rather than taking care of business here at home.

Never hear care is one of his names. That's why they call him Never Hear Care. And we have a Chancellor who seems intent on fleecing the taxpayer as much as possible.

[12 : 15] Pun intended. And the rest of the Cabinet is not much better, sad to say. And likewise, not all of Israel's kings and rulers shepherded God's people with integrity of heart like David did.

After the kingdom split in the time of Solomon's son Rehoboam, every king thereafter of the northern kingdom, we are told, did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

The southern kingdom fared a little better with some good kings like Uzziah, Hezekiah, and Joash. But the kings who came after them, Jehoiakim, Jehoiakim, and finally Zedekiah, did evil in the sight of the Lord.

In fact, the book of Chronicles says that all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful. Until in 2 Chronicles chapter 36 verses 15 to 17, we read, the Lord, the Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.

Yet they did not listen, but they mocked God's messengers, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

[13 : 43] Asked who was responsible for the French Revolution, a famous historian replied, everyone who failed in his public office. God had commanded Ezekiel, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

Prophesy and say to them, this is what the sovereign Lord says, Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves should not shepherds take care of the flock.

Jeremiah had prophesied, Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture. In fact, Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 25 verse 3 that he continually warned the rulers and people of Israel of the consequences of their wickedness over a period of 23 years.

That's a long time to preach when no one is listening. I'm sure our own pastor wouldn't stay 23 months if we as a church were like that. In the end, God gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who broke down the walls of Jerusalem and taking others captive to Babylon.

And there they stayed for 70 years the time God had persigned King Cyrus, they were allowed to return. God had said through Jeremiah, sheep, their shepherds have led them astray.

[15 : 14] Nevertheless, he revealed to me, raise up a faithful ruler for the people from the line of David. There was an expectation that they would reign not only over Israel but over the whole world and usher in a universal age.

But some of those prophecies seem to describe the coming Messiah as a suffering servant while others as a conquering king. In fact, some thought there would be two messiahs but we know that they were one and the same person.

Jesus was that person. The angel Gabriel had told Mary, you will conceive and give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the most high.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end. The angel that appeared to the shepherd said, unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour who is Messiah the Lord.

When the wise men came to Herod asking where is the one born king of the Jews Herod inquired of the scribes and Pharisees who informed him of the prophecy in the book of Isaiah Amica I should say that said but you Bethlehem Ephrathah though you are small amongst the clans of Judah out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel whose origins are from of old from ancient times.

[16 : 46] The Hebrew literally means from days of eternity. For John in his gospel calls him the Logos the word who was in the beginning with God and through whom everything was made yet who took on flesh and came and dwelt among us.

But when Jesus began his public ministry he came not as a king but as a servant. He told his disciples the kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors but you are not to be like that.

Instead the greatest among you should be like the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves for who is greater the one who is at the table or the one who serves.

Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am amongst you as one who serves. Yet he made claims for himself that would have been blasphemous if they were not true.

In the synagogue in Nazareth Luke tells us that he stood up to read and when the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him he found a place where it is written the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

[18 : 04] He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and sitting down he said today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

These were not empty words because he did heal the sick cleanse lepers give sight to the blind and he even raised the dead. He showed his humanity when he was tired or hungry and when he wept at the tomb of Lazarus but he revealed his divine nature when he said I am the resurrection and the life and then raised Lazarus from the dead.

Even when Jesus walked in the water he revealed his deity not because it was a miracle but because only God could do that for in chapter 9 and verse 8 of the book of Job we read God alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea God alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea and when he said to the paralytic whom he healed son your sins are forgiven you the Pharisees complained who can forgive sins but God alone they were right of course but they didn't make the connection on another occasion he told them you study the scriptures diligently because you think in them that you have eternal life these are the very scriptures that testify about me and he clearly identified himself as the very Lord whom David said in Psalm 23 was his shepherd when he told him in John 10 11

I am the good shepherd I am the good shepherd adding the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep and saying in verse 18 no one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again this command I received from my father Jesus didn't die because Judas betrayed him and led a mob with swords and clubs to apprehend him in the garden of Gethsemane taking him to the Jewish leaders who condemned him and brought him to Pilate the next morning and persuaded him against his better judgment to have him crucified he died because he chose to lay down his life for us the author of Hebrews calls Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep Peter calls him the shepherd and overseers of your souls and the chief shepherd but here is something really amazing at Calvary the shepherd became the lamb

John the Baptist in a statement that was as astonishing as it was profound had called Jesus the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world for in the new testament we discover that the lambs sacrificed under the old covenant were only the shadow Jesus himself was the substance the author of Hebrews writes day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties again and again he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins but when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstools for by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy Jesus is uniquely our shepherd and our lamb in chapter 6 of revelation John the apostle saw in a vision a great multitude that no one could count from every nation tribe people and language standing he says before the throne and before the lamb wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands these are they we are told who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb therefore says John they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence never again will they hunger never again will they thirst the sun will not beat down on them nor any scorching heat for the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd he will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes amen our final hymn is the modern version of the Lord's my shepherd as