

Advent Series: *What Child is This?*

SHEPHERDS

Luke 2: 1-7 8-20 (NKJ)

¹And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. NKJ

Luke is the only Gentile in an all Jewish cast of New Testament writers

Also the only gospel to include details of the world arena

Luke carefully sets the time frame of Jesus' birth by naming the current world leaders

- Caesar Augustus is emperor of Rome (*Pax Romano* – peace of Rome)
- Quirinius is governor of Syria
- The tax census that uprooted people all throughout the Empire ...

Which explains why Joseph had to pack up his very pregnant wife Mary and head to Bethlehem where Jesus would be born

Fulfilling the prophecy of the Micah, **Micah 5:12**

700 years before Jesus birth, the Holy Spirit whispers into Micah's ear telling him exactly where the Messiah would be born.

²“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting.” NKJ

Not just Bethlehem but Bethlehem, Ephrathah because there were two Bethlehems

God is not bound by the dimension of time – He exists outside the constraints of the physical universe but reaches through time and space for our sake

Luke had done his homework but his writing was inspired of the Holy Spirit, as he tells us of that Bethlehem night and morning.

Luke 2: 8-20 MSG

⁸⁻¹² There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

¹³⁻¹⁴ At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

¹⁵⁻¹⁸ As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

¹⁹⁻²⁰ Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Just an ordinary Bethlehem evening - late September –early October

A group of shepherds were doing what sheep herders always do - stay out with the sheep to watching over them, protecting them

They were going through the motions of their normal routine, setting up rotating shifts for guard duty while others slept

That night started out like any other night - they had no idea of what they were in for

SUDDENLY, an angel stood among them and God's glory blazing around them

Suddenly, unexpectedly, instantly, the dimensional doorway to the invisible, spiritual world opens and an angel is standing in the middle of their camp

We read this with a kind of detachment – it’s a nice story for us ... but not for the shepherds - these guys are smoked

If experienced the presence of God, in a way that is overwhelming you might say its:

- awesome,
- liberating,
- uplifting ...
- but no one I know experienced what the shepherds did

In our mid twenties, Jen and I were having an amazing time of prayer in our house

God’s presence filled every corner of that room ... but I wanted more. I prayed aloud;

“I want to see you – please let me see you!” then I realized what I was asking for and refracted the request

A young Isaiah *suddenly* found himself surrounded by angels in the heavenly throne room of God, He was sure he going to die.

Isaiah 6: 1, 2, 5

It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. ² Attending him were mighty seraphim ... ⁵ Then I said, “It’s all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. MSG

The shepherds stood face to face with the angel of God – they thought the same thing Isaiah did, we’re dead men.

But they quickly discovered he wasn’t there to harm them

⁸⁻¹² The angel said, “**Don’t be afraid.**

His word can be a warning or a correction but it’s never t ment to harm us, only to help us

This is the Holy Spirit’s word to you this morning is – Don’t be afraid, I’m not here to harm you but to help you

8-12 ... I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

Good tidings of Great Joy ! ... as is says in King James version

The Angel tells them - this is the day you've been waiting for ...earlier tonight the Messiah/ Savior was born

What you've been waiting for happened ... A WORD FOR SOMEONE HERE TODAY

The un-named angel doesn't tell them:

- go and see – he doesn't have to, the implication is clear
- He doesn't tell them to follow the star
- or look for a child that radiates a heavenly glow

You'll find him outdoors a baby wrapped tightly in strips of cloth to protect against the cold

You'll find him in a crude shelter, a manger

Think of it – because of the census and overcrowded towns and cities, Bethlehem has no place open for the weary Joseph and Mary – this was no surprise to God – no mistake

The people God chose to bear and raise His only son, are at least for short time, were homeless

No room in the Inn

But this was no mistake - we make miscalculations, mistakes ... In my case it's a daily occurrence!

But not God! Not ever!

So the next time you wonder why things are not going better even though you're doing your best to serve God ... think of Joseph and Mary

God's ways are not our way – His thoughts not our thoughts

The dimensional door swings wide open and the night sky is filled with thousands of Angels – rejoicing – praising God for the news that was just shared

13-14 At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

The angel wasn't sent to government dignitaries or religious stuffed shirts, just shepherds.

Eugene Peterson writes: "shepherds work, in that ancient society was equivalent to bagging groceries in ours."

⇒ But that didn't matter to God – as always He's more concerned about the content of a person's heart

Today Jen is downstairs teaching a Sunday school lesson that also involves shepherds and sheep

I wanted to share a little of her investigative research as about shepherds.

Sheep are often thought of as dumb – senseless animals but consider this

Sheep:

1. There are 8 varieties of sheep
2. Even though they are flock animals they are also highly independent
3. Jealous of one another for human attention
4. They love to be cuddled and come when called by name
5. They remember faces for months
6. Can take a long time to recover if abused
7. Grieve for lost loved ones
8. Know when you're up to something

Shepherds:

1. They tend to the needs of the sheep
2. Usually have the aid of an animal like a sheep dog
3. Defend the sheep from attack of predators and thieves (David killing lion & bear)
4. Experts at tracking
5. They move the sheep for better pasture and feeding

Let's finish Luke's account:

15-18 As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

19-20 Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Check out the last part of the shepherd's part in this amazing story?

They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherders were impressed. ... The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

When the shepherds found the baby just at the angel had said, and then got even more excited. The realization hit them - they were a part of the story -part of God's amazing work.

Has the realization hit you yet? God has included you in His ongoing plan.

The shepherds couldn't keep that joy and peace to themselves they told everyone who would listen.

The Angel told the shepherds and the shepherds told everyone else that would listen

The word for angel in Greek is *Angelos*, which means messenger or minister

☆ The shepherds became the messengers of good news –

That's what God wants from us!!! – to be His messengers, his ministers, councilors, comforters

Ann Voskamp writes:

Your time is limited – so don't limit your life by wanting someone else's. Sometimes I stand in the living room after they're all in bed and listen to that clock tick slowly. Sometimes the ticking ... is like Morse code, tapping it out again and again:

You have only one decision every day: how will you use your time? ...

The hands of the clock are bound by the decisions of our hands and He (God) has made our hands free to be His.

How will you spend your time this Christmas season?

Will you make time to fit God into your schedule? Or allow His Spirit direct you into a whole new perspective of what Christmas really means

You can be God's messengers - It's not that hard

It can happen in the simplest ways

- a friendly wave, a kind word,
- a smile,
- a caring attitude,
- even a heartfelt Merry Christmas-
- God will lead you if you let Him

Let's pray