

The first evangelists - The Shepherds

There are many characters in the Bible we get to learn in-depth, because there is a lot of references about them in the Book. But there are also many characters we don't know about at all. Even more so, sometimes we don't even know their names. They simply show up for their parts and get off the stage after their parts are done and never to hear from them again.

We have a group of people, known as "the Shepherds" in the event of the birth of Jesus Christ from the Book of Luke. They became the first group of evangelists who brought the Good News of Jesus Christ to others.

Other than the prophets, no one ever had heard the voice of God until now. In addition to that, God chose to be silent for last 400 years until this night. When they heard a cry of the new born Babe in the manger, they just heard the voice of God that announced His arrival to die for our sins.

A. THE SHEPHERDS IN THE FIELD

Luke 2:8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

These sheep outside of Bethlehem were most likely the sheep owned by the priests and used for sacrifices in the temple ministry. But the shepherds who kept watch over them would not have been able to enter into the temple to receive cleansing, they would have been considered unclean.

B. AN ANGELIC ANNOUNCEMENT

Luke 2:9-12 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 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. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

The first announcement of the Messiah's birth was given by an angel to some anonymous shepherds. Why shepherds? Why not to priests or scribes? By visiting the shepherds, the angel revealed the grace of God toward mankind.

Shepherds were really outcasts in Israel. In that day, shepherds were considered to be at the lowest rung of the social ladder. As a class shepherds had a bad reputation. More regrettable was their habit of stealing as they moved about the country. They were considered unreliable and were not allowed to give testimony in the law courts. God does not call the rich and mighty. Rather He calls the poor and the lowly.

As many of you know, I was a former graphic designer and worked in advertising industry for almost twenty some years before I became a pastor. From my education and job background, this is not the way to make the announcement of the God's arrival on earth.

If I were in charge of making that announcement, I would have press conferences periodically to give them teases and updates. Then I would have carefully choreo-

graphed street interviews with a group of supporters of the Messiah's arrival a few days before the D-day. There would be numerous magazine, newspaper and television ads. On the day of His arrival, I would have all the major television networks to be there with political, social and movie celebrities. That is how normally we would spread the words out.

But God's way is much different. God used the simple willing vessels, not the good looking ones. To our God, the obedient availability is more important than the outward appearance.

Swaddling clothes were strips of cloth similar to those used in the embalming process. In other words, swaddling clothes were essentially grave clothes. This was fitting because Jesus came to die. Although death interrupted the ministry and teaching of Socrates, Plato, Buddha, and every philosopher and thinker throughout history, it did not interrupt the ministry of Jesus Christ. Rather, death fulfilled Jesus' ministry because Jesus alone came to die.

C. GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

Luke 2:13-14 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

The angels announced the birth of a Savior, which is exactly what mankind needs. We don't need another advisor, reformer or committee, but the Savior.

What was the Good Tidings? Not that God had sent a soldier or a judge or a reformer, but that He had sent a Savior to meet man's greatest need. It was a message of peace to a world that had known much war. The famous "Pax Romana" – Roman Peace – had been in effect since 27 B.C., but the absence of war doesn't guarantee the presence of peace.

While the Roman emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he was unable to give peace from passion, grief and envy. He could not give peace of heart for which man yearns more than even for outward peace. This is still the same. Many people seek peace everywhere else except from God. Until they come to Him with a complete surrender, they can not have peace. Because our hearts are desperately wicked

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

Just a side note, the majority of people think that these hosts of angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" in the similar format of a hallelujah chorus. It is not so. There is no place it says that they sang. They simply praise God of the heaven and earth.

D. SO YOU HEARD IT, NOW WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO ABOUT IT?

Luke 2:15 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."

Just as all of sudden the angelic hosts appeared before the shepherds, they disappeared and left these startled shepherds and sheep alone in the field. When their pounding heart came back to the normal heart beat rates, they conferred with one

another to seek the truth. They hurriedly went to Bethlehem to see the Baby Jesus. I guess you can call it "The first Christmas Rush."

When you come to this church and you hear the truth that comes straight from the Word of God the Bible. I may not be an eloquent speaker, I speak the truth without any compromise or mincing of the Word. Once we hear the truth, we have a choice to make. We can choose to obey God and follow the Word or ignore Him and go back to the evil world where we came from. To our surprise, many choose not to obey God.

But these lowly shepherds heard the truth and chose to seek the truth. You might say, "If I saw the angelic hosts like they did, I would seek too." You have something far better than the angelic hosts' voices. You have the voice of God on your laps to listen and obey.

E. SO YOU HEARD THE TRUTH, NOW WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO ABOUT IT?

Luke 2:16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

Some people will go to great lengths to wrap a gift. They will make really beautifully decorated packages. But to a man, wrapping paper is merely an obstacle to keep us from what we really want. We don't care about wrapping paper. We just want to know what's inside the package.

God's gift did not come to us in beautifully decorated wrapping. It came in plain, simple wrapping. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in a very humble situation. Think how difficult the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was for Mary and Joseph. And when they arrived, they had to stay in a little cave that turned into a stable. I think the stable smelled like any other stable. It was a very unsanitary environment in which to bring forth a child.

He was not laid in the manger in satin sheets but rather in rags. He was not laid in a bed of gold befitting in a king, but in a feeding trough for animals. There He was – the greatest gift of all, in simple wrapping. Jesus took His place in a manger that we might have a home in heaven.

After the dazzling angelic host appearance and words, they confirmed the message with their own eyes. Even though they are seeing a helpless newborn Infant, they took the message of the angel that the Child is the Christ the Lord into their hearts. Many of you know that Christ means the Anointed One in Greek or the Messiah in Hebrew.

Again, the shepherds made a choice to believe the Child and worshiped Him as we will find it in v20.

F. SO YOU BELIEVE THE TRUTH, NOW WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO ABOUT IT?

Luke 2:17-20 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

God didn't choose, the priests of the temple, scribes, Pharisees nor Sadducees to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. He chose these lowly people like the shepherds and like us to carry out His Word to the world.

The shepherds didn't just hear the angelic message, and do nothing about it. They sought out after the Babe in the manger. They believed the Baby was the Messiah and worshiped Him. Then to everyone's surprise, they started to talk about the Messiah's arrival in Bethlehem. They became the first evangelists of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

These shepherds are good examples for us to imitate today. Telling others about the Savior is a solemn obligation as well as a great privilege, and we who are believers must be faithful.

G. A STONE TROUGH AND AN EMPTY STONE TOMB

When Jesus came to us as a Babe in a manger which is an animal trough most likely made out of a stone, He was wrapped in a swaddling clothes. After He gave His life for our sins as an atoning sacrifice, they wrapped him up in another set of swaddling clothes and laid Him in a stone tomb. They rolled a stone to block the entrance and set a group of the Roman guards around to keep Him inside.

But the Father in heaven sent His angels to roll away the stone for those who wanted to see the empty tomb after the resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. There are some of you must roll away your stony hearts to enter into the realm of eternal life in Christ Jesus. If you don't, you will sink into hell because of your stony heart that rejects Jesus as the Savior and Lord.

By the way, during this Christmas season, don't say, "Happy Holidays!" It is Christmas because of Christ's birth. We don't need to be politically correct with this vile world, rather we need to be godly correct.

H. APPLICATIONS

1) To our God, the obedient availability is more important than the outward appearance.

2) Telling others about the Savior is a solemn obligation as well as a great privilege, and we who are believers must be faithful.

