**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 12-12-2021
Christmas Through the Eyes of the Shepherds**

The Christmas story is a familiar one to most people. But despite its familiarity, we should always be moved by the many surprises in the story. That the current King of Israel, Herod, chose to reject his King and Savior and even tried to put him to death, it’s just startling.

That Simeon and Anna --- two unknowns, but very faithful believers, would prophecy to Joseph and Mary about Jesus and His ministry on the day that Jesus was circumcised --- what an amazing surprise. It was as if their whole long lives were building for that moment with their newborn king and savior.

Today we continue another huge surprise in the Christmas story as we look at Christmas through the Eyes of the Shepherds.

Shepherds have long had a history of being outcasts in society. I think of even when Joseph in the Old Testament brought his family to Egypt, Joseph told his family to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds.

Genesis 46:34 states that **“all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.”** Joseph used the Egyptians distain for shepherds to his own advantage, as he wanted Pharaoh to assign the land of Goshen for the Israelites – away from the Egyptians, which he did do for them.

But why were the Egyptians repulsed by shepherds? Probably because they didn’t smell as good or weren’t as clean-shaven.

Thousands of years later, by the time of Christ, shepherds were still considered peasants and were part of the lower classes of Jewish society.

Truly, this blue-collar job had its challenges that came with it. There were long hours, they worked overnight, protecting their flocks from many predators.

In fact, these shepherds in Bethlehem would be mostly protecting sheep that would be offered as sacrifices at the Temple in nearby Jerusalem.

It was a difficult life for a shepherd. It would have the stigma of being a trash collector or a trucker that’s never home today.

And yet again, the Christmas story surprises us.

Let us turn to God’s Word found in Luke 2:8-18.

**8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**

**13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,**

**14“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
    and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”**

**15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”**

**16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.**

I just love this story of Christmas. I love how God has one of His angels appear to this group of shepherds with these announcements.

The first words of the angel are “**Do not be** **afraid**.” This fear is consistently a common response to people seeing angels of God. It wasn’t that the shepherds were not very tough. Shepherds had to ward off any threat that would come after their sheep. We think of David the shepherd, who had to protect his flock from lions and bears, for example.

But this angel of God so carried the power of God with him that Luke writes that “**the glory of the Lord shone around them.”**

And they were terrified. But again, the angel’s first words to them are “Do not be afraid.”

And then the angel says “I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”

And what will be this good news that will cause great joy?

It is that in the town of David, a savior has been born to them. And this savior is the Messiah, the Lord.

So, this baby is savior of the world, is the long-awaited Messiah who is anointed of God, and this baby is the Lord. This baby is divine. Wow!

And if that wasn’t enough, the angel tells them that he has a sign for them as well. They would find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

But before they could even go into the town, it is like the angels of heaven just could not hold back anymore. Suddenly, there is a great multitude of the heavenly hosts that are visibly present and they are praising God and saying **“Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests.”**

Wow! Again, picture yourself as one of the shepherds. God’s holy angels came to them and it was they who were the first people outside of Jesus’ family, that would know of this birth.

These peasants who were low on the social ladder in Israel, they would become the first witnesses to the world that Jesus has come!

And so, the shepherds do come to the manger that night. The shepherds did not likely have physical gifts for Jesus, as the wise men later would. But these shepherds give their greatest gifts by worshipping Jesus and undoubtedly sharing with Joseph and Mary what they had seen and heard; that was their gift.

But the shepherds continued to give to our Lord by sharing the good news of Jesus to others. And we are told that all who heard them were amazed. They didn’t let their low status or lack of eloquence prevent them from sharing the good news.

Remember, Bethlehem was crowded because of the census.

The love of Christ was compelling them to share this good news to anyone who would listen.

Friends, as we think about Christmas through the eyes of the Shepherds, how does this story connect to our own lives today?

***And it is simply this. Jesus came for everyone and everyone is called to share Him with others***.

The shepherds would not have been considered likely candidates in most people’s minds at that time to hear the amazing announcement of the birth of Christ. Perhaps some of the religious leaders in Bethlehem or even Jerusalem, which was only a few miles away, may seem like more likely candidates.

But God chose the humble shepherds to hear this great news. And the shepherds not only obeyed, but they also shared the news of Jesus with many people.

In our world today, perhaps some of us feel like the shepherds a bit. We’re not famous. We don’t see our names on television or movies.

But Christmas through the eyes of the shepherds should remind us that God sees us and we are precious to Him. As is everyone.

 So please remember that Jesus came for you. You are precious to Him, as is everyone. The good news is for you and the good news is for all.

But equally important, Christmas through the eyes of the Shepherds should inspire us to share the good news of Jesus with others. The shepherds were not commanded to share the good news with lots of people, but just couldn’t keep it to themselves. Friends, when we have encountered Jesus and His love and grace and mercy and the joy that He alone can give us, we should naturally want to share Him with others. When God’s inspired Word impacts us, we want to share with this.

The shepherds may never have preached a sermon, but they humbly spoke truth and they were filled with the joy of Jesus.

Please know that all of you are part of God’s plan to share Jesus with others. Do not feel that you have to have all the answers. Do not feel like you have to be eloquent.

But seek to share Jesus with others. Ask the Lord for opportunities to share Him. You can share from God’s Word. You can share from your experience. It doesn’t need to be anything fancy, but people must know and we are all called to be witnesses.

To put it one other way, we are blessed today to have this pot luck Christmas dinner. All are invited to come and eat. The good meal is prepared for all.

But also, we are all invited to bring something (not that we are required to). We do not have to cook like Leota or Shirley F., for example, to participate in bringing this great meal together.

And likewise, we do not have to be wired like the Apostle Paul or John Wesley or Billy Graham to share Jesus with others. We just have to be filled with His love and His joy and desire that others know their savior as we do.

Let us pray…

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/december-web-only/characters-christmas-daniel-darling-shepherds.html>

www.Biblegateway.com

The Gospel of Luke Commentary by Joel B. Green