

Luke 2:8-20

WHEN SHEPHERDS MEET

Intro: The Christmas season can be a dangerous time! No, I am not referring to shopping at Wal-Mart, although you are taking your life into your hands when you go there during this time of year. I am talking about the Christmas story. There is a danger that we can hear it so often that it become too familiar. There is a danger that we will lose the significance of the message because we are too familiar with it.

Every year we tell the same stories told in the same ways. We talk about shepherds, angels, wise men, Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. If we are not careful this annual handling of this precious truth might just cause us to take it for granted. We know all the details and if we are not careful, our familiarity with the Christmas story can cause us to overlook just how amazing the story really is.

So today, I want to challenge you to see it again for the first time. Let's begin with the announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ. To whom does God announce the birth of His Son? To whom would you expect the announcement to go?

We could see how God might choose to announce the birth of Christ to Herod the king. We could see how he would want to announce the birth in a splendid ceremony in the Temple led by the High Priest. But we have trouble understanding why he would choose a ragtag band of shepherds.

The announcement of the birth of the Son of God is not made to a king in a palace. It is not made to a priest in a temple. It is not made to the wealthy, to the movers and the shakers, or to the most important people in the land. The announcement of the birth of the Messiah; of the One Who would grow up to die on a cross for the sins of the lost, was made to a group of shepherds.

At best the shepherds were common, ordinary men. They were not the social elite. At worst, they were vile, dirty men, who were, for the most part, social and religious outcasts.

Most likely these shepherds were tending their sheep just outside of Bethlehem. By all accounts, they were tending sheep being that were being raised for use in the sacrifices down at the Temple in Jerusalem. They were the last group of people that you would expect God to make this kind of an announcement to. They were the very group of men that was chosen to hear the glorious news of the Savior's birth.

This account of God's announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ to the shepherds contains some very important *truths*. These *truths* are still vitally important to you and me today. I want to share those *truths* with you as I preach from this passage. Today, I would like for us to think about *When Shepherds Meet*. When the shepherds met the Shepherd of the soul, their lives changed forever. That is the most important message of all in this, and every, Christmas season.

I. v. 9 THE ASTONISHMENT THEY EXPERIENCED

The Bible introduces us to a group of shepherds, who are out in the fields at night, keeping a protective eye on the flocks with which they have been entrusted. For them, this was just another boring night with the sheep. Then, suddenly, the sky was filled with light. An angel descended from Heaven, clothed with light. The normalcy of that tranquil evening was shattered and the Bible says, “**they were sore afraid.**” That phrase means that they were, “**seized with great fear and with a desire to run away.**” they are terrified!

It is no wonder they are terrified. Imagine being who they were and seeing what they saw.

What stands out the most in the first part of this passage is just who received this visit from Heaven. The angel of God comes to the most despised of people. He comes to people who were outcasts from all respectable society. The honesty and integrity of shepherds in that day was so questionable that they were not even allowed to testify in a court of law in those days. Shepherds were so far down on the list of social outcast that the only people lower were lepers.

I believe that God chose the shepherds because He wanted to show that His love and His grace is available to all; that He is not a respecter of persons. He does not show more respect to kings than he does to hourly wage earners.

You may think; “***If God is even aware that I exist, He probably doesn't have a very favorable opinion of me!***”

Deep down a lot people may feel like that. But no matter how insignificant you may think you are God knows you and you are important to Him.

The Apostle Paul explains this in his first letter to the Corinthians - **1 Cor. 1:26-28.**

Can you remember the astonishment you felt when the Lord came to you, drawing you to Jesus Christ? Can you remember the fear that occupied your heart? Can you remember the amazement when you realized the truth, that of all the people in the world, at that moment, God wanted you! It is an astonishing moment when God breaks in on your life, but what a blessing it is! It is the first step in seeing your life changed forever!

Al. He still speaks to the unlikely!

I. **The Astonishment They Experienced**

II. V. 10-14 **THE ANNOUNCEMENT THEY RECEIVED**

Note with me that the message the angel brought from God spoke to their most immediate need. When the angel said, “**fear not,**” the Bible says that they were “**sore afraid.**” When the angelic messenger suddenly appeared the shepherds reacted in a normal human would they were terribly afraid.

The announcement they received was Personal - The angel said, “**unto you is born this day...**” The message from Heaven is that God is interested in the individual. He cares about you! When the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, He came as the Savior of the world, but He also came to be your Savior. Praise God! I

rejoice when I think of Him dying for the sins of many, but I almost lose control when I think that He died for me!

The announcement they received was Powerful - The angel speaks to them about a baby. Not just any baby, but a special baby. A baby that is identified by three special names. The message of a birth was not unusual, but the message of this birth was extraordinary, because this child was different from every other child that had ever, or would ever be born into the world. **The titles given to him by the angel declare His uniqueness.**

He is called “Savior” - He is the One Who would give His life for the sins of His people. He is the One Who robed His deity in humanity and came into this world to die on the cross, **Phil. 2:5-8.** He is the One came to do what all the sacrifices and blood shed in the tabernacle and the temple could never do. Ill. **Heb. 10:11-14,** *“¹¹And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: ¹² But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; ¹³ From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”* **Thank God, He is the Savior of all who will believe the Gospel!** *“For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe,”* **1 Tim. 4:10.**

He is called “Christ” - This word tells us that He is the **“Anointed One; the Messiah.”** He is the One promised from the beginning, **Gen. 3:15.** He is the One prefigured in all the sacrifices and all the

Old Testament prophecies. He is the One God said would come. He is the One the Jews anticipated every time they offered a sacrifice and kept a feast. He is the One for Whom the world waited.

He is called “Lord” - This title identifies Him as Sovereign God. This little baby was the One Who spoke the universe into existence. He is the One Who formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. He is the One Who controls the paths of the planets and the galaxies. He is the One Who permits the movement of the most minute piece of dust. He is the Lord of all! **Yet, He lies in Bethlehem, in the person of a helpless baby! What condensation! What grace! What love! What glory! To think that Almighty God would humble Himself to come into this world as a helpless child, so that we might be saved!**

You too may have a heart filled with fear this Christmas. Fear about your health, your family, your job security, the economy, or the world conditions. But we need not fear; we have **“good tiding of great joy”** Why? The Savior was born! Scripture has been fulfilled! Christ is LORD over all!

Notice too that this news **“will be to all people.”** This news is not just for a privileged few. Scripture says, **“Whosoever will let him come.”** Jesus came for pay for the sins of all who would respond to His message in believing faith. He is available to all.

After the angel’s reassurance that they need not be afraid, verse 13 says, **“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, goodwill toward men!’” There was a heavenly flash and then angels surround the shepherds, who are already bewildered! The words “*a multitude*”, do not refer to 50, or to 150, or to 1,500 but to a number that was beyond counting. It is amazing to consider that heavenly host stretched from horizon to horizon to witness the most amazing event in the history of the universe.

Then the heavenly host began to sing praises. Scripture says in **Job 38:7** that at creation the angels “*sang together and all the angels shouted for joy,*” now they join voices again to welcome the birth of the savior of mankind.

The sign to them is that they will find the Christ child lying in a manger. No other child in Bethlehem was being born in a stable that night. No other baby in Bethlehem would be found in a crude feeding trough.

I. **The Astonishment They Experienced**

II. **The Announcement They Received**

III. V. 15-16 **THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THEY OFFERED**

They shepherds hear the message of the angels and they react. **How they responded to that message altered the course of their lives and their eternities.** Notice what they could have done:

- *They could have debated it.* They could have sat down and analyzed what they should do. Could they afford to leave the sheep? What if something happened while they were gone?

Talking, talking and more talking. Sometimes we actually talk ourselves out of responding in faith.

- ***They could have rejected it.*** They could have said, “***This is not for me! This message is just too unbelievable.***” Some people believe the Gospel message is too farfetched.
- ***They could have dissected it.*** They could have said, “***It’s too far to Bethlehem! This message is just asking too much!***” We often reject what we think demands too much of us.
- ***They could have doubted it.*** They could have ignored it. They could have any number of excuses that would keep them from checking out the story they had just heard. They could have said, “***It can’t be like we were told. In fact why should we have been told at all. We better just forget about it.***”
- ***But the shepherds chose to believe.*** Their faith is revealed in their words, they did not say, “***Let us go and see if these things are true.***” They said, “***let us now go and see this thing that has come to pass.***” They responded in pure faith!
- It is not enough to hear about Jesus. It is not enough to look into the manger and say, “***Oh how nice. This touching scene gives me good feelings.***” But the truth is that if Jesus were born in Bethlehem a thousand times and not within you, you will still be eternally lost. You can get all sentimental at Christmas, and have a warm fuzzy feeling but if Christ is not born into your heart, it is a mockery of the reason that he came.

What they actually did is what changed their lives, v. 15-16. They simply took the message at face value and went to Bethlehem to see the Christ child. That is the only response to God’s invitation that will bring salvation to the soul. When the message comes to a lost sinner, it is a crucial moment. Either that sinner will heed the

message and go to Christ, or that **S**inner will reject the message and continue in their sins. What they do with the message of the Gospel determines how they will live out the remainder of the earthly lives, and where they will go when this earthly life is over. III. **John 8:24**, *“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”*

To receive the message of the Gospel means a changed life in this world for the believer, **2 Cor. 5:17**. It also means a change of eternity for them when this life is over, **John 14:1-6**.

So, the question that must be asked and answered now is this: What have you done with Jesus?

- I. **The Amazement They Experienced**
- II. **The Announcement They Received**
- III. **The Acknowledgement They Offered**

IV. V. 17-18, 20 **THE ADVANCEMENT THEY ENJOYED**

The shepherds hear the invitation, and they respond to it and head to Bethlehem. **V. 17** says, *“...and when they had seen it.”* Hearing about Jesus is one thing, but seeing Him for yourself makes all the difference in life. When they met Him for themselves, they wanted others to know about Him, **v. 17**.

When the shepherds met Jesus, they were promoted to evangelists. God took these rough, course shepherds and sent them out with the message of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. As the first evangelists of the New Testament era, they did

not emphasize what it was like to see an angel, or to hear the angelic choir. Nor did they dwell on how frightened they were. Their main interest was in reporting that "**which was told them concerning this Child.**"

It will be about Him!

On the way back to their flocks, they told everyone they met about the baby that had changed their lives, and about the message the angel had given to them.

When we meet Jesus for ourselves, we want others to meet Him too. There is a desire birthed within us to see our friends, family and acquaintances brought to faith in Christ.

I wonder how many of the people they met in **verse 18** to see what all the fuss was about. I like to think that maybe some of those people walked into that manger and humbled themselves before the Lamb of God.

went

We never know who will respond in faith to the Gospel message. Our duty is to tell them; it's God's business to save them. Someone told me, and I had to see it for myself. That is why I am here today!

Let's remember who these shepherds are, they are real men, they were crude, and tough, and you probably wouldn't want your sister or your daughter to date one. The celebrating that these shepherds were doing was not the artistic praise spoken by the cultured, nor the quiet reflection of the scholar. When the Bible says that they were "**glorifying and praising God,**" **v.20**; it is likely that is the only kind of praising and glorifying they knew was loud,

boisterous and excited, and I think it brought a smile to God's face. They met the Lord and it filled their hearts with excitement.

The same is true with us. Meeting Him, fills the soul with His praise and His glory.

V. 20 says that the shepherds who had seen such wondrous sights had to go back to the ordinary. That is true for us each year, for the celebration of Christmas is a special time. But when the fun and excitement is over we have to return to our jobs and our responsibilities. But the shepherds returned so full of what had happened in their lives they could not keep themselves from sharing the good news with everyone they came into contact with. They returned to the ordinary activities of life, but their lives were never the same.

If we can simply encounter Christ, at Christmas, and throughout the year, we will never be the same either!

Conc: Being a shepherd was lonely, weary, usually very boring and tedious, interspersed with moments of extreme danger. **You know what kept the shepherds going? It was hope.** God had promised his people that one day he would send the Messiah, that when the Messiah came everything would be different. It was that hope that burned in their hearts and kept them going. When those shepherds met God, everything changed for the better.

How about us? There are times when life becomes hard and we grow weary. **Meeting Jesus injects hope into our lives. Thank God for His gracious gift!** There are times when we wonder if it is

worthwhile to keep on keeping on. But the Lord has promised that one day He will come back. He is coming for all of us, shepherds and kings, wise men and peasants. He is coming for his people. He will dry all the tears and take away all the pain. There will be no more death and no more goodbyes. And then we will say, It was worth it all, it was worth it all!