

Luke 2:15-20

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Now let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they told others the message they had been told about this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it were amazed by what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Sermon # 4 Advent Wreath series, December 20, 2020

Text: Luke 2:15-20

Theme: “The Shepherds Approach the Manger in Faith”

In the name of Jesus, my dear fellow redeemed,

A little girl who had never attended Sunday School or received any religious training in her home, was sick in the hospital at Christmas time. While she was there the account of the first Christmas was read in the children’s ward. The little girl was enchanted. After the service she turned to her grim-looking nurse and asked, “Have you ever heard that story before?” “Oh, yes,” answered the nurse. “Many times.” “Well,” said the little girl, “You certainly don’t look like it.”

Now, there may be times when a Christian does not feel very happy. But if faith in the Lord Jesus overflows from the heart there is a happiness and joy in the Christian’s life that the unbeliever can’t possibly know about. Jesus once said, **“Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.”** If faith is in the heart of the Christian it will show itself in that person’s words and actions. Faith showed itself in the words and actions of a group of men that we don’t hear much about in the Bible.

Except for Luke 2 we never hear again of the shepherds who worshiped at the manger of the Christ child. But their actions are typical of those whose hearts trust in the Lord Jesus. There was a faith in their hearts that was firmly anchored in the child they may have seen only once in their lives. Today, as we light the Shepherd Candle, let us view these shepherds who approached the manger in faith. 1. They believed the message was from God. 2. They spread the message from God. 3. They praised God who had given them the Savior.

Imagine the scene. You are a shepherd outside Bethlehem in the first century. It is a peaceful night. It has been dark for hours. The sheep are calm. Most have curled up for the night, though a few are grazing or chewing their cud. You, too, begin to doze now for no danger seems to threaten the sheep.

You've been dozing for about a half hour when suddenly pure white light splits the night! Your eyes pop wide open and you see a heavenly being. Fear immobilizes your entire body. And it's just as well, for this angelic messenger will tell you the most important message you will ever hear in your life: "**Today in the town of David a Savior was born for you; he is Christ the Lord.**"

What would you do? Would the initial fear paralyze your actions? I can tell you what those shepherds did. First of all they considered the message.

This had to be an important communication from heaven to earth. After all this was surely an angel who came to tell them these good tidings. Yes, this must be good news from God for the angel said, "**Today, in the town of David a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord.**" Why, that sounds like words God had spoken in the Old Testament through his prophets. Yes. Yes! This must be a message from God.

And...Listen to the hymn the angels are singing! "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.**" Do we dare believe our ears? God has finally sent the Messiah, the child promised through the prophet Isaiah, called, "God with us."

And if you can imagine their excitement and their faith then you can imagine what they must have said next. '**Look, Bethlehem is only over the next hill. Let's go there and see for ourselves this miracle of the ages.**' Yes, these shepherds, simple folk though they were, wanted to see exactly what the angel had been talking about. They believed what God had communicated to them through the angels. They just wanted to behold with their own eyes the one whom they believed was sent by God to reconcile the whole world to himself.

Their faith was not disappointed. "**So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.**" They believed God's promise to send a savior who would wash us clean from our sins. At the first Christmas they could see with their own eyes that God keeps his promises. Yes, they believed that the angels' message was from God.

The most important question each of us must answer is, "Do I believe what God says? Do you believe God when he says, "The soul that sins is the one who will die"? Do you believe that God cannot and will not tolerate sin because he is a holy and righteous God? Do you believe that He will send to hell anyone who hates his neighbor, anyone who even desires to have his neighbor's spouse even if they do not act on it? Do we believe God's whole message as we read it in the Bible? It is

very easy to fashion our own benevolent God who would never punish us for anything. But that's not the God of the Bible. We cannot shape and mold God into what you or I want him to be.

But let me ask you again, do you believe God? Do you believe that completely out of his love and mercy God sent his son born in the manger of Bethlehem to live and die to pay for the sins of husbands and wives, parents and children, pastors and teachers, pharisees and tax collectors, and yes, even the sins of lowly shepherds?

Those shepherds were overjoyed to hear the message from God and to put their trust in what he had said. Their joy and wonder must have been overwhelming as they viewed the miracle of God in the Christ-child. But their faith and joy also translated into actions of faith. Believing the message from God about the Savior, they also spread the message from God.

What do you do when something good happens to you? The youngster who just got a new baby sister or brother wants to tell everybody at school. The guy or gal who bowls a perfect 300 game or finally breaks par on the golf course wants to tell somebody about it. It's not natural to keep it inside.

Something good had just happened to the shepherds in Luke 2. they heard a message of good news from the mouth of the angel, "**I bring you good news of great joy.**" The angel's good news meant they belonged to God. He really did want them to be with him forever in paradise. They had believed all along that when they died their souls would be in heaven with God because of the Savior. But now they had seen with their own eyes the very one promised by God who would justify them before the righteous judge of the universe.

"But wait," the shepherds must have thought. We can't keep this to ourselves. "It wouldn't be right. The angel said this is good news for all people. We need to tell everybody." Recall if you will that a census was being conducted in the Roman empire. Who knows how many of their fellow Jews they were able to tell who wouldn't have ordinarily even been near the town of David. How many people went to see for themselves and believed in God's Savior?

If we remember what these men of the fields heard then we can imagine what they told others. The angel told them a child had been born who was a Savior, Christ, the Lord. When Joseph had doubts about entering marriage with this fiancée' Mary, the angel had told him about the Holy Spirit's power. He and Mary were to name the child, Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. The name "Jesus" is the same as the Old Testament name "Joshua". It simply means, "The Lord saves". His name described his Savior activity, the very reason for which he had come to the world.

This Savior also carried the title Christ which means “Anointed One.” When God wanted to show that he had chosen someone for the position of Prophet, Priest or King he would send his representative to anoint the person for his position so everyone would know that person was chosen by God for his work. Jesus was chosen by God because he was the only one who could rescue us from the punishment we deserved for our sins.

This anointed one, born in a manger was also the Lord. He was and is truly God. What a miracle! He was the God who promised to send the Savior. Now the birth of the Christ-child proved that God keeps his promises. In the message that the shepherds received they had the basics of all the teachings about the Lord Jesus. This was a message they had to spread.

Something good happened for you on that night the shepherds heard God’s most important message. The message of the Christ-child is also meant for you. The good news of a Savior is meant to give you joy when you become conscious of your sins. When you’ve deeply hurt a friend and you are having a difficult time reconciling with him, Jesus says, “I am your Savior. Dump all your sins on me. Enjoy living at peace with God.” Then comes your golden opportunity to share the message of the Savior. For you know in your life what Jesus has done for you. He has lifted the burden of sin from you and given you life. You may not have seen the Christ child with our own eyes but you now what God has done for you. You who know God’s grace are the Savior’s best witnesses. You can tell someone else that the Lord Jesus takes their sins away also.

It becomes very evident that the shepherds knew and believed in God’s grace in the Savior. They couldn’t keep it to themselves. They knew God had sent this child for them and for all people.

I can imagine when it was all said and done, it might have been very early in the morning. Ordinarily they would have been sleeping, or just waking up, preparing to take their flocks to new pastures. They probably slept very little that night. Like children who can hardly sleep on Christmas Eve, thinking about opening their presents in the morning, these shepherds were excited. But they had a better gift than any brightly wrapped box ever held.

Their excitement gave way to songs of praise. “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.” When faith is living and active, it just has to express itself. The shepherds expressed their faith first in their willingness to share the good news the angel had told them about the Christ.

Now they were on their way back to the pastures but their faith wasn’t about to simmer down just yet. With hearts full of joy and thanks they praise the God

who had kept his centuries old promise. And we can well imagine that they thanked God for giving them the privilege of seeing the Lord Jesus with their own eyes.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I wish I had seen Jesus for myself, then my Christmas could be even more joyful." But you have seen him. You see him time after time in the pages of scripture. He says to you as he said to the paralyzed man in Matthew 9, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven. I have died for every one of them. All your debt to God is paid." He promises you as he did to Mary and Martha when their brother died, "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.**" Those promises belong to you. When you receive the Christ child as your Christmas present, you receive many more gifts as well.

You and I like the shepherds have good reason to glorify and praise God. Praise him on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. But don't limit your praise to those obvious times and services. He forgives your sins. You have every reason to praise him with your life as you live obediently before God.

History has produced some exciting moments for people of every era. News of battles won and victories gained. News of treaties signed and conflicts diverted. Yes, news of oppression broken and freedom won. But I doubt that even those who danced on the Berlin Wall were more excited than the shepherds who approached the manger in faith. Earthly freedom can be taken away. But we have a message of forgiveness from God that will never be taken from us. For that we will glorify and praise our God forever. Amen.