

WHEN GOD “CRASHED” INTO THE WORLD OF THE SHEPHERDS

INTRODUCTION:

How many of you like people to “drop in” on you unannounced? Whether we are glad when someone drops in unannounced—or annoyed or embarrassed—depends on at least 3 things: who it is, what do they want, and what are they interrupting. I remember as kids we loved to have our parent’s friends show up unannounced. Why? Because whatever we were doing in the way of **work** stopped and we could go play! For women there’s a quite likely a 4th concern that enters their mind when an unexpected visitor shows up—what does the house look like 😊?

This morning we are going to look at first one angel—then a multitude—“dropping in” on the shepherds and the heavenly message they gave regarding the birth of Christ. Please take your Bibles and turn to Luke 2:8-17.

1. Who God sent a message to—the Shepherds

What do we know about the shepherds?

A. Occupation of Shepherds in OT

Being a shepherd in and of itself was not a bad thing

--Abel was a keeper of sheep (Gen 4:2)

--Moses “kept the flock of Jericho his father-in-law” (Ex 3:1)

--David was called “a man after God’s own heart” and he fed his father’s sheep (I Sam 17:15)

--The major proof that being a shepherd was not sinful was because Jesus called Himself “the good shepherd” that “giveth His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

B. Reputation of Shepherds at time of Christ’s Birth

The reputation of shepherds at the time of Christ was different, though. Being a shepherd was looked down upon for several reasons:

--It was an insignificant class of workers because it didn’t take a lot of skill—and they consequently weren’t paid much

--Because they worked 7 days a week, they could not keep the Sabbath so were looked down upon as being irreligious

--Not all, but many of them were dishonest and guilty of stealing sheep

--At the time of Christ’s birth, they were considered so unreliable that they weren’t even allowed to testify in court!

--In other words, they were what was considered the outcasts of society—especially by the religious elite of Christ’s day.

2. What were the Shepherds doing when they received the message

--v 8 “And there were in the same country shepherd abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.” They weren’t sleeping or goofing off—they were “abiding”—staying—“in the field”—where the sheep were—“keeping watch over their flock.” Simply put, they were doing their job; they were doing what they were supposed to be doing!

I’ve mentioned this at least once during this series but think it would be good to pause here and think again about **who** it is that God appears to. **Who** does God appear to? Who does He have messages for? And what were they **doing** when they received a message from God?

--Zacharias was a priest that was serving God when he received his message. Although the Bible says he was righteous and walked in God’s commandments, he was not perfect—he had a hard time believing the message from the angel Gabriel and consequently was made unable to speak for 9 plus months.

--Mary was a godly but poor teenage girl. Since we aren't told what she was doing when she received her message from God, it is pretty safe to say that she was not doing anything out of the ordinary—she was doing what all engaged girls at that age and in that culture did. We do know, however, that she loved God and knew His word because her praise to God while visiting Elisabeth “oozed” with OT references.

--Joseph was a just man—a righteous man—one that feared God and wanted to do what was right. He—like Mary—was poor and probably not highly educated. We know what he was doing when he received his message from God—he was seeking God's will in the situation that had been thrust upon him—Mary being pg.

--And today we see that the shepherds were poor, uneducated and not highly thought of by the world—yet were the first ones to get the news of the Savior—which is Christ the Lord!

--We don't know much about the character of these particular shepherds, but we do know this: God seeks—and speaks to—those who are humble in themselves and hungry for Him and we can assume the shepherds were like that as well. That serves as a good reminder to us:

--We don't have to be rich...or famous...or highly educated to have God speak to us

--We don't have to be in some special occupation for God to speak to us

--We don't have to be doing some special act of service for God to speak to us

Ordinary people doing ordinary things can have messages from God—provided they want to hear from Him and are willing to obey what it is He wants them to do!

3. What was God's message to the Shepherds?

In a nutshell, the thrust of the message was: “Fear not, I bring you good news—the Savior is born!” I see 3 parts to the message:

A. A Saviour is born (v 11)

I mentioned just a moment ago that I'm of the belief that these shepherds were **seekers** of God. Here's why I say that.

--v 10 “for behold, I bring **you** good tidings of great joy...”

--v 11 “For unto **you** is born this day in the city of David a Saviour...”

--v 12 “And this shall be a sign unto **you**, **Ye** shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes...”

Who does God point out the Savior to? Is it not to those who are **seeking**?

Luke 5:30-32 “But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, **but sinners to repentance.**”

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that **which was lost.**”

What a blessing it must have been to the heart of these shepherds! The unappreciated outcasts of society are the first—besides Mary and Joseph, of course—to learn that **their** Saviour was born.

Let's pause here for a moment. Is Jesus **your** Savior? The “good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people” is only appreciated by those who need a Savior. Jesus is **the** Saviour—but He does not save **everyone**. Why? Because not everyone admits their need for a Savior!

Luke 18:9-14 “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified

rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

God doesn't save—He doesn't justify/declare righteous—those that think they don't need saving and He doesn't save those who are counting on their own goodness—or their good works—to get themselves to heaven. The shepherds knew they needed a Savior and knew they couldn't save themselves—that's why they were seeking God. And because they were seeking God—God brought the message to them!

B. A Sign is given (v 12)

“And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

i. Easy access

--Sign was for them; God wanted them to find the Babe

--Not at a palace...or the governor's mansion...or guarded by an army—was in a manger

ii. Common ground

--They would not feel ashamed or embarrassed about visiting Him; they had common ground with Him—He would be laying in a manger made for animals!

C. A Song is sung (vss 13-14)

“And suddenly there was with the angel...” What angel? The angel they had been getting the message from. The song then—the angels' praise to God—was part of the message. What was that part of the message?

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Think about the progression of the message.

--There is first good news to **them** (v 11): “For unto **you** is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

--Second, there is a sign to **them** (v 12): “And this shall be a **sign unto you**; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

--The song, though, was not about them, was it? It was **about God!** God was being praised because the excellency of the greatness of God was on full display in providing a Savior! Spurgeon wrote:

“Pause, Christian, and consider. See how every attribute is here magnified. Lo! what *wisdom* is here. God becomes man that He may be just and the Justifier of the ungodly. Lo! what *power*, for where is power so great as when it concealeth power? What power, that Godhead should unrobe itself and become Man! Behold, what *love* is thus revealed to us when Jesus becomes a Man! Behold, what *faithfulness*! How many promises are this day kept? How many solemn obligations are this hour discharged? What *grace*, and yet what *justice*! For it was in the person of that newborn Child that the law must be fulfilled, and in His precious body must vengeance find recompense for injuries done to divine righteousness.” (Prchg on Christmas; 51). What do you see when you look at the manger? You should see—and think about—the wisdom of God and the power of God and the love of God and the faithfulness of God and the grace of God and the justice of God!

4. How did the shepherds respond to the message they received

I'm sure there are more, but I see 2 main responses the shepherds had to their message from God.

A. Decided to go (v 15-16)

Middle of v 15 “Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord made known unto us.”

i. Intention—“let us now go” (v 15)

MacArthur points out something from the Greek that we do not see in English in the phrase “...the shepherds said one to another...” In the English it looks like they said it, then went. In the Greek, however, it was more of an ongoing discussion repeating over and over again their desire to go to the Bethlehem.

How long did the discussion take place? Probably not long. Who watched the sheep while they were gone? We are not told.

In their decision to go, there is not only intention, there is also...

ii. Conviction—“let us now go...and **see** this thing which is come to pass” (v 15)

It blessed my heart to realize that they had a conviction—an assurance—that they **would find** what had been told them. Notice the phrases in v 15:

--“Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and **see...**” There was no wondering. It was **not** ‘Let’s go see *if* this is true;’ instead let’s go see this thing **which is come to pass!** This thing has already happened; it has come to pass.

--“which the Lord hath made known unto us...” - They recognized it was a message **from** God so they knew it could be counted on. They were not going in **hopes** of finding the Babe—they were going to **see** Him!

Not just intention—and not just conviction—there was also...

iii. Action—“And they **came** with haste, and **found** Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.” Were they surprised to find them? The Bible gives no indication that they were surprised which further reaffirms in my mind their conviction that they expected to find Him!

Let’s pause here for a moment and consider what we can learn from the response of the shepherds. They heard a message from God to them—and they acted on it. It was not just enough for them to have good intentions. There was **intention**—they desired to do what God said—and there was **conviction**—we will see the Savior if we go—but there also had to be **action**. Michael Josephson wrote: “Good intentions are simply not enough. Our character is defined and our lives are determined not by what we want, say or think, but by what we **do**.” They not only went, they also...

B. Declared what they knew (v 17)

Notice v 17 “And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.” They shared—with all who were present—the angelic message they had received regarding this child being the Savior and the fact that they had been given a sign so they could find Him.

Question for you? In the angelic message that the shepherds received, were they instructed to **share** this good news? Not really; at least not specifically. But they **did** share the good news, didn’t they? Why? Because I believe they couldn’t **help** it!

--God had appeared to them—the outcasts of society

--The message was of good news, not of judgment

--The message was more than good news—it was the best news—the Savior was born!

--The Savior was for them—“unto **you** is born this day in the city of David the Savior...”

--And they were invited—by God—to go see the Savior for themselves!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. God’s invitation has not changed; it is still in effect. He wants you and I to come to the Savior. Have you done that? Oh may Jesus not say to you when you meet Him as Judge in the next life—“And ye would not come to me, that ye might have life!”

2. How about your good intentions? I believe there are things that you and I are **not** doing that we know we should. For example, I know I should pray more. I know I “have not, because I ask not” (James 4:2). I also know that God hears and answers pray—I have a conviction that it will make a difference if I pray more. And yet too many times my **good intentions** to pray more and **conviction** that it will make a difference if I pray more do not spill over into the **action** of praying more. What about you? Is there something in your life that God wants moved out of the “good intentions” phase to the “action” phase?