

**Luke 2:15-20**

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Today's Scripture is the manger scene. It is my favorite scene of the Bible. Imagine you are one of the shepherds. Life during biblical times was not easy or glamorous. You learned your trade from your father. Your job is to protect and care for the sheep. The ongoing challenge is to teach the animals to obey and to guard them from wild life and thieves. You have to repeatedly move the flock to find a better place to graze which frequently causes problems with neighbors. Your work varies by season, there are births in the spring, and you move to find cooler places in the summer, graze on stubble after harvest and sheer fleece in the winter.

All of the work is done outdoors and varies according to the time of the day. In the morning you take the flock to pasture, midday to the pools of water or to draw water from a well, in the evening you count them and check their health, and the nights are the toughest as you are out in the open and it is dark with threats of danger. Shepherding requires constant movement for food, water, and climate. You have to be equipped for work. Your clothing is to protect you from the weather. You carry necessary equipment of food, water, and a weapon. You do all of this for the basic necessities of life; milk, meat, wool, and sheep skin. The people love all the things that you help provide. There is milk for nutrition, meat for supper, wool and sheep skin for clothing.

A good shepherd is not just another hired hand; he is diligent, dependable, and brave. He will take risks in order to protect the flock. Hired hands tend to have a reputation of looking out for the self and pay less attention to the well being of animals. Most people prefer any other trade. But this is a family business and it goes without question - you are a shepherd.

Now imagine you are one of the shepherds in the Christmas story. You live out in the fields so that you can keep watch over the flock at night. Most of the people work in the day and are warm inside while you are cold outside. You as a shepherd have to work day and night. It is a double duty profession. The night time is the worst. You always dread the night time. It is the most dangerous time and is quite spooky. It is too hard to see the predators. You can't avoid them because you have what they want. You are hoping that you can make it through the night without incident. Then all of a sudden an angel is there. What is it? What are you going to think? What are you going to do? It is easy for us sitting in 21<sup>st</sup> century America with heated tents and bright flashlights to think of an easy life. But in biblical Palestine nights are dark and scary. There are plenty of things to give you goose bumps as if someone is watching you. You hear a sound and you get scared. You see something unusual you get more scared. The Scripture tells us that they were terrified. The angel announces the good news. The Messiah is born in Bethlehem. Now think this through. You are scared to death. Your 1<sup>st</sup> reaction is one of disbelief. Your nation and your people have waited centuries for the Messiah. You question how this news could possibly be coming to the lowly shepherd. You think if anything this kind of news will come to

high priests. But no, in this dark and scary night you must have seen a ghost or as in *A Christmas Carol* maybe it is just a blot of mustard. During this state of uncertainty, disbelief, shock, and intense fear the angels report that you will find a child in a manger.

You couldn't help but question if this is real. It is very odd that someone would place a baby in a manger. But that is also something that you cannot mistake - a newborn child in a manger. Nowhere on earth will there be a newborn child in a manger. We just don't do that. In this state of disbelief, shock, and fear there is a multitude of heavenly host praising God. Well, there is no way to mistake a multitude of heavenly host praising God. You just have to go and see this good news for yourself. So, off you go to Bethlehem which is not very far away. There may be a problem locating the exact location of the child but you do not question how you will find him. Your confidence comes from the divine revelation. You will find a newborn child in a manger.

Now let's take a moment and think this through. It is the Lord that has made this known to you. Bethlehem is a little town of less than 1,000 people. There aren't that many places to look. You look for Mary, Joseph, and the child and there is no mistake about who this child is because of the divine revelation. He is lying in a manger. This is confirmation of all your doubts and uncertainties. When you find him, it is a goose bump moment that you will never forget. Chills race up and down your spine. You can't help but talk about it. People hear your story and are amazed. You return to your job glorifying and praising God.

We have celebrated Christmas for the birth of our Lord and Savior. Now like the shepherds we return to our normal life and routine. Let us also be like the shepherds by glorifying and praising God for what is revealed in this child is the most beautiful gift of love.