

**Luke 2:8-14**

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

The Old Testament is loaded with occasions where God intervened on behalf of the people in order to rescue them from themselves, give the people another chance, and offer love to them. The Old Testament also frequently mentions that God is going to continue to save the people and send a savior for the people. God rescues the nation of Israel repeatedly from their enemies and restores them to a righteous relationship.

Today's Scripture is the most beloved of all biblical stories. I hope during this Christmas season your focus is on this beautiful gift of love. Luke's narrative of the Nativity is pure, wholesome, and powerful. In this Bible story, God delivers a savior to the people when they least deserve it, anticipate it, but yet are not ready for it. The Gospel writers are specific in revealing that this new baby is the one that fulfills Old Testament expectations. It is the most familiar biblical story of all. This is the story of God reaching out to us. The birth of Jesus is proven to be the Christ and the Son of God. Matthew tells the story from the perspective of the wise men. Luke tells the story from the perspective of the shepherds.

Luke puts a great importance on the location of the birth. This is significant in his identity as the long awaited Savior that is a gift from God to the people. In this story the humility of the Lord is inconspicuous. The people would assume that the divine nature of Jesus would be of a royal and grand nature. Luke is about the Savior of the world and the meaning that goes behind the title of Savior. Luke's story is terrific news but it isn't just good news for the Jews. This terrific news is for everyone. The angel confirms it by proclaiming this good news is for all people. This is a very important theological concept. The Jews of the day believed that the Savior is reserved for them as God's chosen people. But the gospel writers reveal that the Savior is for the whole world. In chapter one Luke tells the story of the Angel Gabriel visiting Mary with the news that the Holy Spirit has overshadowed her and she is blessed with a child that is holy. This child will be called the Son of God. Mary visits her relative Elizabeth and finds out the pregnancy is a sign of confirmation that the word from the Angel is true.

In our Scripture for today, the shepherds are very significant. Using the shepherds as the first people to witness the divine miracle shows the importance God places on humility and those that are on the fringes of society. The Scripture reveals that God includes what society considers as outsiders as being included in God's plan of salvation. By stating that they live in the fields indicates the hard life that they live. Watching the flock at night reveals a difficult and uncomfortable job away from the comforts of home. Nighttime can be quite scary when you are outside in the dark. It is then that the angel stood before them. The angel delivers a summary of the person that is born. This is the Savior, the Christ, and the Lord.

I invite you to take the time to imagine the scene. You are there as a shepherd. It is a normal night and you are doing your job. Imagine the weather. Cold at night the wind adds to the chill. Imagine the danger. You are protecting the flock from thieves and wild life. It is dark and the only light is a camp fire. It is a scary position to be in. So, when you see an angel you are terrified. The first thing the angel does is offer comforting reassurance by telling you not to be afraid. This is good news of great joy for all the people. I like that idea – great joy for all the people. The good news is the Savior. This news is the biggest news ever. This is the big news that the whole nation has been waiting for.

The announcement of birth of the Lord doesn't go to the king, emperor, governor, wealthy, or religious elite. The announcement of the birth of the Lord goes to the lowly shepherds. The shepherds of the day were not very well liked. They had a reputation for dishonesty and breaking the law by not respecting the land rights of their neighbors. By sending God's news to the shepherds shows God's care for the outcasts. David was a shepherd. Jesus is our shepherd. The news goes to the shepherds. The sheep were used for temple sacrifice. Those that were located near Jerusalem for the temple sacrifice stayed in the fields all year long – even during the cold winter nights. The temple sacrifice was no longer needed after the sacrifice of Jesus.

The angelic announcement is a grand display of heaven. It is a moment of great celebration as the choir in heaven praises God. The shepherds join in the celebration of the birth of the divine child by becoming eye witnesses to the news and providing their testimony. This is breaking news. Today the Savior is born. Notice the words that Luke chooses. He is the Savior, the Messiah, and the Lord. He is born in the city of David. This is very specific Old Testament prophecy. Here is your sign. Here is how you will confirm the announcement. Here is how you will recognize the divine baby. He will be in a manger. Signs are very significant. They tell us what we need to know. We all know to look for signs while we are driving. In real crime shows on television the forensic scientists always look for signs of evidence. In our human relationships we look for signs that someone is listening, angry, friendly, frustrated, confused, or any number of other emotions. This particular sign – the baby in a manger – is a confirmation. The angels are legitimate, this is a divine message, and they do not have to prove themselves. The sign allows the shepherds to immediately recognize the Lord. Here is your sign. It is for you. The child will be lying in a manger. The manger is highly abnormal. We simply do not place babies in mangers. This is a sign of God's humility and this is a sign that cannot be mistaken. Then the multitude of heavenly hosts praises God and gives glory to God.

This is the most beautiful story ever told. The first public announcement of the divine birth did not go to King Herod, Caesar Augustus, or the religious leaders. It went to the shepherds. Mary and Joseph knew the wonderful news. Elizabeth and Zacharias knew the wonderful news. The one the people have long waited for has at last arrived to the world - glory to God in the highest.