

Christmas Through The Eyes of...
...the Shepherds
Luke 2:8-20
Third Sunday of Advent
December 15, 2019
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INTRO TO ANN READING THE SCRIPTURE PASSAGE:
Many of you will recall where you've heard this:

"I guess I don't really know what Christmas is all about. Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?"

"Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about," said Linus. [Linus walks to center stage.]



Luke 2:8-20 (KJV)

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

I've got the "Lucy and Linus" song as the ringtone on my phone. It's the music that plays when the kids are dancing in the Charlie Brown Christmas program. I really

like the Charlie Brown Christmas program. For as long I can remember, I've watched it. Maybe not the first year, 1965, but MOST since! I've even got it on DVD!

My most favorite part of the show is when, as the children are supposed to be rehearsing their Christmas program, Linus steps up and recites the verses that Ann just read for us. This is ONE good time to hear the KJV!

There is actually a lot of theology, almost "hidden", in the Charlie Brown comics and the Christmas show, but we'll save that for another time.

For today: *"there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."*

And those shepherds, herding near Bethlehem, have a few things to teach us as we look at Christmas Through the Eyes of...The Shepherds.

How're you doing, 10 days before Christmas?

Are your lists getting ANY shorter?

Are your fingers healing from using your hot glue gun and are now stuck with packing tape?

Cards done? (ththththtb)

Yikes!

Believe it or not...these are not the things Christmas is for!

I know YOU know, it's not!

For the shepherds there was no baking or wrapping or sending.

Perhaps we should be influenced in how we celebrate Christmas and what Christmas should mean to us.

To the Shepherds, Christmas was a time of...

...TERROR

That's not a great start – but hold on.

The shepherds didn't have OSHA protections.
They were "out there"; probably living in tents.
The Shepherd's Field, where the animals that would be used for sacrifices at the Temple, was 2-3 miles from Bethlehem.
And these particular shepherds, were working the night shift because the sheep needed to be protected from wolves and thieves.

Talk about looking over your shoulder!

Then, without warning an angel was RIGHT THERE!
This is the third time Gabriel is *right there* in the First Christmas story. He showed up and spoke to Mary. He appeared to Joseph in a dream. And now, he's in the field.

Did Gabriel have a glow?

Maybe. But it was *nothing* when the "glory of the Lord shone around them."

Commentaries tell us that **this** glory is God's Shekinah glory – which, throughout the OT, is a sign of God's presence. This was a ta-da moment, out in the field, and had to have been frightening.

Because, here's an interesting tidbit that gets forgotten in the excitement of the Christmas story.

According to the prophet Ezekiel, the Shekinah glory, God's glory, had **left** Israel – centuries ago! (Ez. 10:18 and 11: 23.) It says, "*The glory of God departed from over the threshold of the Temple*" and "*went up from...the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.*"

The GLORY OF GOD had departed and had not returned...until NOW, on the night Jesus was born. Remember, "Emmanuel" is God with us! The Glory was on earth!

So, yes, our dear shepherds were terrified.

And then we can read and hear, that the angel said, "*Do not be afraid.*"

Rick Warren, who wrote The Purpose of Christmas notes that this is ONE of 365 times (one for each day of the year) that this phrase is used in Scripture. When we look through God's story – don't you K-N-O-W that whenever God or one of God's messengers says, "*Don't be afraid*" – there's something coming!

"Don't be afraid," the shepherds heard.

Oh, yeah, okay. (Mheh)

These guys were terrified.

Scared out of their wits, freaked out - however you say it...they were beyond scared.

Here they were, the shepherds, in the dark, I don't know if they had a full moon like we've been seeing the last few nights, when a *very* unexpected angel appears – OUT OF NOWHERE.

Angels don't appear to "regular" folks like shepherds.

Mary and Joseph were also "regular" folks – and they BOTH had heard the angel tell them "don't be afraid!"

So: unexpected and unknown **and** maybe the shepherds feared judgement – because they'd heard and been taught that angels come to pronounce God's judgment.

How 'bout us?

Don't we fear the unexpected, the unknown, and, ooh, surely, the possibility of judgment?

But, let's remember **WHY** the angel was there.

He wasn't there to announce judgment, NO!

He came (it says) to bring "good news of great joy!"

His announcement was that "a Savior has been born **for** you."

This was news, to the very people who were watching the sacrificial lambs, was that THE final sacrificial lamb had come!

Right from God's Word, the angel is telling the shepherds (and us) that Christmas is not a time for terror, but something entirely different.

It's about TRUST.

Remember hearing that a multitude MORE of angels showed up to sing?
Oh, how I'd have loved to hear THAT choir! Amen?

But, when they left, what do the shepherds do?

They were now swept up in a sense of THIS IS SOMETHING BIG!
Why dawdle? "Let's go now...," they said.
Why put it off? Let's do it. RIGHT HOW.

They've heard the "*great tidings*" – which means "good news."
And Good News means GOSPEL - Jesus Christ the "good news."
The shepherds have been given the NEWS – hot off the presses – and they had an immediate response to it!

Perhaps, for the first time in their lives, SOMETHING is urgent. "We gotta go!"
Without doubt or any hesitancy, they're ready to go and "*See this thing...Lord has made known to us.*"

It wasn't "IF this is true" **but** "SINCE IT IS true – let's go!"
They hadn't seen it yet but they had faith
And soon, just those 2 or 3 miles back into town, their faith would become sight!
They went: where they were told
and looked: where they were told
even though, to them, it didn't make sense.

"We're supposed to look in a **stable** for The Savior?
The Messiah in a **manger**?
Come on! Who's gonna believe that?"

For some people, WHERE the shepherds were supposed to look, could have been a revolting sight.

A tired little mama, soon after giving birth...and a nervous daddy-guy.
Animals and their *by-product* on the floor.

It could have been enough to send people AWAY from Christ.

Think about it. What could be more improbable than The King coming as lowly, born to poor parents, baby, lying in a feeding trough?

But listen, Dear Ones, Our God still operates this way today.
God puts that VERY Treasure, The Son, in unlikely places.
God puts Christ in us!

And we have to do as the shepherds did - trust, in spite of our terror.

"I wanna serve God but don't ask me to do _____"

What fills in YOUR blank?

We need to trust Jesus with our fears and trust Jesus to be who He says that He is, and take Him at His Word.

Some people might say, "I don't see it" because, perhaps, they're not looking with faith. Faith first, and then SIGHT!

So – TERROR then TRUST...
...which leads to...

TESTIMONY

When the shepherds saw...they told.

That's testimony - telling others what you've seen and heard personally.

And BONUS: their testimony, *what they had to tell*, came RIGHT FROM an angel of the Lord.

They didn't just talk about what they saw...they told about the life-changing "good news" they heard.

It had to have been written on their hearts. They'd had THE personal experience about (and then they SAW) the Christ of Christmas.

Can't you envision them getting to the stable and blubbering to Mary and Joseph about what they'd experienced...and Mary and Joseph nodding and smiling to each other 'cause they knew. The shepherds' news confirmed what they'd already experienced.

The shepherds remind us, this Christmas, to tell others (give our testimony) about what has happened to us because you know Jesus Christ personally.

The response the shepherds got, we heard from v. 18 is that people were amazed by what they were told by the shepherds!

The phrase "told them" appears FOUR times in this passage! They can't stop TELLING!!

Our testimony is EXACTLY what the world *can't* give.

More than any wrapped gift under the Christmas tree, the world wants – make that needs - THE GIFT of Jesus Christ the most!

So don't whisper it.

Talking about Jesus needs to happen OUT LOUD!

And don't be afraid (there it is) to DO your testimony either. Others need what we've got – sometimes that's socks or a warm meal, but mostly, it US encouraging THEM to know Jesus Christ in their lives, too.

'Cause, we've been changed, right?

The shepherds were too! When they went back to their sheep, but they were different!

Yes, they went back to doing what they knew how to do BUT while they did it, they did what the angels had done: they "*glorified and praised God.*"

We can't be ashamed to share our testimony of the Lord.

As Linus says, at the end of his monologue: "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

Don't miss the message of Christmas.

Face your fears. And replace those fears with a fear (meaning a respectful awe) of God.

Trust Jesus with that fear.

And Tell others about Him. It's your testimony so testify!

That is "Christmas through SHEPHERDS' eyes!"

Amen!