

## Encountering Jesus: The Shepherds, Luke 2:1-20, 12/3/17

About 10 years ago I was sitting in my office at MBC in DC and I received a phone call from a guy that was new to the church and someone told him that a pastor might be able to help him with some challenges in his marriage and so we were talking and I scheduled an appointment for him and his wife to come in to meet the following day. Our scheduled appointment comes and goes and they don't show... Call them up, "They say, oh sorry, yeah we kind of figured it out... but thanks." A couple years go by, I forgot all about this, I finish preaching a message and a guy comes up to me and says, "Pastor Nate I have to confess something to you. I called you up a couple years ago about my marriage and wanted to meet with you, and then we never showed." Ok, I kind of remember that. "Well I lied, the reason we never came in is because after we hung up the phone I looked you up on the website and I saw a picture of you, and you looked like you were about 15 and I told my wife we weren't going in to talk to a kid...what does he know about marriage? I'm sorry, you just weren't what we were expecting." We ended up becoming friends and wouldn't you know I helped them in some marriage challenges they had later. But I just wasn't what they were expecting...and rightly so! Lt. Dan- White, Jewish cop who wants to help with diapers in his police car... probably not what West Center City expected... but in a good way.

Today, as we enter into advent, we are going to see why the shepherds of the nativity scene would have been the last people anyone would have expected to be part of the story of the coming of the Savior Jesus Christ. Let's read the nativity story, understand it from its original context and then find out what God has for us to apply to our lives.

### Luke 2:1-5

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.*

*<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.*

Now let's just stop for a second. Notice that the Christmas story does not read like a fairy-tale, like a myth- Once upon a time in a galaxy far, far away... No- it's historical non-fiction, written within a few decades. In a place, specific people, specific time. Meant to be trusted.

### Luke 2:6-14

*<sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

*<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

*<sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

*<sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

### **What is a Herald?**

Just to get your head around the scene here, it was commonplace in the first century when you had your firstborn to hire a herald to announce the good news. If they only had a little bit of money, it would be a little herald. If they had big money, it would be epic herald, Pavarotti, U2... and make a big deal of it. We kind of understand this, we do something similar but with pictures. You take pictures of your baby, and then you mail them out to people. Wealthy, famous people do that bigger than you. We just posted ours on Facebook- "New baby." Other people are like full-on mail out, with gold embroidering, glitter falls out, new, baby scented paper right? We have these ways of heralding the birth of a child.

Well, Mary and Joseph are broke. Not only that, but they're not even in their hometown anymore. In fact, they're in a stable. But this is God's firstborn, and he heralds just like you would expect God to herald. Hark, the Herald Angels...He goes big! So that's expected. But what was NOT expected was that the recipients of this heralding spectacular put on by the angels would have been some shepherds.

### **Unexpected Shepherds**

We have a soft spot in our hearts for shepherds, David was a shepherd, Jesus is called the great shepherd...maybe that's your favorite part in the Christmas play...but during this time in Israel? Not so much. Shepherds were the lowest of the low on the social wrung, just a step above lepers. The shepherds were considered thieves by many and not to be trusted, In the Mishna, ancient Jewish writings, we see they were not only low socially but they were looked as living in general violation of religious law. They were discriminated against, avoided and invisible to the people of that day.

So why the shepherds? If you were orchestrating this, if you were a PR agent and you were designing a campaign to announce that the Savior of the world had been born, the last people you would go to is a bunch of shepherds. You would say, we need to go to the people who have the greatest influence. We want to go to the movers and the shakers. We want to go to the people who have the ear of the

world. We might consider going to the high priest and Pharisees... might even send a press release to Caesar Augustus to let him know that the true Savior had been born. Shepherds? Not on your life.

Not what people would have expected...Except if people were reading their Bibles about the coming Messiah, **Isaiah 61:1**. A messianic prophesy- And He says, **"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me."** It's the one Jesus quotes in Luke 4 in the temple and says He fulfills. But He says, **"The Lord has anointed Me to preach the good news to the (poor) lowly and afflicted and He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted and to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners."**

When the Messiah comes...what does he do? Just that. He's going to touch the untouchable, he's going to see the invisible, he's going to speak to the voiceless, he's going to save the sinners. We have just spent the last several weeks looking at many of those stories from the Book of John. And so while no one else expected the shepherds to be the first to hear this good news, for God's grace to come to them, in God's economy they were top of the list! So amazing display, announce the savior of the world.

**Luke 2:15**

***15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."***

How would these men know where to find Jesus? Remember what the angels said in v.12? they would find him lying in a manger. Now that's just an unheard of thing and very unusual, probably never happened. A manger wasn't a bassinet or a crib, it was a **stone feeding trough for animals (Picture)...**

***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 spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.***

***19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.***

So these nobody shepherds become not only the first visitors privileged to see the Savior, but they become the first evangelists, proclaiming the good news of the Savior born. Amazing isn't it?

So what about us? God is trying to get our attention so that we understand something about His economy.

**People look at status, God looks into souls.**

NoVA story- measure status by zipcode 64 or 65? We do it by what school our kids go to. DE License plate- #11 sold for 675k a few years ago, worth more than his house. Version of iPhone, followers on twitter, you name it we can figure out a way to measure our status by it. Status is just so important to us, our way we measure our self-worth. God doesn't care about that one bit.

God looks at the inside. **1 Samuel 16:7 God does not look at outward appearance, but looks at the heart.**

What is the quality he's looking for? Humility. He's looking to reveal himself to the humble. To give grace to the humble. Uses the humble. **What does humble look like? Someone who sees himself not better than anyone else, with faults and failures, in need of a savior.** See we try to hide who we really are behind nice clothes, houses, our manners, a nice smile... The attitude of Paul in **1 Timothy 1:15 Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.** I only know my own issues and I can't speak for anyone else. Salvation through Jesus comes only to people who believe they need it! And God is looking to use people like that. God's economy is upside down! I want to hire the best and brightest! So do you if you are in business...and rightly so. But is not like man.

**1 Corinthians 1:26-29**

***<sup>26</sup> Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.***

***<sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him.***

Here's what happens when we **humble ourselves-**

**We realize that we are shepherds too.** Just some regular people who God showed grace too... Whatever our social media, or title, or degrees say don't matter...Because we are no better, no different than anyone else, but for the grace of God. Do you think if you grew up on Madison St. in West Center that your life would look different? Walking the streets and meeting people you realize that we all suffer from the same human condition- they are often just more honest about it.

**2) We start seeing with Jesus' eyes**

God gives us eyes to see people that world doesn't see but God sees. The invisible people- Kid at school who sits by himself? Special needs? Someone in the neighborhood? West Center city?

**3) We give grace like Jesus gave to us** Communion

