

## **SHEPHERDS: THE FIRST WITNESSES**

### **Luke 2:8-20**

**(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 Savior, 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 to 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, thy 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.**

### **Introduction**

The Child had finally been born. All history had been marching forward toward this event. The Word had truly made Himself flesh. The much prophesied and much anticipated Messiah had arrived, but not in the way everyone expected. There was no earthquake, no fire, nor smoke, the night Jesus took His first breath as a sinless human. His earthly parents were common people, not aristocrats. He was born in a manger, not

in a mansion. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, not in silk, satin, and fine linen. He was born in a hick town, not in Jerusalem, the Holy City.

Yet, this historical night did not pass without some reliable eye witnesses. There were shepherds keeping watch over their sheep at night to protect the flock from thieves and wild animals. (Domesticated sheep are very vulnerable, prone to wander, and have no natural defense against predators. Because of selective breeding, all of the aggressive survival instincts have been neutralized. This made them ideal for sacrifice in the Old Testament. However, the males, when they mature, can be aggressive. (Think of the Los Angeles Rams football team.)

While these shepherds were experiencing what they thought would be a routine, uneventful night, an angel of the Lord appeared unto them and filled them with fear. The angel quelled their fear and announced that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The angel gave detail signs to remove all ambiguity. The shepherds would find a newborn baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. Under normal circumstances, shepherds would not be looking for a child and certainly not in an animal feeding trough. The uniqueness of these signs helped the shepherds search for the Child and confirm the angelic message.

Without warning, the angel was joined by a multitude of additional angels praising God by singing a hymn of praise.

After the angelic host departed, the shepherds quickly went in search of the child and found Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus, who was lying in a manger.

Why shepherds? Theologians have long puzzled over the significance of this angelic appearance to the shepherds. Jesus was a decedent of David. David was a shepherd before becoming a king, so the shepherds may also carry some Davidic symbolism.

Most likely, the revelation to shepherds parallel and reinforce the lowly circumstance of the Savior's birth. He was born in a barn because there was no room in the inn. Because of their work, shepherds were almost always ceremonially unclean and were generally distrusted and viewed negatively. (What's new? There are individuals in our society, whose work is critical to our economy, yet many look down on them.) The angel appeared not initially to the rich and powerful or to the particularly perceived righteous and religious, but to the lowly shepherds, to average people who would be receptive to the message.

Let's look at a few of the incidents in this narrative and extract some spiritual and practical truths.

## **Exposition**

### **1. The Shepherds Were Diligently Doing Their Job.**

(They Were Doing What They Were Supposed To Be Doing.)

(They Were Committed Caretakers.)

(God Honors Honest Hard Work.)

(Hard Work Is Not Always Manual Labor.)

### **2. The Shepherds Were Led By God's Unseen Hand.**

(It Was No Coincidence That At The Time Of Jesus' Birth They Were Near Bethlehem.)

(Shepherds Move Their Sheep In A Large Grazing Circumference That Includes Many Miles.)

(Were It Not For The Hand Of God, They Could Have Been Miles From Bethlehem.)

### **3. The Shepherds Put Their Knowledge Into Action.**

(They Left Immediately To Find The Baby.)

(Sometimes You Have To Break Your Routine And Seize The Sacred Moment.)

### **4. The Shepherds Witnessed and Worshipped The Christ Child.**

(They Accomplished their Mission: They Found Jesus.)

### **5. The Shepherds Became Bold Missionaries After Worship.**

(They Were Not Afraid Or Ashamed To Tell The Wondrous Story.)

## **Closing Thoughts**

The shepherds responded with praise, worship, and witness. The people who heard their report responded with receptive amazement. Mary responded with quiet reflection. How have you and I responded to the good news of the birth of Jesus, the Savior, the Christ, the Messiah, the Lord? Our response will make all the difference in the world.

Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

**Copyright © 2024 By James C. Ward**

**All Rights Reserved**