

Sermon 13 December 2015 'Our Coming Saviour: Shepherds'
Luke 2:1-20 Is 7:10-16; Ps 19:1-6

Prayer: May the Words of our Mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our God. Amen

Today I have a quick introduction to our video. Our focus on this 3rd Sunday coming up to Christmas is on “**The Shepherds**”. The good news of our coming Saviour’s actual arrival was first given to shepherds, minding their own business, looking after the sheep on a cold winter’s night outside Bethlehem.

For a moment I invite you to imagine the most emotion-laden experience that comes to your mind, and then multiply it exponentially in number. That volume of emotional outburst **might just** begin to paint the picture of what the shepherds must have been feeling *that* night when they were not only visited by the angel of the Lord, but they also found themselves in the presence of the multitude of the heavenly host.

What began in the shepherds’ minds as just another ordinary night on the late shift, watching their sheep, soon unfolded into the most extraordinary evening of their lives. This minimum-waged group of men were given front row seats to the Hallelujah chorus along with backstage passes to seek the King. *Only* Luke shares the story of the shepherds among the four Gospels.

These men simply were doing their job like they did every day. It was neither a glamorous job nor a job that was viewed in high regard by the more sophisticated in first-century Jewish society. In fact, it was one of the lowest jobs around and considered by many to be the lowest rung on society’s ladder in that day. However, it was steady work, and somebody had to do it—even if they were considered the social outcasts in that day and time.

But the outcasts quickly would become the insiders on what God was up to on the other side of the hills where their sheep were grazing and bedding down for the night. Their insider status immediately filled them with understandable *fear*. Not only were they in the presence of the angel of the Lord, but also they were standing in the middle of the glory of the Lord, which surrounded them on all sides. Sensing their fear, the angel of the Lord immediately spoke to their terror before ever delivering *any subsequent* word of good news. ‘Don’t be frightened’ the angel said – before giving the Good News!

When Christmas was coming, God had obviously decided who would receive the good news first and the angel was sent to the shepherds. The good news first went to the outcasts of society on the lowest rung of the ladder who were in the paddocks, rather than to important and influential people at the top of society’s ladder. *Yes*, this message of good news in the form of a Saviour would be for the privileged, but it started at the bottom, on the margins of life rather than on the top or middle of society’s center.

The shepherds’ job and way of life made it unmanageable for them to meet all the religious ritual requirements leading to ceremonial purity; so they were not qualified to worship at the temple. But **they** were chosen by God to be the first to receive the good news and this helps shape from the start this long-awaited message of hope. This Saviour, embodying good news, was meant to include the socially despised, economically depressed, and religiously shunned in the world. This good news would extend to all people—nobody gets left out of this joyous news of salvation.

It must be pointed out that although the shepherds clearly heard the message of the angel of the Lord and experienced the heavenly host worshipping at full volume, there still was a choice regarding what the shepherds would do next. They chose to “go with haste,” according to verse 16.

We can learn good lesson from the obedience of the shepherds. How many times do we hear and understand what God wants us to do, but we delay action? Delayed obedience is disobedience. The Bible is full of people who clearly heard what the Lord wanted them to do but responded with scepticism, delay, and disobedience. Just a few accounts in Scripture are found in places such as Genesis 3:6, 8-21, 24; 2 Kings 2:15-18; Luke 1:20-22; John 20:24-25, 29. But we do not find delayed obedience with the shepherds in Luke 2. They responded to the message with haste, and rushed to Bethlehem to find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Video: ->

The shepherds found what they were looking for: Jesus. They met his mom and dad and looked at the baby Jesus all wrapped up in swaddling clothes in the manger—just as they had been told. When the shepherds told these things to Mary and the others who they came into contact with, they became the first evangelists in the history of the world; ordinary people with an **extra**ordinary message of good news.

It all started from the lips of the shepherds who left the manger that night with hearts and lives full of joy as they were “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them” (v. 20). They didn’t keep it to themselves. They shared the angel’s news with all they came in contact with as they returned to their hills and pastures with the sheep. The Saviour had Come!

After the singing of our next Carol the Children’s Church are following the lead of the Shepherds and will tell us about the Good News: The saviour has come.