

ADVENT QUESTIONS - WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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Facebook Sentence – The Shepherds worship the newborn Jesus

TEXT: Luke 2:8-20

December 18 – the fourth Sunday of Advent. Where is the time going? Can you believe that Christmas is just seven days away? I don't know about you, but I am very far behind! Time just seems to be flying and it's not slowing down to help me get all of my preparations done. Anybody else feel like that? All too often, in the midst of the busyness of the season, I think we miss something. Somehow, we miss the joy and the wonder of the season. Oh, we sing of the joy and peace - the love of Christmas, but somehow at times, it just doesn't seem to reach down deep inside.

The story goes of one of those last-minute Christmas shoppers, running furiously from store to store, with her little 3-year-old boy tagging along. Suddenly she became aware that the pudgy little hand of her son was no longer clutched in hers. In a panic she retraced her steps and found him standing with his little nose pressed flatly against the frosty window. He was gazing at a manger scene. Hearing his mother's

near hysterical call, he turned and shouted with innocent delight:
“Mommy! It's Jesus - baby Jesus, laying in the hay!” With obvious indifference to his joy and wonder, she impatiently jerked him away saying, “We don't have time for that!”¹

How about you? Have you taken time to gaze in joy and wonder at the baby Jesus? Have you stopped to marvel at the wonders of His love?

Christmas is about the greatest gift of all – given for you and for me – the gift of love from the Father of His one and only Son. And our question for today is – what will you do with this gift? How will you respond? What will you do now that you have been to the manger and received the gift of love?

Notice today what happens when the shepherds heard the news of the birth of Jesus and drew near to the manger. This story of the shepherds, found in Luke, chapter 2, is one that is so familiar, as we hear it every Christmas. Today I invite you to watch the story as depicted in the movie, “*Why the Nativity?*” from David Jeremiah’s new movie

about the birth of Christ. And I want you to just imagine – imagine that you were one of the shepherds, watching your sheep by night, in the fields near Bethlehem.

<<SHOW VIDEO CLIP>>

It is such an amazing thing to think that the shepherds would have received an angelic message like this! From an earthly point of view, they're the most unlikely group to receive such a message! In fact, as Pastor John MacArthur says, “if the announcement of Jesus’ birth had been part of a humanly planned public relations campaign, it would have been handled very differently. The announcement would have targeted the powerful and influential in Israel: the high priest, the members of the Sanhedrin, the priests, Levites, scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees. Instead, God chose to reveal this glorious truth, first of all, to members of a lowly, despised group.” God first announced the birth of Jesus to these humble shepherds.

These shepherds were considered by society as the lowlife, outcasts if you will. Laborers. Uneducated. Shepherds were considered social misfits, and religious outcasts. They were considered unclean and

were not able to participate in temple worship. They spent their entire lives taking care of sheep.

It was to these simple people of the fields that God's message first came. The Lord came to the lowly, to the most undeserving, to the neglected and marginalized. The shepherds help us to see that God has a message for sinners just like us. Everyone matters to God! The only announcement of Christ's birth goes out to a bunch of uneducated outcasts. And beyond all the things that would make other people look down on them, these shepherds around Bethlehem were likely very special among shepherds. In the temple, morning and evening, an unblemished lamb was offered as a sacrifice to God. To see that the supply of perfect and unblemished offerings were always available, the temple authorities had their own private sheep flocks and we know that these flocks were pastured near Bethlehem. It is most likely that the shepherds were in charge of the flocks from which the temple offerings were chosen. It is a lovely thought to think that the shepherds who

looked after the temple flocks were the first to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

So how did the shepherds respond to this wonderful, incredible announcement from the angels? And how can their response make a difference in our own faith journey? Luke 2:15-16 tells us *“When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.”*

The shepherds **heard the good** news of a Savior being born – and they believed! In fact, you could say that they were the first converts – the first to receive Christ as their Savior. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah and they knew that they needed to follow Him. Their decision to have faith in the good news is an example to us. Faith comes by hearing and believing the good news!

After hearing the good news of the angels – the shepherds didn’t just believe the message – they also took a step of faith and **responded**

and followed the directions of the angels. They didn't just sit on the hillside and discuss what just happened. They went with haste to Bethlehem to see the Christ-child for themselves.

G.L. Chappell, in his sermon, sets up a hypothetical situation in which the shepherds respond quite differently. They simply sit around discussing the brightness of the angelic appearance and the wonder of the message.

Some 40 years later, one of the shepherds tell his small grandson about that eventful night. The youngster asks, "But Granddaddy, was what the angels said really true?" The shepherd continues telling him what he has heard about Jesus, even the reports of His resurrection. But when the lad keeps asking, all the elderly shepherd can do is shake his head and say, "I don't really know. I never went to see."³

Many people are like that shepherd. They have heard about Jesus but they have never come to Him. They haven't taken action – to take that step of faith and become a disciple and follow Him.

The shepherds teach us that we need to respond to the good news of

the gospel. To confess our faith – our belief in Jesus as our Savior – and then to follow – to get up and take that step of faith and be active in following Him.

Once they get to Bethlehem, they were able to find where Mary and Joseph were staying in the stable and there, they saw Jesus, lying there in a manger. Now – can you imagine what they did when they saw the baby? I imagine that they immediately fell to their knees in adoration and awe. And then – look what they did. Luke 2:17-19 says, *“After seeing Him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.”*

I kind of imagine them all talking quickly and excitedly, describing the incredible scene of a multitude of angels, praising God. Thus, they were **rejoicing and proclaiming** the good news of the angels. They couldn’t keep the good news to themselves! And Mary was amazed and kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And then – as the shepherds left the manger, they continued to spread the word about the miracle of the angels and the birth of Jesus. You could say that the shepherds were actually the first evangelists/missionaries to spread the word about God’s precious Lamb! You and I are here today, in part, because they couldn’t keep quiet once they had encountered the Christ child.

A question for you and me today is this: in what area of your life is God calling you to be to take some sort of action? It's not enough just to *say* you have faith, or to *know about* the baby Jesus born and lying in a manger. There comes a time that after seeing we must be involved in sharing!

Like the shepherds on that first Christmas night, you and I have a wonderful message to share. There are so many people who don't know the good news - who don't even know what Christmas is all about. **Romans 10:14-15** says, “*but how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him and how can they hear about Him unless*

someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the scriptures say, “how beautiful are the feet of the messengers who bring good news.”

We are called to be like the disciples and proclaim the good news so that others will come to know our Savior!

And notice one more thing about the shepherds! Luke 2:20 tells us that, *“the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”*

One of the wonderful things about this story is realizing that the shepherds went back to their same routine jobs, but they weren't the same on the inside any longer! They returned to where they started, they went back to the mundane routines, they hung out with the same people, they lived with the same family members, they traveled some of the same pathways they had before... but they did it as different people!

They continually glorified and praised God for all that they had seen and heard, and that would make a difference for the rest of their life! After meeting Jesus at Christmas, and for that matter after meeting Him each

and every week in worship, we go back to the same routines of our lives but the good news is we can go back as changed people! And we can go forward changed for the rest of our lives! We can know a hope that goes beyond despair, a peace that passes all understanding, a joy that rises above our circumstances and a love that endures forever! We can know a Savior who lived and died to forgive our sins..... and lives again and walks beside us everyday of our lives. That is worth celebrating and praising God each and every day! That is a message worth sharing to a broken and hurting world!

So, the questions remain – now that you have heard the good news of Jesus being born for YOU – what will you do with Jesus? Will you be a shepherd? How will you respond? What will you do now?

PRAYER AND INVITATION

RESOURCES

¹Source: Glenn Pease, “The Wonder of Christmas”

² From Pastor Freddy Fritz – sermoncentral – “Jesus is Visited by Shepherds”.

³H. V Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI.](#))

