

Christmas Eve Service

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 December 2020

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0 : 00] Luke 2, verses 1-20, which records the birth of Jesus Christ.

! And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

[1 : 18] And the angel said to them, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told to them concerning this child.

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

One of my favorite classes in seminary was Old Testament survey. And I enjoyed that class so much because we had such a great teacher.

[2 : 50] He had visited the Holy Land on many occasions. And so, as he walked us through the Old Testament, he would show us pictures of the actual sites where these things recorded in Scripture had truly and genuinely occurred.

And I'll never forget one particular picture that he showed to us. It's still vivid in my mind. All these years later, and it was a picture of a shepherd boy, a modern-day shepherd boy, taken by our professor on one of his most recent journeys to the Holy Land.

The boy in the picture looked like he could have stepped right out of our Bibles. Though he was young, he looked old beyond his years, probably as a result of his youth not being spent playing video games or with toys, but working tirelessly in the field, guiding his sheep, and defending them against predators and tending to their wounds.

His clothes were tattered. They were littered with holes and faded. Our teacher mentioned that he, like all shepherds that he had encountered in that region, put off a repugnant aroma that could be smelt from a considerable distance away from them, which made them undesirable to be in close contact with.

A shepherd's job today, as it was back then, is not a glamorous occupation. It's a job for the poor. It's a job for the lower classes of society.

[4 : 36] It's a hard job. It's a dirty job. And it's a job that pays very little for how much work and effort you have to put into it. During the time of Jesus' birth, a shepherd's life was ironic.

Many of the sheep that they cared for would be used as sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people.

These creatures cleansed them of their sin. And the shepherds, because of their close contact with them, were filthy too.

Which made them unclean in the eyes of that society. And so it was ironic that these men who cared for the lambs, that would be appointed to die on the altar as sacrifices to the Lord for the sins of the people, in order to cleanse them of their uncleanness, were looked down upon and despised because they were unclean.

An unclean occupation which they carried out in caring for these lambs. The lambs would be used for the people's worship, but the shepherds were viewed as being too dirty, too unclean, to participate with them.

[6 : 03] The situation and treatment of a shepherd was also ironic because it was the job of the shepherd to protect the sheep from predators.

To save the sheep that would atone for the sins of the people by sacrificing themselves, if necessary, to spare these lambs.

Their job was important, but it wasn't a job that men respected. Then one night, in a region, on the outskirts of Bethlehem, a little tiny town, as shepherds sat at their posts, watching over their flocks, likely in silence, so as to hear any kind of disturbance from a predator, that they could spring into action to protect them, their unsuspecting sheep.

In the midst of that quiet, the starry sky was torn apart by a heavenly herald. The night sky was instantly filled with the light of the glory of God.

I think of it like when you're fast asleep in your room with all the lights turned off, and then suddenly somebody opens the door and turns on all the light. You're startled, aren't you?

[7 : 27] You're upset, probably too, aren't you? As your eyes try to readjust from being dilated to be able to focus on what is happening, startling you, blinding you, scaring you, as you are instantly flooded with an alarming light.

The shepherds were understandably terrified by this light, bright as the sun, as they realized that the source of this great light that they were seeing was an angel of God.

But what would a celestial being want or have to do with grimy, dirty, unclean shepherds?

So they were understandably terrified. Terrified. Surely, like so many others recorded in Scripture who encountered an angel, they were aware of their unfitness to be in the presence of something that was holy.

Almost like attending a meeting or a party, and you get there and you realize that you are woefully underdressed for the occasion, embarrassed.

[8 : 42] And if that's been you, then you understand in just a very small way what it must have felt like for them in that moment.

And not only that, but what news, again, would a being of such high, heavenly station, what would they have to share with them who occupied such a low station in life?

It couldn't be good, you would think. What would an angel sent by God have to do with impoverished paupers and unclean outcasts? Couldn't be good news.

But then the angel spoke, and the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Terror gave way to astonishment. After all this time, the promised one, the Savior, the Messiah, had come. And he'd been given, the angel said, for all people, even people like them.

[9 : 59] This child, the angel said, was a Savior, referring to his ability to save, to make a final atonement for sin. He was the Christ, the deliverer, the redeemer, whom their God-given prophecies from long ago promised would one day come.

This child was the Lord, meaning that he was divine, a man, but so much more than a man, a God-man. Shepherds probably were the last ones to know when important news broke.

They likely received their news from second and third-hand, maybe fourth-hand sources. Because again, while what they did was important, they were treated as unimportant.

Such news, we'd think, as would the shepherds have thought, should be delivered to people of a higher station in society of greater influence than what they had.

But this news was given to them first and exclusively. These men who were used to being on the outside, looking in, had the inside scoop.

[11 : 16] in a front row seat to an awesome worship service as suddenly the angel was joined by a multitude of other angels who collectively praised God together, saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth among men, those whom he is pleased.

So what a strange turn of events. One moment darkness and stillness, maybe the occasional annoying sound of a sheep bleeding in the pasture, then brightness, followed by an amazing message concluded with an out-of-this-world worship experience.

In the midst of these events, though, the shepherds received an invitation with detailed instructions. The angel said, and this will be a sign for you.

You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying, and of all places, a manger. They were invited by God to visit His Son who was their Savior, their Messiah, their Lord, and they would find Him in a familiar place.

A manger. A place where lambs, like the ones they were watching, were kept and ate.

[12:44] This Savior, their Savior, was found by them exactly as the angels had described. And how fitting, considering all that we now know about Jesus, that He emptied Himself, that He added a human nature to His divine one.

He came to an unclean world stained by sin, to an unclean people, to outcasts like the shepherds in order to become the perfect, spotless, sinless Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. The child's coming would establish peace between God, creator of man, and His fallen image bearers who time and again repeatedly rejected Him.

And so it would be for the rest of Jesus' earthly life. From Bethlehem as a baby to Calvary as a man.

Jesus moved among the people, was accessible to the people. He went into their homes. He touched their blind eyes.

[14:08] He permitted their unclean hands to touch Him, to pierce Him, and to kill Him, to atone as a substitute sacrifice for the poor in spirit and for the spiritual outcast.

Removing their stains, their uncleanliness, their shame by willingly taking it upon Himself. And just as Jesus was born surrounded by those who were outcasts, poor, and despised, so He would one day die in a similar environment on the cross.

Crucified between thieves, out in the open air, being cast out of the city where He was crucified outside of its walls.

And so when the shepherds arrived that night, they beheld a child who was their Messiah, their Savior, the Son of God, who was rich but became poor so that in His poverty they might become rich through His being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

And in so doing, He becomes their good shepherd who served and who willingly sacrificed, laying His life down for His sheep.

[15:41] In John 10, 11, Jesus said, I am the good shepherd. Lord, the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. And so He has. And so those of us who have trusted in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior know Him as the Lamb of God.

We know Him as the good shepherd who has taken away our sins and who has clothed us in His righteousness. We've received the same good news that the shepherds received out in that field so long ago.

And likewise, we share in their joy. He came to die. Jesus did. That we may live.

And He lives today. That we too will have eternal life. In Luke 2.20, He records that as the shepherds returned, they were glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard as it had been told to them.

What a great day in the lives of these shepherds. Though so much had happened so unexpectedly and confusingly, these men got the point.

[17:04] They understood as we should today that Christmas is not about the worth and goodness of humanity but of the astounding grace and mercy of God to send His most precious gift, a child, a lamb, a shepherd who is our Savior.

Let's pray. Lord, we are so thankful that You have come. We are so thankful for what we have to celebrate not just tonight but always that You have come, that You willingly died on the cross for our sins, that You rose from the grave on the third day.

You've ascended to heaven where You seat at the right hand of the Father even now hearing our prayers. And Lord, we anticipate Your soon return.

And in the meanwhile, Lord, we pray that like the shepherds we would praise You and glorify You for the fact that in You, Lord, we have a lamb, a shepherd, a Savior, and a King who reigns eternally.

Lord, we pray that as we prepare here soon to leave from this place that we would go filled with the joy and knowing that Christ has come and that Christ will come again.
[18 : 39] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.