

## **LARGE-PRINT**

**Devotions for the Week of December 23, 2018**

***“It’s A Boy!”: The Shepherds Speak***

**North East United Methodist Church**

**By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

**Sunday, December 23, 2018**

**Read Luke 2: 1-20.**

On that first quiet Christmas night, as the star shone over the manger, and shepherds cared for their sheep in the fields, God taught us many a lesson by sending His angels to appear to the shepherds.

Shepherding was a despised occupation at the time. In the first century, shepherds were scorned as shiftless, dishonest people who grazed their flocks on others’ lands. They were dirty, uneducated, and poor. Yet, who did the angels appear to, announcing the birth of the Christ child?

The angels appear to the shepherds and announce that there will be joy for “*all the people.*” The birth of Jesus will be a sign for all the people, all Israel, for the “*long-awaited*” Messiah has been born. What the prophets have spoken about over the centuries has now come to pass.

R. Alan Culpepper writes, “*Consider in what splendor God might have come, but instead God slipped unobtrusively into a small province far from the seat of earthly power, born to a young couple, unwed or only recently married. No elaborate preparations were made for the birth. God was born on the road. The crib was a feed trough, and those who came to visit were shepherds, not kings. By entering human history in this way, God identified with the powerless, the oppressed, the poor, the homeless.*”

Many times, we feel we are unworthy of this incredible gift that God gives in His Son, Jesus Christ. We are unworthy to experience forgiveness for our past misdeeds so we attempt to make up for our mistakes by working harder, doing more, reaching out, or we simply give up.

We are unworthy. God's gift is magnificent and extravagant. There is nothing we can do to deserve it; we must simply accept it. God teaches us, by sending His angels to appear to the shepherds in the fields, that first Christmas night, that God is ready to meet us and love us right where we are, as we are, with His grace and love.

This Christmas, allow God to meet you where you are...simply open your heart to Him, to Christ, and allow the announcement of His birth to begin to change your character, your life, your priorities, your sight. Let Christmas be the beginning of the next stage of your journey...You are not worthy...but God loves you anyway...You cannot earn His love...but God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, anyway...You are dirty and smelly like the shepherds...but God decided to announce the birth of His Son to people just like you...Celebrate and take time to leave the fields and travel to see the Christ Child this Christmas. God wants you to know, regardless of how you come, you are MOST WELCOMED!

### **Monday, December 24, 2018**

#### **Read John 10: 1-16.**

Throughout the scriptures, shepherds are spoken of and used in explaining God's expectations and Christ's character. In the Gospel of John, Jesus compares himself to a "*good shepherd*." Again, Jesus doesn't compare himself to the respected and well-known members of society, but to the

outcast, the disrespected, shepherd who journeyed miles and miles, fighting against the elements, protecting his sheep from weather, robbers, and wild animals.

A shepherd not only protected his sheep, but knew all his sheep by name. The sheep also knew the voice of the shepherd and the sheep would listen to that voice. The shepherd would lay down his life for the sheep and would travel great distances to save one that was lost.

Jesus makes it clear that He is our “*good shepherd*,” reaching out to the one who is lost, protecting His sheep, loving them, knowing them by name, and most importantly, “*laying down his life for the sheep*,” for us.

The Christmas story begins with the announcement of Jesus’ birth to the shepherds and builds up to Jesus becoming a man and laying his life down for us, just as those shepherds, who first heard the news, were willing to lay down their lives for their sheep.

We cannot hear the Christmas story of a baby being born in a manger without also seeing the shadow of the cross falling over that stable. We cannot celebrate Christmas without remembering that the baby grew to be a man and laid down His life for us.

Take time tonight to give thanks for the “*good shepherd*” who laid down His life for you, who knows you by name, who protects you from harm, who sought you out when you were lost, and who loves you.

**Tuesday, December 25, 2018 – MERRY CHRISTMAS!**

**Read Matthew 25: 31-46.**

At Christmas we not only remember the birth of the Christ child, and the fact that the child born in Bethlehem grew up into

a man who laid down His life for us, but we also remember and look forward to, preparing our hearts for, His return. Advent and Christmas is a time to remember that one day Christ will come again and we will meet Him, like the shepherds and wise men, face to face.

On that day, Jesus says the sheep will be separated from the goats, or in other words, those who have cared for the oppressed, given to the poor, reached out to the brokenhearted, loved those who are hurting, will be separated from those who did not. Why? Because anyone who loves God cannot “*not love*” others. Therefore, our love for the hurting and those in need shows our love for God and is the “*fruit*” that signifies that our love for God is real.

Culpepper writes, “*The Christmas story tells the birth of a new king. This child would be given the throne of his father, David. The world was moving according to the orders of Caesar Augustus, but although he was hailed as the great bringer of peace, real peace on earth would be realized only through the sovereignty of the child born in Bethlehem. This is the story of the birth of a new kind of king. The birth reveals a new world order, a world not under Caesar but under the direction of God’s design for the redemption of all peoples. In this world, God’s Word is heard by the humble. There is a place even for shepherds. There is hope for the oppressed, and those who heard what God is doing were filled with joy. God has not forgotten us or abandoned us to the brokenness we have created...Among [us], God can do the divine new work.*”

A “*new world order.*” “*God’s Word*” heard by the people. A place for all people, “*even shepherds.*” God can do a “*new work*” through us. Christ came and taught and opened our hearts to love, to the character of God, to becoming vessels, every one

of us, regardless of our backgrounds, that God can work through to touch the lives of others. God works through the shepherds, announcing the “good news” of the birth of Christ and the story ends, “*The shepherds went back to their fields and flocks, glorifying and praising God for what the angels had told them...The shepherds told everyone what had happened.*”

God’s great gift of love that first Christmas set the stage, bore the example, of the love that we should show each other. Ours should be a love that is sacrificial, giving, and available to all people, regardless of their color, background, or social status. This love that we share will show Christ our love for Him.

How are you showing Christ your love for Him this Christmas? Who are you reaching out to? Giving to? Sharing Christmas with? As God shared His love with you that first Christmas and to all people, how are you sharing Christ’s love to all people, especially those who are hurting, hungry, oppressed, and on the outskirts of society? How can you reach out this Christmas and, in the year, to come? Pray that God will show you opportunities to reach “*the least of these, [Christ’s] brothers and sisters...*”

### **Wednesday, December 26, 2018**

#### **Read Ezekiel 34: 11-24 and Psalm 23.**

Both of these passages of scriptures show that God is like a shepherd who protects and cares for His helpless flock, us. God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel, and says, “*I will rescue my flock, and they will no longer be abused and destroyed...I will give them good pastureland...I will feed them...they will lie down...I will tend my sheep and cause them to lie down in peace...I will search for my lost ones who strayed away...I will feed them, yes – feed them justice!*”

Give thanks this Christmas for our Father in heaven, or our great shepherd, for the God who created the universe and loves us so much He sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Wow! What a gift! God cares enough about us to not only send us His Son, but God looks out for us and if we allow Him, if we listen, if we are willing to be obedient and follow, God will lead us like a shepherd to “*good pastureland,*” will “*feed us justice,*” will find us when we “*stray away,*” and will tend to us and allow us to “*lie down in peace.*”

Spend some time this Christmas listening for the voice of the shepherd. Simply take time to sit with God and talk with Him and listen to His words of comfort in Ezekiel 34 and Psalm 23. Hear His voice this Christmas and be comforted.

### **Thursday, December 27, 2018**

#### **Read Revelation 4.**

In Revelation 4, John receives a vision of heaven, and thousands of living creatures and angels are singing, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.*” Like that night in the fields, when the angels sang the announcement of Christ’s birth, one day we will join with the angels in singing of the glory of God. May this be a Christmas when God’s glory and Spirit is outpoured on us, and like the shepherds we go forth to share it throughout the year to come.

*Send Your Glory, Lord*

-By Jack Hayford

*May the glory of God be upon us this Christmastime;  
May the Spirit of joy be outpoured,  
That the blessing intended to be sent from heaven  
Now abound as we worship the Lord.*

*May the Bethlehem Babe be born in us this Christmastime;  
May the blest tender grace of this Child  
Be incarnate again, be revealed in our living,  
As we walk in the Light undefiled.*

*As the shepherds we come from our task  
Lord, this Christmastime,  
To respond to the message from heav'n;  
For Our souls pulse anew with this bright expectation  
That a Savior this day has been giv'n.*

*Father God, now we humble our hearts at this Christmastime;  
To request that Your wisdom divine  
Lead us past all diversion until, as the wise men,  
We rejoice in Your Morningstar's shine.*

*May the glory of God be upon us this Christmastime.  
May the Spirit of truth free us all.  
Broken yokes loose our lives unto Your celebration  
As Your love-gift our hearts now enthrall.*

### **Friday, December 28, 2018**

#### **Read Matthew 2: 1-2.**

The wise men saw the star and followed it to worship Christ. I pray you see the star this Christmas season, and will continue the journey to the stable and beyond, moving toward a closer relationship with the Christ child, the Christ man, the Savior. Ask God to help you commit to getting to know Him better in 2019.

**Saturday, December 29, 2018**

**Read Luke 1: 1-56; Matt. 1: 18-25; Matt. 2: 1-12;  
Luke 2: 1-20.**

Think back over the last four weeks, as we have spoken about the reactions of Mary, Joseph, Herod, and the Shepherds to the news “*It’s A Boy!*”

Whose reaction has been most meaningful to you? Most instructive? Most inspiring? Where do you see yourself in the Christmas story? How have you reacted to the news at Christmas that “*It’s A Boy!*”

Reflect and pray over the Christmas story. And remember, don’t forget, to invite someone to church tomorrow so they may hear the “*Good News.*”

