

“It’s A Boy!” *The Shepherds Speak*
Message for December 23, 2018
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Luke 2: 8-20 (NIV) –

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Why shepherds?



Why send down a “*heavenly host*” of angels for the most important birth announcement of all time to a group of shepherds in the fields overlooking Bethlehem?



Why shepherds?

God, in His infinite wisdom, and His mysterious ways, uses the announcement of Jesus' birth to teach and guide us...to set the stage for Jesus' teachings...to help us understand the relationship that we are being offered. God chose the shepherds to show us the length, width, and depth of His love.

Jesus continued to use the imagery of shepherds throughout His ministry to teach us who we are, who He is, the relationship offered us, what our mission is, and the judgment to come.

First, God wished that, as Paul writes in Ephesians 3:18-19, we...

...“may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Thus, on that first, quiet Christmas night, as the star shone over the manger, a “*heavenly hosts*” of angels appeared to shepherds in the fields...



...not kings and queens, not the priests and religious leaders, not important members of society, not the rich and influential, but to shepherds...and announced the birth of Jesus.

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.

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 feel 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.

The truth is “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.

The shepherds had done nothing by societal standards to earn such an invitation to see, firsthand, the Christ child...in fact, they would be the last people on earth given such an invitation...yet, God invited...God’s grace shone forth...



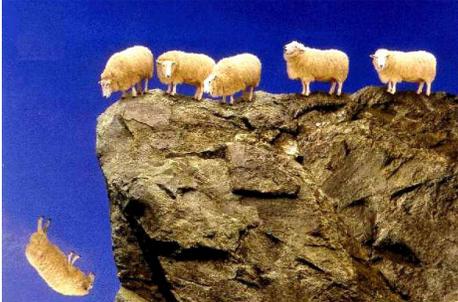
...and the shepherds accepted the invitation and traveled the short distance to Bethlehem to find Jesus, wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.

The first visitors to the manger...the first outsiders to see Jesus...became a huge part of Jesus’ teachings and imagery as He grew up and began to show us who we are and who He is.

Throughout the Bible and Jesus’ teachings, we are referred to as sheep. Now you think shepherds were spoken of badly...sheep were described with one word...”stupid.”



For example, on July 8, 2005, in Ankara, a village in eastern Turkey, the people cursed their luck after losing 400 sheep, which were killed after falling into a ravine, the local newspaper reported. Shepherds were having their breakfast, leaving the flock of 1500 sheep alone. One of the sheep tried to jump across a 15-metre-deep ravine.



The rest of the flock followed, with the first 400 being killed. The rest had a "soft landing," the article stated.

Sheep will even eat all the grass around them down to the roots and starve to death unless led to new pasture and water. If you take the leader away from a flock of sheep, they will not know how to get to pasture...they will find themselves lost, unable to figure out what to do...Isn't this what Jesus predicted would happen before His death? Matthew 26: 31 – ***"Tonight all of you will desert me," Jesus told them. 'For the Scriptures say, 'God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"***

God knew how apt we were to follow one another, even down the wrong road...even to our death...but God promises, in Ezekiel 34, that if we are willing to follow Him instead of the crowd...



...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." God goes even further with Jesus...letting us know that He is willing to sacrifice His Son for us...

Jesus reemphasizes this, and continues to show us who He is, in John 10:11-15 when He says, ***"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will leave the sheep because they aren't his and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the***

flock. The hired hand runs away because he is merely hired and has no real concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

Later, when Peter meets the resurrected Christ, Jesus speaks once again of sheep in order to make sure we understand our mission.



Having shared with His disciples and us that we are sheep, lost and in need of care, and sharing with His disciples and us that He is the good shepherd, who will seek out the lost and even lay down His life for the sheep, for us...now Jesus makes sure we understand that we are sheep in need of a shepherd, but once we are brought into God's fold, we must also become fellow shepherds with Christ.

And we must do what those first shepherds, on that first Christmas night did, after meeting Jesus face-to-face...they ***“told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child...the shepherds went back to their fields and flocks, glorifying and praising God for what the angels had told them...”***

And how do we “glorify and praise” God...by sharing God's love in both word and action...The resurrected Jesus tells Peter, in John 21:15-17, ***“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” ‘Yes, Lord,’ Peter replied, ‘you know I love you.’ ‘Then feed my lambs,’ Jesus told him. Jesus repeated the question: ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ ‘Yes, Lord,” Peter said, ‘you know I love you.’ ‘Then take care of my sheep,’ Jesus said. Once more he asked him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Then feed my sheep.’”***

Lastly, Jesus carries the shepherd imagery into His description of the last days, the last judgment, when we will stand before Christ and He...



...like a good shepherd, will separate the sheep from the goats...those who have served, loved, reached out, fed His sheep from those who have not...for as John writes in I John 4:20 (NIV), ***“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”***

Our deeds will not save us, but if we have a relationship with Christ...



...if we have given our hearts to God, our lives will begin to reflect our love for Christ and will begin to reflect a thankfulness for what Christ has done for us.

Luke 2: 8-12 (NIV) - ***And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”***

Why shepherds? To show us that no matter how unworthy or outcast we might feel, God’s love is available to us. Do you feel unworthy of God’s love or have you accepted the most wonderful gift ever presented...a love that is for you...right now?

Why shepherds? To prepare us for Jesus’ teachings...to begin to see ourselves as part of God’s flock...animals that need help finding nourishment, direction, living water to

drink... animals that need a shepherd to rescue us... that we might understand... that we might be able to pray...



...***“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...He makes me lie down in green pastures...He leads me besides still waters”***...Have you recognized your need for a Savior...have you recognized that you will not find the nourishment, direction, and help you need to thrive alone...you will not find it from this world...?

Why shepherds? To remind us of our own mission...to reach out and feed God’s many sheep...to help bring the lost into the fold. Are you fulfilling your mission? 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?

Why shepherds? To remind us of the final judgment where our faith will be shown in how we lived...for those who love God will love others with their lives out of gratitude for what God has given them. Do your daily actions and priorities reflect a life of gratitude for the love God has shown you? Can people see your faith in your actions, your service, your words, your acts of compassion? Are you living and sharing your faith?

Why shepherds? Because like the shepherds we are dirty and smelly, but God decided to announce the birth of His Son, “It’s A Boy!” anyway. God decided to send His Son, to love us, anyway...dirt, smell and all...Have you recognized that God loves you just as you are, dirty and smelly, though He refuses to leave you that way...He wants you to be just like Jesus. Will you meet Him this Christmas as you are...warts and all...and allow Him to begin to change your character, your life, your priorities, your sight, and your heart?

Why shepherds? Because God wants YOU to know that regardless of how YOU come to the manger, regardless of how YOU come to Christ, YOU will find a loving shepherd...a Savior...and YOU will be MOST WELCOMED!