

Hebrews

The Shepherds and the Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:1-20

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INTRODUCTION:

If you have good news, who would you tell first?

When something wonderful happens to me, the first people I want to tell are those closest to me: those most important in my life. They have proven themselves trustworthy over time, and will rejoice with me. They have stood by me during difficult times, and will share in a victory.

When God had the best news of the ages, whom did He tell first? Important religious people? Wealthy folk? Learned men? Actually, **no**. God told shepherds.

Do you know how many of the gospels give the account of the shepherds visiting Jesus? It is only found in Luke.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Luke 2:1-20 (NASB95)

2 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. ² This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, ⁵ in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. ⁶ While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

¹⁵ When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen this, they

made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Prayer

BODY:

I. Old Testament Prophecies of Christ's Birth.

Using the same approach as the author employs in Hebrews, I would like to start with the prophecies from the Old Testament concerning the birth of Christ. Were it not for the prophecies that were made hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, it would be tempting to consider that the events that are recorded in the Bible are just fanciful stories. But when we are able to see these prophecies come to life exactly as foretold, it strengthens the human mind to know that they were actual historical events. Not only does it help us in our day, but it also allowed the events that were happening to the people who were personally experiencing them to be very powerful. This was the method used by the author of Hebrews to convince the Jews that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah. This is one of the great realities of Scripture!

The prediction of Jesus' first coming was foretold all throughout the Old Testament. You might be wondering where does the Old Testament predict Jesus' birth and death? I am glad you asked because we are going to look at some of them this morning.

For those who have not experienced the harmony of the scriptures throughout the old and the new testament, they may ask "How can you trust biblical prophecy?" The answer is found in the very Scripture itself:

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 (NASB95)

²¹ You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'
²² When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

You can test the prophetic accuracy of Scripture by asking this one question: Did it come to pass? This is really the only way to know if something that is prophesied is true or not. The amazing thing about the prophecies in the scriptures is that none has ever been proven to be untrue.

Let us consider some of these prophecies from the Old Testament that accurately predicts Jesus' birth.

Genesis 3:15 (NASB95)

¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

From the very beginning, right after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, he gave indication that a savior would be coming from the seed of the woman, Eve. God revealed right away that

this seed would be the one that would crush the head of the serpent. We know that seed pointed to Jesus and the serpent was Satan who is currently the ruler of this world. Moses is credited as the author of the book of Genesis. The time of his writing is estimated to be about 1500 years before Christ was born.

Genesis 12:3 (NASB95)

3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

In this verse, God is making a promise to Abraham that he would make him into a great nation. As part of that promise he tells him that all people on earth will be blessed through you. This blessing of all mankind points to Jesus who would redeem peoples from every tribe and tongue on the face of the earth. The blessing of salvation was for all who would believe.

Isaiah 7:14 (NASB95)

14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Can you imagine the impact that this prophecy would have had on Mary and Joseph and those around them as they personally experienced the fulfillment of this scripture?

This Scripture points to the manner in which he will be born, and also to one of the names given to Christ: Immanuel, meaning "God with us". This was pointing to both his human birth and his divine nature. This was written over 700 years before Christ was born.

Micah 5:2 (NASB95)

2 “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”

We know Jesus was born in Bethlehem and this Scripture tells us in advance the place Jesus would be born. That He would be a ruler in Israel and He would be an eternal being. This prophecy was written by Micah approximately 800 years before Christ was born.

Hosea 11:1 (NASB95)

11 When Israel was a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.

This prophecy was written by Hosea also approximately 800 years before Christ was born. This verse looks backward and forward. Remember the Israelites were slaves in Egypt when God brought them out and He made them "God's people". This foreshadowed Joseph and Mary who fled to Egypt with the baby Jesus to avoid the slaughter by Herod. This verse can apply to both of those situations.

How do we know that it refers to Jesus?

Because Matthew tells us in his gospel.

Matthew 2:14-15 (NASB95)

¹⁴ So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵ He remained there until the death of Herod. *This was* to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

We see these prophecies unfold as we read of the familiar Christmas story recorded in Luke. Once again, God is revealing the truth of this story from the Old Testament.

II. Angelic Beginning.

The Christmas story takes us right from the manger to the fields nearby, where an angel appeared to some terrified shepherds. Who wouldn't be if an angel and “heavenly host” appeared where there had only been scrub brush moments before?

Luke 2:8-12 (NAAB95)

⁸ In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² *This will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Have you ever wondered why it was that God chose shepherds and wise men to come and see Jesus following his birth? Why didn't tax collectors, doctors, or Jewish leaders meet Jesus at the manger? Some have speculated the shepherds and wise men represent the spectrum of humanity: the shepherds symbolizing the poor and uneducated of society, while the wise men stand for the rich and well-read; this may be true, but could they **also** hold a more significant meaning?

Very little Scripture is written as a standalone statement; everything has significance. Therefore, might it be that the shepherd narrative points to **the mission** of the newborn babe?

The prophet Ezekiel spoke of a day when the Sovereign Lord would remove the shepherds of Israel—the leadership—and hold them accountable for not caring for his people. He would replace the wicked shepherds, who cared only for themselves, and become the Shepherd to his people.

Ezekiel 34:10-12 (NASB95)

¹⁰ Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.””

¹¹ For thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

The nativity story in Luke tells us the shepherds were in the fields nearby watching over their sheep. Undoubtedly, some of those sheep would later be sacrificed in the temple, which means those shepherds were charged with tending perfect and without blemish

sheep that would be sacrificed for the atonement of sins. Is this not an echo of Jesus' mission? He is the **Good Shepherd** who "lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). He is the perfect "**Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29).

Significantly, the angel did not visit the most prestigious people in society. God chose to send the host of angels to make this important announcement to humble shepherds. Since the shepherds raised the lambs that were sacrificed to atone for people's sins each spring during Passover, they would have understood the importance of the Messiah's arrival to save the world from sin.

III. Shock and Awe.

The shepherds were watching over their flocks as their sheep and lambs were resting or grazing on the quiet surrounding hillsides. While the shepherds were prepared to deal with wolves or even robbers who threatened their animals, they were not prepared for what was about to come upon them. They were terribly frightened when an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared before them.

If the appearance of a single angel was not enough to totally terrify the shepherds, a large number of angels also suddenly appeared, joining the original angel, and praising God.

Luke 2:13-14 (NASB95)

¹³ And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

IV. Off to Bethlehem.

This was enough to spark the shepherds into action.

Luke 2:15-16 (NASB95)

¹⁵ When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."

It didn't take long for the shepherds to pull themselves together after the angels left did it?.

Did they follow a star to Bethlehem? **No!** There is no star attached to the story of the shepherds. Often we see movies and manger scenes with the star, shepherds, and wise men. But Luke does not reveal the wise men at the manger. That came at a later time which we will examine in next week's message, Lord willing. The shepherds knew that the "**City of David**" meant Bethlehem. So they hurried off and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, who was lying in the manger.

CONCLUSION:

The Bible says after seeing the baby, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

Luke 2:17-18 (NASB95)

¹⁷ When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

Shepherds were in the fields among smelly and not-so-bright sheep. They had no power or influence. They had nothing to bring the baby King. So why did God choose the lowest members of society to entrust the greatest truth of the ages?

Why didn't God choose the religious leaders? Surely they would have been excited after waiting for thousands of years to meet their Savior. Why not choose a king or a rich man whose testimony would have carried more weight? Why shepherds?

First, shepherds had the capacity to be humbled and amazed that God chose them to hear the news. Imagine how unworthy they must have felt, but how honored. Based on Jesus' opinion of the religious leaders of that day, I do not think they would have had the same reaction.

The Pharisees loved religion more than they loved a relationship with God. They probably would not have been very impressed that God chose to reveal the secret of the ages to them. In fact, they might have thought they **deserved** to hear the news first.

But not the shepherds. They were amazed God chose them and they couldn't keep it to themselves.

That leads me to the second reason I think God chose shepherds. After they had seen the baby Savior, they spread the word concerning what they had seen and heard. They did not worry about what others thought of them. They did not over-think the situation and talk themselves out of telling the news. They were exuberant and overflowing with joy.

You know what happened when those uneducated, simple shepherds spread the word that a Savior had been born? People were amazed!

Everything in the scriptures are written for a purpose. The same seems to be true when it comes to the decision by God to allow the nearby shepherds to be the first to visit the baby Jesus as He lay in the manger.

Consider the following: It was very fitting that the shepherds would be the first to see Jesus. A shepherd is always the first to know when a lamb is born. Jesus is the Lamb of God. They were the ones caring for the special sheep that were being used at the temple in Jerusalem for sacrifice to God. And, of course, Jesus, as the Lamb of God, became the perfect sacrifice for us on the cross for our salvation.

When they had seen the baby, the shepherds spread the word about what angels had told, and all who heard the Nativity story were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

This caused the shepherds to return to their homes and fields glorifying and praising God.

Luke 2:19-20 (NASB95)

¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Mary and the shepherds were greatly moved by what they had experienced. When the shepherds returned to their work in the fields after visiting the newborn Jesus, they did not forget about their experience: They continued to praise God for what he had done.

God is His infinite wisdom chose just the right group of people to entrust the greatest news of eternity. Those humble men took the Good News of Jesus and did just what God wanted them to do – tell others. Can you imagine the impact that this event would have had on the lives of those shepherds and their families and friends? Their lives would never be the same!

As this season approaches, let us **not** think about what I may be **receiving** for Christmas, but rather, what I will be **giving** by sharing the Gospel to the world in both action and word. It was this spirit that brought us the Messiah, the redeemer of all mankind.

John 3:16 (NASB95)

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that He **gave** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Go Tell it on the Mountain