

Humble Shepherds
The Supporting Cast of Christmas
Luke 2:8-20

1. An angel announced the good news of the Savior's birth to _____. (2:8-14)
 - a. Shepherding was a _____, marginal, _____ occupation.
 - b. Shepherding is used throughout scripture to describe the _____ and leadership of people.
2. The shepherds _____ went to find the baby and share what they had heard. (2:15-20)
3. Applying Truth
 - a. God often draws people that society _____.
 - b. Entrust yourself to the _____.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection

1. How many different types of people are involved in the narrative of Jesus' birth? (think in terms of education, wealth, social status, roles, gender, etc.)
2. Why is the role of shepherding so prominent in the Old and New Testaments?
 - a. What do we learn about God as our shepherd? (Psalm 23, Gen. 48:15; 1 Peter 2:21-25)
 - b. How can the "shepherding" of God be an encouragement when life is difficult or confusing?
 - c. How is the current role of an elder/pastor similar to a shepherd? (1 Peter 5:1-5)
3. What type of mental picture do you have of the angelic announcements in Luke 2:9-14? Does it match the details of the passage?
4. Read Luke 19:37-38. What is happening in that passage? How do the words shouted by the crowd compare to Luke 2:14? Why would they be so similar?
5. How do the responses of Mary and the shepherds in Luke 2 compare/contrast with the responses we saw last week by the wise men, Herod, and the priests/scribes in Matthew 2?

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Big idea: The Lord announces good news to and through humble shepherds.

Intro

On June 2nd, 1953 Queen Elizabeth was officially crowned at her coronation ceremony. Like every coronation for 900 years it was held at Westminster Abbey. The journey from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey included a procession of 30,000 people. More than 8,000 guests attended the ceremony itself, composed of nobility from 129 nations and territories. She wore a crown with 1,333 diamonds on the way to the ceremony but her official crown that was placed on her head during the ceremony was solid 300 years old, solid gold, and weighed almost 5 pounds.

Unlike every other coronation, this was the first to be fully televised, over the strong objection of many traditionalists on the planning committee. They wanted cameras only placed “west of the organ screen,” so that they showed the procession to the building but not the ceremony itself. The ceremony was to be reserved only for the privileged few elites. But a modern faction won out that argued it should be accessible for all the people. The three-hour event was watched by 20 million people in the UK out of a population of 36 million at the time, with another 11 million listening on the radio. Television allowed all classes people in the UK to watch what had previously been an event reserved for nobility.

The birth of king Jesus, born king of the Jews as we read last week in Matthew 2, didn’t have the same human fanfare. The wisemen came bearing gifts fit for a king, but otherwise it was overlooked by the privileged elites of the time. But the people invited to come and see the new born King were anything but elite. These shepherds are the next figures in our series on the supporting cast of Christmas.

1. An angel announced the good news of the Savior’s birth to shepherds. (2:8-14)
 - a. Shepherding was a poor, marginal, difficult occupation.
 - i. Shepherding had a lowly place among occupations. The tasks were menial, the people were made ceremonially unclean by the conditions of the work. Unable to stop working for the Sabbath.
 - ii. They worked constantly, often isolated from society as they were on the range with the sheep.
 - iii. About 1,500 shepherds continue to work in the US, many of them in Idaho. The large Basque population in Boise came from shepherds brought over from Spain to care for sheep. Today many shepherds are brought in from Chile and Peru. One article describes their work this way, “Herders work for pay that on a per-hour basis is closer to volunteering than it is to earning minimum wage. They are required to be on-call 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, living in small campers without electricity, running water or a bathroom.”
 1. You might have seen these simple sheepherder wagons in the backcountry. They look like they should be pulled on the Oregon trail by a heard of oxen.
 - iv. Although its difficult work and low pay, the pay is still three times as much as these shepherds could make back in their home countries.
 - v. The life of a shepherd hasn’t changed that much in 2,000 years. But the image of a shepherd is significant in scripture.
 - b. Shepherding is used throughout scripture to describe the care and leadership of people.
 - i. **Genesis 48:15** He blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,

- ii. **Jeremiah 31:10** Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, And declare in the coastlands afar off, And say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him And keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock."
- iii. **Psalms 23:1** A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- iv. **Ezekiel 34:2** "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"
 - 1. They earn a stinging rebuke in the chapter because they were not sacrificially caring for the people but exposing them to danger
- v. **John 10:11** "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.
- vi. Pastors and elders are called to serve as under shepherds of the Chief Shepherd
 - 1. **1 Peter 5:1-4** Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
- c. However they were viewed, they would not have been the likely candidates to be visited by angels declaring the birth of the Messiah.
 - i. The high priest was the religious leader
 - ii. The scribes were the teachers
 - iii. The Pharisees were the rule keepers and enforcers
 - iv. The Sanhedrin was the governing body of 70 elders
 - v. Why not appear to them? Surely they could spread the word more effectively? They were more powerful, influential.
- d. Perhaps in line with 1 Corinthians 1:26-29
 - i. **1 Corinthians 1:26-29** For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God.
- e. Mary praised God in her song after learning she would be the Mother of Christ
 - i. **Luke 1:52** "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.
 - ii. Daniel Darling: Luke is telling us that this ruler who is to come would be different than the rulers His people were used to seeing. He wouldn't be a Caesar who ruled only by brute force. He wouldn't be a Herod, who governed by treachery, murder, and paranoia. No, Jesus, would be, among all of His attributes, a shepherd. And He would entrust Himself and His message to shepherds.
- f. An angel appeared and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

- i. What do you picture as I read this? A petite feminine angel? Something that looks like a chubby baby? However the angel appeared, it caused the shepherds to be terribly frightened.
- ii. The glory of God is a prominent theme in this account of Jesus' birth.
 1. The glory of the Lord shone around them (v. 9)
 2. The angels praise God and say, "Glory to God in the highest" (v. 14)
 3. The shepherds return to their fields glorifying God (v. 20)
- iii. What does the glory of God refer to? How it is used in these various ways?
 1. Dave Harvey – "What is glory? The New Testament word – *doxa* – speaks of worth and dignity and weight... Glory is about radiance and splendor. But glory isn't just an attribute; it exists to be seen and recognized. It's about reputation, esteem, standing, honor. At its core, glory is about inherent value that's recognizable to others. . . In a profound sense, this glorious God created the cosmos to display his glory, his worth, his value."
 2. "To whom [is God's glory displayed]? To a special creature who could take it in, make some sense of it, and rejoice over the worth of his Creator – to us! That's what the Bible means when it calls us to glorify God. We can't make him something that he already is – glorious. But we can recognize the glory that radiates from him, value it properly, and give God his due."
- iv. We see instances in scripture where God's glory was made visible in some way
 1. Exodus 34 when the glory passed by Moses
 2. **Exodus 40:34-35** Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.
- g. The angel brought good news of great joy!
 - i. Is there a more deeply loaded and significant sentence in scripture?!
 - ii. This good news and great joy are wrapped up in the three terms the angel used
 - iii. Savior – Christ – the Lord
 1. Savior
 - a. **Matthew 1:21** "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
 2. Christ
 - a. The messiah you have been waiting for!
 - b. Anointed one – anointing was a symbolic way of recognizing kings
 - c. At her coronation, Queen Elizabeth was anointed with a special oil. The recipe for the Anointing Oil contains oils of orange, roses, cinnamon, musk and ambergris. Usually a batch is made to last a few Coronations, but in May 1941 a bomb hit the Deanery destroying the phial, so a new batch was made. (royal.uk)
 3. The Lord

- a. **Matthew 2:2** "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."
- b. **John 18:37** Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."
- c. Romans 10:9 – confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord...

iv. Why is it good news?

- 1. The good news hinged on the identity and mission of this child.
- 2. **1 Timothy 2:5** For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,
- 3. At that moment, Jesus had not yet lived a life of perfect obedience and died for sin. But the mission had begun and it would surely be carried out.
- 4. Analogy – someone who has been chronically sick for decades, several times close to death, know what they have is terminal, and suddenly it's announced that a cure has been found. They go to the doctor and are prescribed a pill to take and in 3 months they will start to feel better. As soon as they get this news and take the pill, they rejoice, but they still feel exactly the same. Now there is hope though.
- 5. How much more so for us as we look back not just on the promise but the completion of the earthly life of Christ?
- 6. Yet we still also live in a period between promise and full fulfillment.
 - a. Sin is forgiven but still present
 - b. Death is conquered but still an enemy
 - c. Pain will eventually be no more but it is still gnawing at all of us

v. They are given instructions for how to locate and recognize this child.

vi. A multitude of angels appears and praises God

- 1. From one angel that terrified them now there are a multitude –a great number, term could refer to more than 10,000.
- 2. Surely this is not how these shepherds thought there night would go!
- 3. Again the attention is directed to God's glory on display.
 - a. His worth, radiance, esteem, reputation is on highest display.
- 4. Peace – as discussed in Matthew 10, the result of Jesus' coming was often conflict between people, but the purpose was peace. Peace between God and man!

2. The shepherds **immediately** went to find the baby and share what they had heard. (2:15-20)

- a. They didn't waste any time – "Let us go straight to Bethlehem ... so they came in a hurry."
- b. After seeing, they made known to others what they had seen and heard.
 - i. That's what we do with momentous events – we look closely and tell others
 - ii. They were the first NT evangelists

- c. All who heard wondered in amazement
- d. Mary treasured these things, pondering them in her heart
 - i. She had already had her own angelic encounter 9 months earlier.
 - ii. Luke 1:28-35
 - iii. Now this news was verified by another source.
 - iv. Treasure – hold close, ponder - consider
 - v. Surely she still wondered how all of this was going to come to pass. What would the future hold for her little one? How would God save people from their sins through Him?
- e. The shepherds worshiped – they glorified and praised God
 - i. Recognize His glory, value it, celebrate it
 - ii. That's why we sing after hearing the word during a worship service. It's not just so our service appears symmetrical – pray, sing, preach, sing, pray. It's because worship is a response to revelation. Sometimes I've wondered if we should sing more after a message than we do before. Musical worship isn't simply a way to stir up the affections of our hearts to hear the word, it's a response to who God is.
 - iii. Bruce Leafblad: "Worship is communion with God in which believers, by grace, center their minds' attention and hearts' affection on the Lord, humbly glorifying God in response to His greatness and His word."

3. Applying Truth

- a. God often draws people that society overlooks.
 - i. He's accessible. Isn't that remarkable? Wisemen, academics, scholars come to him to worship (like we saw last week). But so do blue collar laborers without formal education.
- b. Entrust yourself to the Good Shepherd.
 - i. **1 Peter 2:25** For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.
 - ii. **John 10:14-15** "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.



1



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John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

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1 Corinthians 1:27 ... but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

11

Luke 1:52 "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble."

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1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,

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20