



Why The Shepherds?

Dr. Jeffrey Arthurs // Luke 2:8-20

Intro

Story takes place in Bethlehem, situated among rolling hills, 2,700 asl. Just a small town, about 10 miles from Jer. For centuries the Jews had known that the Messiah would come from B., but no one expected Messiah to be born in a stable, and no one expected the first word of his birth to go to shepherds. Why Shepherds? Why not the king, priests, CNN?

Background

8. Shepherds. Common laborers. Smelly, rough.

[analogy: Today = farmers, construction workers, lobstermen. God went first to these folk. As if the President would make a big announcement by going to Dunkin' Donuts. The Pres walks in, secret service flank him, the press is there and he speaks to a mother with two kids in one stroller, an old guy with the newspaper and coffee, some workers from Pakistan.]

Living in the fields! Normal between April and Nov. Drove flocks together, one or two keep watch.

[hymn: The first Noel, the angels came to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay, keeping their sheep, on a cold winter's night that was *so deep*.]

Snoring. Walks and sings: Mary had a little lamb. Quiet.

Rising Action

9. Angel appeared. Non physical, take appearance, awesome.

"Glory" often connected with light. No way to describe as unseen world intersects with seen.

"Terrified." Understandable.

[story: Mother Theresa: Have you come to give your lives to the poor?]

Awesome, light, fall to ground, sheep scatter (or too dumb?)

10. Fear not. Why? Gospel (good news of great joy). "All people" = all the Jews, but more broadly, to everyone.

11. Savior!! This **is** good news. Deliverer.

Christ = messiah. Anointed one.
[analogy: Anoint like dub with sword.]
Lord = God himself.

This word is so shocking that they need some proof, a sign . . .

12. Sign = helpful because no other child born in Bethlehem like this. But also oxymoron.
[analogy: Like giving birth in tool shed where you keep lawn mower.
Unexpected. Sign was unexpected.]
Shepherds look at each other. Did you hear him right? Manger?

But there's no time to think . . .

13-14. Heavenly host = mystery. The other dimension intersected with ours for a moment.

Then silence, dark again.

15. Let's go!

Climax

16. Went to stable (cave?). Shhh.

"My, my, my. It's true! The sign of the angels appearing to us. The sign of Bethlehem. The sign of the baby in the manger. My, my."

Their natural response was to talk about this miracle.

17. Told people about the angel and the heavenly host and what had been told them:
- Savior, Christ, Lord
 - Sign

Notice the responses to this good news:

Resolution

18-20 Amazed. Wonder. Dumbfounded. Awe struck.
Treasured up and ponder.
Glorify and praise.

Which response is most like yours?

- If you do not have first hand experience of this visitation, your response is likely to be, like the first group: amazement. Those who have only heard others tell about God's communication, often react with wonder.

But two other responses are featured in this story: Mary's and the shepherds.

- Mary pondered these things, treasured them. Although none of us can fully identify with Mary, having carried and born the messiah, perhaps we Xns can identify with some of her reaction. We too mull things over. We meditate on these astounding events and communications. But perhaps we identify most with the shepherds.
- **The natural response of those who hear and believe the good news is to praise God. The natural reaction to this news, when mixed with faith, is to honor and praise and thank the Heavenly Father. Those who hear this message as spoken to them, not some generic public service announcement, naturally are happy.**

But outsiders sometimes find that response hard to understand. Let me see if I can explain this reaction a bit more. Why were the shepherds so fired up?

1. He is no respecter of persons. Appeared to Shepherds.

***God doesn't choose you based on your job (even shepherd, rough and smelly); IQ (brilliant or meager); physical appearance (lovely or plain). None of us impresses him. Yet all of us are dear to him. He communicates with all. The shepherds felt this and they were happy. God communicated with them, common folk, the good news of great joy.*

[story: Kathleen Petersen tells the story about a Chicago bank that once asked for a letter of recommendation on a young Bostonian who was being considered for employment. The Boston investment house sent the letter and could not say enough about the young man. His father, they wrote, was a Cabot; his mother was a Lowell. Further back in his family line were the Peabodys and others of Boston's finest. His recommendation was given without hesitation.

Several days later, the Chicago bank sent a note saying the information supplied was inadequate. It read: "We are not contemplating using the young man for breeding purposes. Just for work." The Chicago bank was not a respecter of persons, and neither is God who communicates with common folk like shepherds. He accepts those from every family, nation, and race who fear him and work for his Kingdom (Acts 10:34-35).

Kathleen Peterson, Chicago, Illinois, Leadership, Vol. 5, no. 1]

2. When we fear God, he says to us, "Fear not."

***When we are awe struck, when we realize that someone from another realm has invaded our realm, when we see ourselves in the light of God's glory, when we know that we are weak, vulnerable, limited, sinful, coarse, all too human, then he says, "Don't be afraid. I am for you, not against you. I have come to save."*

Do you fear God? Respect him? Are you still before him? Do you sense that he is not like us, not the person in the cubicle next to you or the neighbor over the fence? He is "other." Are you aware that you cannot manipulate him, trick him, buy him off? Your intellect is not superior to his. Do you live with the conviction that he sees all you do and hears all you say? Do you confess your sins saying "Lord have mercy," or do you yawn and joke about them? If we *don't* fear him, he says, fear! But in this text, when the shepherds were awestruck and terrified, he said, "Fear not." And that is good news. It makes us happy, and we want to tell others. God is for us, not against us.

3. He includes us in his work.

**The shepherds partnered with God to announce salvation and spread the work of redemption started that night. God started a chain reaction. The angel announced it, and the shepherds continued it. And the shepherds considered this an honor.

Aren't you glad God includes *us* in his work? He could have sent a pack of angels to Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Rome, Cleveland, but he sent common folk. Aren't you glad you get to do his work? Disciple young Christians, give money to missionaries, pray for the spread of the gospel, and take tennis shoes to homeless people under the starlight? God doesn't need our money or tennis shoes, but he chooses to use them, and this elevates our work, our giving, our day to day lives, whether it is eating or drinking or whatever we do. He empowers these humble offerings and uses them in the redemption of the world.

Remember this when you write a check, when you prepare a meal, when you attend a board meeting, when you listen to someone's heart ache, when you treat your employees with respect, when you stand up for what is right—the immaterial dimension has invaded the physical dimension and now our daily grind can be more than grinding out a living and accumulating toys.

God has come, the savior of all people. And he came first to shepherds. Common folk like you and me.

Closing Prayer: Thank you for communicating with common folk and for commissioning us to be your partners.