

Our Shepherd

Why do we talk about shepherds?

Most of our mental images about Christmas come from medieval art and Christmas cards?

Three wise men coming to the Christ child just minutes after His birth. If you read the biblical account carefully, it could have been up to two years after Jesus was born that the magi offered their tribute to the Child. Herod sought out the male children two years old and younger. We have no idea how many wise men came. Christmas cards show three. The biblical account does not give a number. We know it was more than one because the Bible talks about men - plural. But was it two, three, or six? We don't know, because the story in Matthew doesn't tell us. You don't believe me? You're sure you've seen it there, in Matthew 2. As a matter of fact, the number three is not even mentioned in chapter two. The unnumbered magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. I guess that's where we get the idea of three.

Now, scripture does talk about shepherd's – managing their flock by night. So what? Shepherd's were not the mainstream ...

In the first century, shepherds were generally scorned as shiftless, dishonest people who grazed their flocks on others' lands. They weren't the pleasant Hallmark faces we're used to seeing this time of year. We have sentimentalized them so on our Christmas cards and art that they look like gentle folk waiting to go to a homecoming celebration. No picture is farther from reality.

Now, notice to whom the angels first go to share their news. Notice whom the angels tell: the shepherds! Isn't that strange? I want the angels to do something widescreen and high-definition. I want them shouting from the mountain tops and parading the streets of Jerusalem shouting, "Wake up and hear this!"

Perhaps they did:

If the angels went to the Temple to tell the religious leaders what God was doing; they would have scheduled a potluck.

If they went to the governor and let him know that something awesome was happening in Bethlehem, he would have sent it to committee for study.

If they had gone to Herod. After all, he was the current king of Judea, he probably would have had him (along with young Joseph and young Mary, imprisoned).



The shepherd, worked on the margins, and he/she was an important position in the community. Many families would put their sheep together so that one shepherd could care for them.

A shepherd had a 24/7 job.

The shepherd was expected to make sure the sheep had enough food by leading the sheep to “green pastures by the still waters” and that they were safe in the sheepfold at night. When the shepherd led, the sheep did not meet to vote on whether they should follow the shepherd. The sheep trusted the shepherd and followed.

We are the sheep of God’s flock, we don’t gather and vote on whether to follow. The Shepherd (Jesus) leads —and we follow.

The shepherd was expected to “lay down his life” for the sheep. He protected them, whatever the threat. Jesus did.

The sheep did not question his ability to care for them. They trusted, followed and depended on the shepherd to do whatever was necessary to keep them safe.

As Jesus’ sheep, we depend on our Good Shepherd to take care of us. “The Lord is my Shepherd.”

Jesus: Our Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep,” guaranteeing that “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). The Savior loves his sheep and we trust him.

The shepherd knew his sheep and they knew him. Sometimes flocks of sheep from several shepherds would get mixed together as they sought new pastures. But the sheep knew their shepherd. He could stand aside and call. His sheep knew their shepherd’s voice and would come to him. We know our Shepherd’s voice. He comes to us in his Word and in the Word as it is shared by our fellow believers. Jesus said: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Jesus calls us to follow.

Do you **hear**? (Or, rather, do your **listen**?)

In Biblical times, shepherds knew that their sheep were not very bright. They often strayed, following the illusion that the grass is greener in the next pasture.

Our Good Shepherd knows when we stray after things, we think will make us happy and fulfill us, that we will be disappointed and find ourselves wandering somewhere away from our Shepherd

But our Shepherd does not wait for us to find our way back. Our Shepherd leaves the other sheep, the “ninety-nine,” and comes looking for us. He does not give up on us.



He searches until he finds us and then he gently brings us back. It is too easy to get spiritually lost in our world. Temptations surround us. We cannot overcome them on our own. The Good Shepherd seeks us out, calls us back, surrounds us with his loving care and holds us as his own now and eternally.

When we call Jesus our Good Shepherd, we are naming him the one we know, the one we listen to, the one we follow, the one we trust, the one who brings us safety and peace. We have no other.

But, that is the way God did it. Accept it or not; romanticize it or not. Put it on a Christmas card or not ... God likes sheep and he sent us a shepherd. John 10:11: "I am the good **shepherd**. The good **shepherd** lays down his life for the sheep."

God sent Jesus as a shepherd because of sheep. (That's the way God did it.)

In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. **(Luke 2:8-11 HCSB)**.

The angels came to shepherds. People who were doing what they did every day and every night. People going through the routines of life. People living their ordinary lives

Isn't that what the birth of Jesus is all about? It's about God meeting us, not on high holy days, but on ordinary days, in ordinary places, in an extraordinary way.

The birth of this child is about God coming to us in our everyday lives and saying to us, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news."

- It's about God meeting us in our pain and loneliness.
- It's about God meeting us in our frustration and anger.
- It's about God meeting us Monday and Wednesday and Friday.
- It's about God wanting to be a part of our lives every day.

Think about why God sent the angels to the shepherds - He wants to let us know that this child was for all people, even the most ordinary.

Illustration: His name was Bill. He had wild hair, wore a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and shoes with no socks. This was his wardrobe during four years of college. Though mildly eccentric, he was a brilliant person. He became a Christian while attending college.



Across from the campus was a traditional church. They wanted to develop a ministry to students but weren't sure how to go about it. One day Bill decided to go worship there. He walked in with his wild hair, T-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and shoes with no socks. The service had started. Bill started down the aisle looking for a seat, but the church was full.

By now people were looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one said anything. Bill got closer and closer to the front, when he realized there were no seats. He just sat down right on the floor. Although perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, this had never happened in this church! By now the people were really uptight, and the tension in the air was thick.

A deacon slowly made his way toward Bill. This deacon was in his eighties, a distinguished man with silver-gray hair and a three-piece suit. He walked with a cane. Everyone thought, "You can't blame him for what he's going to do. How could you expect a man of his age and background to understand some college kid, thinking he can worship sitting on the floor?"

It took time for the man to reach the boy. The church became utterly silent, except for the clicking of the man's cane on the tiled floor. All eyes focused on him. When the elderly deacon got next to the boy, he dropped his cane to the floor. With great difficulty he lowered himself and asked Bill, "May I sit with you?" The man sat down next to Bill and worshiped with him, so he wouldn't be alone.

That's what the birth of Jesus means.

- Radical action.
- Radical behavior.
- Radical gospel.
- Radical Savior.
- Radical God.

II. The shepherds in shock

You can only imagine the first reaction of the shepherds. They were scared to death. They understood the appearance of angels as an omen, as though God were bringing His wrath upon them. To allay their fears, the angels said, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy. Today a Savior is born!"

With that, the heavens opened with glorious music. The heavenly chorus praised God and said, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people He favors!" (vs. 12, HCSB). During an ordinary night, ordinary shepherds encountered an extraordinary God. The shepherds must have been surprised that God broke into their ordinary lives. For us, Christ sometimes breaks into our lives when we least expect it.

