

**Scripture Reading: Psalm 23**

**“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For you are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”**

# **“The Great Shepherd”**

**This week we come to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Advent season & it is important to remember that Advent simply means arrival or appearance:**

- **As I pointed out last week it is both the beginning and the end of our church calendar: A time where we remember the arrivals of Jesus!**

**His arrival as the God-man who would save His people from their sins, and His arrival at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.**

- **Truly it should be a season of remembrance and anticipation!**
- **Remembering the first coming of Jesus and anticipating His return.**

**To help our younger children understand the season you could relate it to special family times. When you plan a return trip to a very special place and there comes a time of remembrance and anticipation... Remember how much fun we had on that trip and anticipate just how much fun we are going to have this next time.**

**In His first coming, Jesus changed all of history and with His second coming He will defeat the final enemy death and bring us into a glorious eternity.**

**The Advent season as we know it today developed over many centuries, beginning as a time to prepare those who would be baptized in the new year. Soon it included a time of anticipation of Christ’s second coming at the end of the Church calendar and later it came to also include the remembrance of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.**

**The season of Advent was first modeled after the 40 days of Lent and this is why it covers four Sundays. Many follow the themes of Hope, Faith, Joy & Peace while others take two Sundays to focus on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ and then two focused on His first coming at Christmas.**

**Someone asked about the Advent candles and they are an even more recent addition being used for the first time in 1839, symbolizing the coming of Jesus as the Light of the World.**

**There is a candle for each Sunday and the Christ candle in the middle.**

**Some add 24 candles for each day.**

**The pink candle comes with the Sunday for joy as that liturgical color.**

**So, is Advent a good tradition to follow? As with all things in our lives, the question is whether it keeps Jesus at the center of our lives and brings glory to God. I believe that it can and does, so that is why we continue to celebrate this important season at Church of the King.**

**Toward that end, this year I have chosen to focus on three groups of players who are cast prominently in the important historical event of the first coming of Jesus...**

Last week we considered the angels and today we will look at shepherds.

- And Lord willing next week will bring us to the role of the parents that we find in the Gospel accounts of that First Christmas.

Last week we saw that the Bible gives us few details about angels, but as we come to shepherds we have a great deal of information... Information that we find both in the Scriptures and our everyday lives...

- There are about a hundred references to shepherds in the Bible and a lot more about sheep!

We can also read about or see the lives of other shepherds and the work that they do to help us understand all of those Biblical references. I chose one of the most famous passages as our text and the images there are far richer IF we understand a bit about shepherds and sheep.

**Psalm 23:** “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. *[what do shepherds do? They care for the sheep!]*  
2 “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.” *[when we think of God caring for our soul and keeping us in the right places we are to picture that shepherd leading and caring for the sheep!]*

4 “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

*[none of us likes discipline and yet we know that just as the shepherd’s staff cares for the sheep, so God’s discipline protects us, whether the rod given to parents or the keys given to the church]*

5 “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.”

*[here again we see the Shepherd’s care, taking the sheep to pasture even when there might be danger, caring for their health and providing all they need]*

King David then clearly relates all of this to God’s care for His people: 6 “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”

We have often traced the significance of Jesus as the Lamb of God that runs from Abel bringing that first sacrifice to Jesus ascending to heaven and being seen there as a Lamb that was slain.

Jesus as the Messiah is called the Son of David and of course King David was the most famous shepherd in the Old Testament and the author of Psalm 23. Even the religious leaders who were “troubled” by the visit of the Wise Men knew that Messiah would come as the Great Shepherd.

When King Herod inquires as to where this new king would be born we read this in Matthew 2: “5 So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’ ”

- We often turn to Isaiah the Prophet in the Christmas season and one passage we sang about last week goes on to speak of a great shepherd.

**Isaiah 40:** ““Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. 2 “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Jehovah’s hand Double for all her sins.”...

9 O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” 10 Behold, Jehovah God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him. 11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.”

We should keep all of this in mind, as we again consider those familiar words Dr. Luke uses to tell us of shepherds on the First Christmas morning. We should not be surprised to find shepherds in the account and we should think about what those particular shepherds were doing.

With Bethlehem just a short distance from the Temple in Jerusalem, it is likely that they were raising and caring for the lambs that would be used in the daily sacrifices.

- The Messiah that those lambs would represent was now lying in a manger nearby in Bethlehem.

Luke 2: “8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” 15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.”

Last week I suggested that we ponder the work of God’s messengers when we find a reference to angels in the Bible. Now we can add shepherds and sheep to the list for meditation, knowing that they point to and demonstrate God’s great love for His people.

- It should bring new meaning to those places where Jesus speaks of being our Shepherd!

I could do an entire sermon series on what is found in John chapter 10... But for this morning just reflect on what we know of shepherds and sheep as we read these precious words:

“10 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. 7 Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. 11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.”

- We may think we have other comforters, but they will disappoint in the end!

14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

**The writer of Hebrews reminds us about our great shepherd as well:**

**13:20 “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”**

**And we learn from Matthew that Jesus is the Great Shepherd who sends His followers out in the same way He ministered during His time on earth:**

**Matthew 9: 35 “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.**

**36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.””**

**Jesus looked around and saw multitudes of people who needed a shepherd.**

- **Jesus is the Shepherd they need and we are to be the laborers who bring them to Him!**

**That requires two very important things: First we must have the heart that Jesus demonstrated being able to look around and see the need! We must not be taken in by the appearance of joy or happiness, but truly discern the needs of those around us: The multitudes who are scattered and weary, in need of a Shepherd.**

**AND as those who know the great Shepherd, we should be ready and willing to be those laborers who carry the Good News that they can know Him as well!**

**We must be like those faithful shepherds who when they had seen Him, made widely known the saying which was told them concerning the child.**

- **May this be our challenge for the New Year, to have eyes to see the needs around us and the boldness to share the truth they need to hear!**

**And finally there is the Biblical teaching about under-Shepherds...**

**Those the Spirit of God calls to assist the Great Shepherd in the work of caring for the sheep in the visible Church, which is something very applicable for us today.**

**Here at Church of the King we have two men, Jeff and Rick, who have responded to the call to serve as an elder and a deacon!**

**We need to be in prayer that their training and evaluation go well and that Lord willing in the New Year they will be ready to serve along side Roger and I in the work of the Church.**

**If you have not discussed this with them, please take the opportunity to do so in the coming weeks.**

**They must take seriously the challenge to serve in the church and you as members must take your responsibility to support them seriously as well.**

**Both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter understood the importance of this and their encouragement and challenge reflects on Shepherds and sheep as well...**

**The Apostle Paul tells us in Acts 20:28 “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”**

**I Peter 5: “5 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”**

**Communion Meditation: John 10**

**“22 Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. 23 And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch. 24 Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, “How long do You keep us in doubt?**

**If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”**

**25 Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. 30 I and My Father are one.””**