

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. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.”

Those Faithful Shepherds

Another Christmas Day is upon us and soon we begin our journey into the year of our Lord 2018!

Let us begin with the words from Pastor Booth that we ended with last week reminding us of the importance of the Advent and Christmas seasons: “[it is]the central story around which all else revolves. To miss it is to miss everything. ... It’s a story that embraces all of human history; for we were “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.” Human history is the history (or the story) of redemption. Moreover, it’s a story that’s still being told. This is the good news—the Gospel— God delivering on His promise. To understand this story is to understand where we came from, where we have been, where we are, and where we are going.”

- **Thus we, as Christians, are those who can truly appreciate the wonder of the God of the Universe coming as a little baby, demonstrating His ultimate power through ultimate weakness.**

Submitting Himself to parents and relatives and friends who cared for Him: Some of the very sinners for whom He came to die, fed Him, changed His wraps, taught Him to walk and talk and how to grow & mature in wisdom and knowledge before God and man. A story that only our loving God could conceive of & only our loving God could carry out giving us not only redemption but an example of how we are to humbly live our lives in service to others.

- **We celebrate all of this each and every year to remind us & our children that this all took place in real history.**

In the same way, we remember the birthdays and anniversaries here a Church of the King during our fellowship meals: We do so because each of us was actually born on a certain day & real couples took real vows on their wedding day. Our age is one where these reminders are very important: An age where our children will be told that the accounts of Christmas are all just fairy tales, like Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny... Nice images and stories to make us feel better in a dark and depressing world.

- **But the Bible declares that we are His faithful witnesses, who are to know and proclaim to the world that Jesus DID come as the light of the world and that His coming has changed everything!**
- **NOT just because we believe it, but because it is REAL!**

This morning I want to continue on with the account of those shepherds and next week Lord willing spend time on the wise men. The actual texts that give us the Christmas story are relatively short: Given to us only by Matthew & Luke.

- **Of course they are not the only places in the Bible where we learn about the details and meaning of the coming of Jesus.**

From the promised deliverance by the seed of the woman in the opening chapters of Genesis to the closing call for Jesus to come quickly at the end of Revelation...

- **The Bible IS the story of the coming of Jesus to save His people from their sins!**

The accounts that are given by Matthew and Luke tell us the details that we need to know about the birth of Jesus... So let us consider the shepherds and the wise men. They have much in common and much that is a contrast.

- **The shepherds would have been simple men working long hours in a poor region of Palestine.**
- **The magi or wise men would have been philosophers and leaders coming from one of the richest parts of the world, most likely enjoying lives of luxury.**

And yet God approaches both and in very similar ways:

- **They are given powerful signs**
- **They are given information about where to find Jesus**

Both respond in very similar ways:

- **They follow the instructions and signs that were given.**
- **They worship the newborn child as their Savior and King.**

They return to their lives knowing that the world will never be the same!

Obviously, it is no accident that we see these contrasts and similarities...

- **They should certainly remind us that we are to hear and respond to the call of Jesus no matter what our status in life might be at the time.**

So, with that in mind this week we will turn to Luke's account of the Shepherds and learn from them.

It is Luke who tells us the details of the night Jesus was born:

Luke 2:1 "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria."

Let me here again remind us about the historical accuracy of the Bible...

Today the skeptics who want to discourage us from believing the Bible and undermine our precious faith, often bring up the question of when Jesus was born...

- **They tell us that we don't even know what year Jesus was born nor even what time of year His birth took place!**

Well, the Bible does not give us the exact year, or the exact time of year, so we have to accept that:

- **Knowing that if it was critical it would have been given.**

However, the skeptics go even further and say the Bible actually contradicts itself about the time Jesus was born. They point out that other secular records show King Herod dying in 4BC which had to be after Jesus was born because King Herod is present at the time of His birth.

However, they tell us that Governor Quirinius took his famous census in AD 6 or 7 which is almost ten years later. Of course, they assume there was only one census, even though Luke specifically references the **FIRST** census which would imply more than one census so we don't have a conflict.

Of course they will say, **BUT** there is no other record of such a census!

- We should be ready to remind them that earlier skeptics, using the **SAME** type of argument saying the same about Pontius Pilate the governor who condemned Jesus.
- Up until 1961, [in my lifetime ☺] there was no secular historical record of such a governor outside of the Gospel accounts.

Thus, the same type of skeptics said he was a mythical character dreamed up by the Gospel writers. Christians for years said the Bible **IS** reliable and clearly states that he was a real Governor & of course the skeptics insisted that the Bible did not count without other witnesses!

- Suddenly in 1961 there was a coin with the governor's inscription discovered: The Bible, as we expected, was right and the doubters had egg on their faces.

Since that time Pilate's palace & other evidences have been found confirming the historical accuracy of the Gospels. Whether any secular evidence about the earlier census will be discovered before the return of Jesus does not really matter when you consider how many proofs have already surfaced that confirm the faithfulness of the Scriptures.

Sadly, some Christians say these details are not important because the Bible presents the Gospel, the great 'spiritual truth' that is of primary importance... True enough, but if the Bible is wrong about what historical details it does give us, then why should we believe that Jesus was born of a virgin or any of the other details of His life & work?

- And so, God uses this census to bring Joseph and Mary to the place where He promised long ago that the Messiah would be born.

Luke 2:3 "So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. **4** Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. **6** So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. **7** And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Much has been made about Jesus being born in humble surroundings, but we do need to remember the reality of what is happening here... The fact is that **ANYPLACE** on this earth would be pretty humbling for the Son of God, the eternal second person of the Holy Trinity to be born! The Old Testament promised that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem and that He would come as the lamb of God... So Joseph goes to Bethlehem and Mary delivers the baby Jesus and puts Him in a manger...

- A place where shepherds would often place a new born lamb.

Thus it should not surprise us that the first announcement of this important event came to.... **SHEPHERDS!**

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."

Jesus did not grow up to become King or even ascend to be King...

- He was born the King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Last week we considered how John opens his Gospel account with God becoming flesh, coming as the light of the world and the incarnation is also given to us in the middle of Revelation, where John sees a summary of this important story in a great sign!

12: "12 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. 2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. 5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne."

- And of course, we see this great truth proclaimed by the angels, by the wise men with their gifts and by Simeon in the Temple just so we don't miss that important point!
And as we discussed last week, God gives these humble shepherds a confirmation of these great truths with signs they could see and touch:

12 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

Next we see that the birth of Jesus was certainly NOT a secret in heaven:

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!"

If you have experienced the beauty of just twenty or thirty well trained choral voices signing in the round or even in a rotunda, then this picture should take your breath away...

- Imagine what this heavenly HOST sounded like that night!

AND as you are trying to take all of this in, remember that they were not performing for the world or even ALL of Jerusalem, but just for these faithful shepherds who were to be the first witnesses for Jesus!

And we know them to be faithful because they demonstrate it with their response: 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. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them."

- As I mentioned, we will see many similarities with the coming of the wise men, but I will leave that Lord willing for next week:

For today I want us to consider the very practical lessons that we should learn from the account of these faithful shepherds...

- First and foremost it reminds us again of the importance of our being faithful in our callings!

Any shepherd who had decided that keeping the sheep was just too boring or that this particular night was too cold would have missed that heavenly chorus and the chance to see Jesus!

There are many who wonder if God is real in their lives often looking for some experience or new adventure to get them excited.

- The lesson of the shepherds is that God more often than not meets us where we are faithfully serving in our everyday lives!

And this leads us to the second lesson where we must learn to listen carefully to what God has to say, even when it might seem a little strange: The shepherds where to seek the Messiah in a manger and next week we will see the Wise Men having to leave the great Kingdoms of the East to look for the King of Kings in Judea.

- And of course, we must not only hear what God says, but obey His commands as these Shepherds did that night.

Some will object at this point and say that was fine for them, but my Christmas has been pretty dull: Lots of shopping and other distractions of the season...

- But no angels singing or special stars to help me along!

Here we must remember what Jesus told the rich man who wanted Abraham or Lazarus to return to his brothers to warn them about the fires of hell, arguing that they would believe it if someone came back from the dead.

- Abraham told this man that they had Moses and the Prophets and if they did not believe them, then even if one did come back from the dead they still would not believe because they rejected what was clearly in God's Word!

We must remember that God did not send His angels to a group of men who had spent their lives apart from the faith, not caring about what God said, hoping to sort of wake them up and we will see next week it was the same with the Wise Men. It is faithful people who are faithful! If you have not been faithful, the answer is not to continue in sin until the angels appear to you some night...

- The answer is to begin being faithful...
- Faithful to what God has said in the Bible, His Word!

Going into the New Year we will again study the lives of Simeon and Anna where we see great faith and faithfulness in their lives and we will be challenged to live such lives today. They will be simple lessons that each and every one of us can learn and we begin to see such simple lessons in the lives of the shepherds:

- Be faithful daily as you serve in your vocation or calling.
- Hear what God has to say in the Holy Scriptures.
- Do what God commands, even when it seems a little strange!

If we do this the result will be what we should see as the final lesson from these faithful shepherds: In verse 20 of our text Dr. Luke tells us that "20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them."

- These humble shepherds worshipped God, they gave Him all the glory and they went about telling others about the Good News!
- May it be so with all of us in this New Year!

Communion Meditation: I Corinthians 11:

"23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

[just as the actions of those shepherds have proclaimed His birth for thousand of years!]