

January 10, 2021

Come and See the New Shepherd

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Epiphany, it was this last Wednesday, January 6th, it was the official end of the Christmas season. It is a time where well, the word epiphany simply means to make known or to make manifest. It is a time where we look and we see how Christ was made known, how He was made manifest to the people. Traditionally it begins with the story of the coming of the wise men. They saw the star, it was that which had been prophesied, and it literally because of that, beckoned to them to come and see. Why because they knew the prophecy. The prophecy from Numbers 24, verse 12 where we read; ‘a star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.’ So, they went to see this great fulfillment. And yet at the same time we really need to think about this. How did these men know about it? They were from Babylon. You know what happened; over 400 years before, Babylon had overrun Judah, Jerusalem, the temple; had taken some of the brightest people and made them servants of King Nebuchadnezzar. Those servants Daniel, Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego had proven themselves in their wisdom to King Nebuchadnezzar to the point that Daniel was put in charge overall. What is the wisest thing that you can teach someone? The word of God. And he did such a good job of teaching them that wisdom that for over 400 years this had been passed down. And the wise men, when they saw this star, they knew; it is the fulfillment. And as I said it beckoned to them, come, and see. And yet we so often skip the time between Jesus's birth and the wise men coming, because they were not the first to hear that message. A message that I hope we hear today as well, to come and see.

You see, literally it began out in the fields in, I quote “the same region.” What region is that? The region around Bethlehem, because that is where we read that there were shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night and an Angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, they were filled with great fear; an Angel said to them; “fear not for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David

a savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” Which really narrowed it down for them. If this baby is lying in a manger, you only need to look in the stables of Bethlehem; of which there were probably just one or two because Bethlehem was not a big town. And have you ever asked yourself or have you ever wondered why? Why did God choose to make the manifestation, the Epiphany of His son to shepherds out in the field? Perhaps, it was because the shepherds would have been awake at night. Vigilant, just as God is always vigilant and watching over us. Maybe, perhaps because shepherds were humble and there was nothing glorious about Christ's birth, other than maybe the Angel's singing to the shepherds. But the Messiah, promised Messiah, born in the stables, laid in a Manger; it is very humble. Just as poor shepherds were very humble.

Maybe it was because God Himself refers to Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep in the Old Testament. He is the quote “Shepherd of Israel” and we see in Psalm 80:1-3, His people are His flock. Or maybe it's because of who shepherds are; and it's a sign of what God is. Shepherds were caretakers. Especially these particular shepherds. A caretaker is someone who takes ownership of something and treats it as his own, though it does not belong to him. And we will talk about that a little bit more in just a second. But I will say that for instance at a church, we do not want a janitor, we want a custodian, a caretaker, someone who takes custody; or literally takes ownership in the church and cares for it as if it was his own.

Yet shepherds are and God is a protector. The Shepherd protects the sheep from the wolf or anything that would come to hurt them because the shepherd, and God the Good Shepherd is the provider. The sheep, they are pretty dumb, and they need everything to be done for them. And so, it is the shepherd that gives them food, or takes them to good food. It is the shepherd that leads them to water. It is the shepherd who at night brings them into shelter or watches over them in the fields at night. It is the shepherd who gives them guidance, who goes after the one who has gone astray. It is the shepherd that is ultimately responsible for the overall safety and well-being of every single one of the lambs. Now let us get back to the caretaker. Who owned these sheep? We know who

owned these sheep. You see it was in the fields around Bethlehem that the sheep for the temple sacrifices were cared for during the winter months. These were the sheep of the temple flock, and these were the shepherds of the temple flock, and these were the sheep that would be sacrificed in the temple.

Now we could spend a whole lot of time talking about that assimilation or comparison of the shepherd to God; but what we want to focus on in Epiphany is the manifestation, that called to come and see. What were they going to see? They were going to see the new Shepherd. A Shepherd just like them, but yet their own Shepherd. He was born to rescue them from the power of sin, death, and the devil. He was born to redeem them and to make them His own. He was born to protect every one of them from anything that would try to snatch them out of God's hand. And born to provide for them everything; and let me stress that **everything** they needed for salvation and His service.

You see, this is what the author to the Hebrews picks up on as he comes to the ending of his letter to the Hebrew people. He writes and he says, 'now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant; equip you with everything good, that you may do His will. Working in us, that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen.

You see, the shepherds were coming to see The Good Shepherd; the great Shepherd of the sheep, who comes from the God of peace. And I want you to think about peace. I remember Billy Graham's wife was once asked about peace in the family, and she quoted a saying that goes back many centuries. I forget the exact name of the first person to say this, but he, himself probably was one who had heard it before. It is a little saying that goes like this; "To obtain peace violence is inevitable." Think about that, have we not seen that throughout history? But to bring peace violence is inevitable. To gain peace with God, the God of peace, it took a lot of violence. Because there is this thing that stands between God and man and it is sin. The scripture is very bold and very specific in telling us, the wages of sin is death.

What the shepherds came to see, was yes, the fulfillment of what the Angel said, a newborn Savior lying in a manger. And the Angel was right, they found him quickly by going to the stables. But they came to see much more, they came to see he who would replace the sheep they were watching because He would be the one who would become the atoning sacrifice; because He is the Good Shepherd who would lay down his life for the sheep. And he laid it down and there was much violence involved as He was whipped, beaten, stripped, and hung on a cross. This is what they saw, and this is what they understood. What did they do? Well, they did not hold it and ponder it. We read, they went, and they told everyone what they had been told.

And dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I pray that that is our Epiphany this year. That we like the shepherds, look at that Baby and realize He is Christ the Lord, the great Shepherd of the sheep, who took all the violence to die for us so there might be peace between God and man; and that we might be like those shepherds and go and tell others. It might be a lost family member, it might be a neighbor, it might be a total stranger; but to do what Phillip the disciple did when he went and told his friend Nathaniel to come and see. Nathaniel doubted, but he came, and he saw, and he realized Jesus is the promised Messiah. Or to be like King David, who in Psalm 34 verse eight says, “taste and see that the Lord is good.” But we first must come; we must come and gaze upon the prophecies, gaze upon their fulfillment baby in the manger. Gaze upon that and see Jesus is the fulfillment. And then taste, taste the goodness, experience His goodness and the peace that passes all human understanding, the peace of knowing there is nothing we can do about our salvation. God is already done it all for us through that little baby lying in the manger who the Angels told the shepherds, go, and see. May we see Him just as well.

In our Saviors name, Amen.