

## **“The Announcement”**

*December 11, 2016*

Luke 2:8–20

### **I. Introduction**

Like birthdays, anniversaries and other important milestones in people’s lives, we take time every year to remember the events surrounding the miracle birth of Jesus Christ because of its great importance. The birth of God’s anointed One is significant to each one of us individually and to the world as a whole—among other things, Christianity led to the founding of schools and hospitals, it led to the downfall of slavery and the lifting up of the place of women in society and the home.

But the telling of the Christmas story can become such a familiar and common experience that we lose the significance of it all. For example, with yearly repetition, this story of the shepherds can become so familiar that we overlook just how amazing this was. As we consider Luke’s account of the angels’ announcement of the birth of “*a Savior, who is the Christ,*” let’s begin by reminding ourselves of the recipients of this announcement, i.e. the audience of shepherds.

### **II. The Audience of Shepherds**

We’ve heard announcements all of our lives. We hear announcements on the radio and on TV; we are bombarded with them on the internet. Announcements are usually rather boring and unimportant, but not this announcement. Of all the announcements that were ever made, this announcement about the birth of the Messiah was the most important one ever. How one responds has eternal significance.

God often doesn’t do things the way we would, as we read in [Isaiah 55:8](#), “**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD.**” We can see how God might choose to announce the birth of the Savior of the world to Herod the king or He might announce the birth in a splendid ceremony in the Temple led by the High Priest or to the most religious men of the day, the Pharisees. But no - the only invitation from God to anyone to come and visit Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus is to a group of shepherds—one of the last groups of people that you’d expect God to take notice of. God chose shepherds over Pharisees

Why didn't God send the angel to the chief priests or to the elders and religious leaders of Israel—men of respect; men who daily studied the Word of God; men who would be able to reach many people? [Turn to Luke 18:9-14](#). The Pharisees and the religious leaders of Israel saw no need for a Savior or for repentance; they thought they were righteous enough; they were good enough. They wanted nothing to do with a "Savior."

It was because of this attitude that the angels were sent to shepherds—men who, because of their occupation, were outcasts. Since they were out with sheep and often had to kill predators, they were almost always "unclean." It would seem that they were seldom (if ever) allowed to worship in the temple. Even back in Joseph's day in [Genesis 43:32](#), we read that shepherds were "**disgusting**" to the Egyptians. And they were poorly thought of by their own people, too. One historian writes that "*shepherds were despised people. They were suspected of not being very careful to distinguish 'mine' and 'thine'; for this reason, too, they were debarred from even giving evidence in court.*" Basically, shepherds were pretty close to the bottom rung of the social ladder. Unlike the Pharisees, they knew that they needed a Savior and they were ready to respond to God's call.

There is another reason why they were chosen over many other groups in the Israelite culture. [Turn to 1 Corinthians 1:25-29](#). God doesn't call many of the rich and mighty, He calls the poor and the lowly. He doesn't call those who will rely on their education or their position in life or in their own strength; He calls those who will rely on Him. Peter tells us in [2 Peter 3:9](#) that God is concerned about all people, regardless of their position in life, their education, or their strength, but, as we see throughout the New Testament, only those who see their need and respond will be saved. This announcement to the common, despised shepherds is an example of just that. The shepherds may have been outcasts, unclean, and unreliable, but God chose them and they responded in a positive way. They answered God's call.

### **III. The Announcement**

The announcement itself was unlike any other announcement that has ever been made—"God has come to earth." Can't you just imagine the scene that night? The shepherds were probably sitting around

the fire eating and talking about the events of the day. As they were talking, all of a sudden they saw a painfully bright light—the light coming from a shining angel right in front of them. They weren't expecting this and the angel scared the stuffing out of them. I'm sure their first thought was, "*Uh, oh! This can't be good!*" These men who would fight thieves, bears, lions, and wolves—these brave men—were scared stiff! They were in the presence of God's glory and God's holiness—who wouldn't be terrified.

The angel brought them good news: God had sent a Savior for mankind. Not a soldier or a judge or a reformer but a Savior to meet man's greatest need—salvation from God's wrath; salvation from an eternity in hell. The angel said that this Baby was the anointed One—the Christ. And just as prophesied in the Old Testament, the Messiah was of the lineage of David and He was born in Bethlehem. According to the angel, this Baby wasn't just someone sent by God like Moses had been; He is the Lord. Not just any run-of-the-mill lord, He was the Lord God; He was Immanuel—*God with us*. As prophesied, this miracle Baby is the Savior, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

The angel went on to tell them how to find this Baby. Contrary to what they would have expected, the Baby wasn't dressed in the finest clothes and living in the finest house in Bethlehem with many people attending to His needs. Immanuel, Jesus the Christ, the One described in [John 1:3](#) as "*through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made;*" this One would be found wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger—an animal feeding trough in a barn.

Then, just in case someone thought he was dreaming or that this was a reaction to eating bad food, God sent "*a multitude of angels praising God.*" The Greek word for multitude is our word *plethora*—God sent a *plethora of angels*. Job tells us in [Job 38:6 & 7](#) that the angels praised God at the 1<sup>st</sup> creation. Now they praised God at this new beginning—a new covenant with mankind. [Hebrews 1:6](#) says, "*When God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'*"

Jesus came to meet man's greatest need—Jesus came to bring "*peace to men on whom His favor rests.*" [Isaiah 9:6](#) calls Him the "*Prince of Peace.*" In [John 14:27](#) Jesus said, "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be*

fearful.” The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom. *Shalom* means more than peace from war and the battles of life. *Shalom* means an inner peace; peace from passion, grief, and envy—a peace of character—a peace with God. This is the peace Jesus brought—peace between God and mankind; peace between Jew and Gentile; peace between one another. Turn to Romans 5:1-2. As well as peace with God, there is the peace **of** God—Paul; wrote in Philippians 4:7: “The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

But understand, being at peace with God doesn’t mean everything will be “hunky dory and peachy keen.” If we are at peace with God, we will be at war with Satan. As Ephesians 6:12 says, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” In Matthew 10:34-36 Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ‘For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.’” Peace with God doesn’t lead to peace with the world.

For that matter, peace isn’t assured to all mankind; God’s peace is only for those who please Him. So how does one please God? In Romans 8:8 Paul wrote, “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.” The writer of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 11:6 “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” As Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:1-21 and Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 and in Ephesians 2:8-9, the way of faith and peace is to believe that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is all one needs to be saved and to have peace about eternity. Then and only then will one be at peace **with** God and have the peace **of** God.

#### **IV. The Shepherds’ Response**

After they heard the announcement, we see the shepherds’ response. They wasted no time. We don’t know if they left anyone behind to watch the sheep, but some of them, if not all of them, went to Bethlehem to see this Baby. As they approached Bethlehem, they certainly must have gotten stares from

the people. Because of their reputations, shepherds were not usually welcome in any town. I wonder if they walked up to people and said, “*We saw angels in the sky and they told us that a baby had been born who is going to be the Messiah. We were told to look for Him in a manger. Do you know where we can find Him?*” I wonder how many people ignored them completely and walked by them never slowing their pace at all. I wonder how many people thought these filthy shepherds were crazy or drunk. I wonder how many people rejected them before someone finally pointed them in the right direction.

Eventually, they found the Baby just as the angel had said. They worshipped Him and no doubt marveled at God’s grace and goodness to them as they shared their experiences with Mary and Joseph. They weren’t put off by the surroundings—a smelly barn and an animal feeding trough!! Their eyes were on Jesus and not on the things surrounding them.

After worshiping the new-born Savior, they didn’t just have a benediction and a 3-fold amen and go back to their flocks as if nothing had happened. After they left the Baby, they went and told the good news—the Gospel—to others as they “**glorified and praised God.**” This was a day of good news and they couldn’t help but tell others what they had seen. I suspect that, since it was late at night or early morning, many did think they *were* drunk. Others were just amused by them, but some must have gone to see for themselves. But regardless of what others did or didn’t do, the shepherds continued glorifying and praising God. They took the place of God’s heavenly messengers—the angels!!

Luke tells us that when they finally returned to their flocks and their regular duties, these shepherds were changed men. They continued to glorify and praise God as they shared their experiences with each other and anyone else who would listen to them. We see the shepherds’ response, what is your response?

## **V. Your Response**

The shepherds are good examples for us to imitate today. By faith, they heard the message God sent them and they responded in obedience and joy. These social outcasts went to find the Christ child; they worshiped Him, and then went and told others.

In a similar manner, we have received a message and a command from God; the message is: *“Jesus loves you; He died for you, and has risen from the grave for you.”* **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”** (Acts 16:31). Every person needs to make Jesus his or her Lord and Savior. And once you have “seen” this Baby of Bethlehem; once you have received Him as your Lord and Savior, the command is: **“go, make disciples.”**

For whatever reason, shepherds weren’t allowed to give testimony in court. They definitely weren’t learned men who could speak with great eloquence, but God used these humble shepherds to be the first human witnesses that prophesy had been fulfilled and the Messiah had come. Angels can never experience the grace of God, but we, like the shepherds, can experience God’s grace and mercy. We can tell others what God means to us. Telling others about the Savior is a solemn obligation as well as a great privilege, and we, who are believers, must be faithful. As Romans 10:14 says, **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”**

We must pick up where the angels and the shepherds left off. We must tell others that the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Son of David, has come to earth. He was sent from heaven to identify with us, to walk with us, to die for us, to be raised for us (1 Corinthians 15:1-6)—this is the story of Jesus, a story worthy of praise and worthy to be told—again and again.

The reason for our rejoicing starts with Jesus in the story of His birth, but it doesn’t stop there—it’s just the beginning. Through His Spirit—the Holy Spirit—Jesus’ presence continues to be with us and to shape us as we live on this earth. Now instead of being a meek baby in the manger, He is the Good Shepherd who watches over us in **our** weakness. Like the shepherds, we need to go forth glorifying and praising God, telling others that the Savior has come. As the sign in front of church says, we need to tell others that “Jesus is God’s Gift to all.”