

Model Shepherds

Luke 2:7-21 - NCBC, December 24, 2017

Main Point: **The shepherds model the joy and wonder of God's gospel.**

- God's gospel reaches spiritual outcasts (8)
 - Socially: Accepted rejects
 - Spiritually: Dispensable necessities
- God's gospel is revealed by God's messengers (9-14, 21)
 - Honoring God
 - Bringing salvation to all people
 - Through the Son of God
 - For your peace and joy
- God's gospel requires a whole-person response (15-16)
 - Great hope
 - Great faith
 - Great love
- God's gospel renews the entire life (17-20)
 - From shepherds to heralds

Application: **Follow the shepherds' response to God's gospel.**

Opening Announcements:

- 12/31 5:30pm New Year's Eve Celebration

<<Joy has Dawned!>>



Glory to God in the highest and merry Christmas to all. God Himself has come to earth to rescue us from sin, and so we gather together to worship Him in prayer, song, and responsive obedience to the preaching of His Word.

Luke chapter 2 is the Scripture before us this morning, and I invite each of you to open your copy of the Scriptures to **the second chapter of Luke's Gospel.**



If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, please raise your hand so we may give you a Bible as a Christmas gift from New Castle to you today.

Last week we studied the first 7 verses of **Luke 2**, and noted the human context behind that first messy Christmas. Today **verses 7 through 21** give us heaven's vantage point on God becoming a man. Never before, and never again will there be a birth like this one in human history. It's almost too wonderful to fully comprehend. The Supreme King of Glory humbling Himself to be born to humble people in the most humble way in order to rescue us from our greatest problem.

Without the incarnation – or God becoming flesh – there could be no salvation. So rejoice and celebrate the birth of Jesus the God-man that initiates our salvation from sin's guilt and eternal penalty – for this is the true meaning of Christmas.



Now for our study this Christmas Eve, **verses 7-21** walk us through the experience of the shepherds. These herders have much to teach us this morning, so prepare

your heart to listen carefully to God's Word, and submit to its life-giving truths.

In honor of the public reading of God's Word, I would invite all who are able, to stand as I read from the English Standard Translation, starting in **Luke 2, verse 7**:

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and 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 among those with whom he is pleased!" ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had

heard and seen, as it had been told them. ²¹ *And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

This is the Living and True Word of God. Please be seated.

Let's Pray.

This familiar passage of Scripture could rightly be titled, "The Gospel according to the Shepherds" for,



The shepherds model the joy and wonder of God's gospel throughout this narrative.

If you listen carefully this morning – you'll be able to relate in some way to these nomadic individuals just outside of Bethlehem living in the fields along with their sheep.

So for this hour at least – try to distance yourself from the deafening familiarity of all our Christmas traditions. Get all the nativity scenes out of your mind, and just soak in

Page 3a of 14

the Biblical account of this scene. There's no oriental astrologers with camels yet. There's no star yet. There's no inn-keeper. We are not even sure there's a stable...all we know from **verse 7** is that the newborn is now laying in an animal's feeding trough after the first-time mother and her husband cleaned him up and wrapped him in strips of cloth to give his little body security and warmth after entering our cold, harsh world.

Certainly Joseph and Mary must have stared in wonder at this little boy that God's Spirit had conceived in Mary's womb.¹ The angel Gabriel had told them clearly that this child was the very Son of God, the promised King and Messiah who would rescue God's people.² Mary's relative Elizabeth had already called the unborn child, "Lord."³ Mary's own joyful prophecy in **Luke 1:46-55** testified that yes, Mary did know...and Joseph did too – that the child she had just delivered... would soon deliver her!

Who would now share the immense joy and wonder in this good news? God Himself had come in human flesh!!

Well **verse 8** says that *in the same region* [likely just 1 or 2 miles outside of the little village of Bethlehem⁴], *there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

¹ Luke 1:35

² Luke 1:26-35; Matthew 1:20-23

³ Luke 1:43

⁴ According to local Bethlehem tradition the sheep fields were approximately 2 miles from the center of Bethlehem's village.

And with this unexpected introduction in the account of Jesus' birth, we learn that,



God's gospel reaches spiritual outcasts (8)

The good news that you can be saved from sin's guilt and shame and given a brand-new life of peace and joy is not just for the privileged, or the strong, or those who seem to have it all together.⁵ No. The news of God bringing salvation to sinners is good news to every heart who hears... even if you are a religious vagabond... just like these Bethlehem shepherds.

You see, under the influence of western culture and Roman corruption, shepherding had become a corrupt and despised trade. The shepherds were the,



Accepted rejects on the social ladder. They were largely uneducated and unskilled. And because they spent all their time outdoors watching and guarding the sheep – they smelled – like sheep – and just in case you are wondering - it's not a compliment if anyone ever tells you that you smell like a sheep!

Shepherds were social outcasts. Their reputation was so dishonest and unreliable, that they were not allowed to testify in Jewish court. Many were regarded as robbers for using land for their flocks that they had no rights to. Shepherds were at the bottom of the social rung... but someone had to do it, right?

The culture merely tolerated them...as accepted rejects.

Spiritually speaking, shepherds were just,

⁵ C.f. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31



Dispensable necessities.

After all, the Jewish sacrifices and burnt offerings at the temple in Jerusalem required a large supply of sheep. Accordingly, the Jewish Rabbis had decreed that all the sheep raised outside Jerusalem as far as Bethlehem 7 miles away, should be used for religious animal sacrifices.⁶

Now we don't know for sure, but this could mean that the shepherds in **verse 8** were actually raising sheep for burnt offerings and sin sacrifices in Jerusalem.

And the Pharisee's scrupulous inspection of these lambs for any blemishes required the most tedious care from the Shepherds. Jewish tradition⁷ tells us the shepherds would have the baby lambs born in a cave, rather than outdoors where they were more susceptible to danger. Then after birth, the shepherds would carefully inspect the lamb – even wrapping it in strips of cloth to swaddle it

just like a baby – keeping it secure and preventing it from harming itself in the first few hours of its fragile life.

Yet consider the irony of the shepherd's plight. Since the animals didn't give them the Sabbath off, their continual animal husbandry made them ceremonially unclean sinners who were unable to keep the Jews Rabbinic law.

Shepherds could never attend a holy synagogue. They were unclean...dispensable necessities – for someone had to raise the unblemished and spotless lambs whose blood could be used to cover the sins of the Jews.

This week I've thought a lot about the irony of God announcing the birth of Jesus – the perfect Lamb with a capitol "L", to a group of spiritually outcast shepherds who were responsible for raising sacrificial lambs for Jerusalem's worship.

How many times had the Pharisees told them that their lambs weren't good enough to be used for sin offerings? How many times had they been laughed out of town for their smell – or pushed out of the synagogue for being unclean?

And yet in **verse 9**, the angel of the Lord appeared to *them*. Yes – to the low and outcast. There's good news this Christmas for you dear friends – because God's gospel reaches out to spiritual outcasts!

You don't have to clean yourself up first in order to be rescued. Just listen and respond to the good news of salvation that God is bringing to you even now! For,

⁶ MacArthur, Luke Commentary

⁷ Alfred Edersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah



God's gospel is revealed by God's messengers (9-14, 21)

In the text, the messenger was an angel from heaven. We don't know if the angel hovered in the air above the shepherds, or if it stood on the ground next to them.⁸ We don't know if the wind picked up or died down before this heavenly visit. But this we do know:

According to **Hebrews 1** angels are ministering spirits compared to flames of fire.⁹ They are fearsome creatures – not cute, nor pudgy, nor naked. God's messengers are holy warriors, and notice what surrounded the angel from God in **verse 9**,

The glory of the Lord shone around them.

The glory of the Lord?! Remember the glory of God is the Name and Fame of God. The visible beauty and light of God's presence. The glory of the Lord had not been

⁸ Luke 1:15 may indicate they were standing with the shepherds before going back into heaven.

⁹ Hebrews 1:7, 14

seen in Israel since the days of Ezekiel when the prophet saw God's glory depart from the temple prior to the Babylonian exile!¹⁰

No wonder these shepherds were overcome by fear – they were surprisingly and unexpectedly in the very presence of God and His messenger, and the message of God is always,



Honoring to God, and humbling to men.

For every message that comes from God better reveals God's Name and Fame. The whole purpose of God's plan of salvation is the greater glory of God. So after telling the shepherds not to be afraid, the angel announces that his message

¹⁰ Ezekiel 8, 10-11



Brings salvation to all people

Look again at **verse 10**,

Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Literally, the angel uses the Greek word for preaching the good news... as a noun, it means “the gospel.” As a verb, it means “to evangelize.” So the angel says, Fear not, I’m an evangelist – and I’m preaching some good news to you that will bring great joy to anyone and everyone who hears and believes my message.

Salvation has come for *all* people! Gentiles and Jews. Ceremonially clean and ceremonially unclean. Shepherds and Pharisees alike. Today salvation has come for you,



Through the Son of God

Look at **verse 11**,

For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Here’s why you should not fear, but be full of great joy: For God’s glory and your joy a child has been born today in Bethlehem – and this child is Savior, Christ, and Lord!

You might underline all three of those titles mentioned in **verse 11**.

Savior is a title for God Himself that Mary uses back in **chapter 1, verse 47**. This child who has been born is the Son of God – and He is your Savior!

Look ahead to **verse 21**. What did Joseph and Mary name their child? Why didn’t they name him Josephus? Because in **Matthew 1:21** the angel told Joseph to name the child Jesus, *for he will save His people from their sins*.

Listen carefully. Jesus is not just a moral teacher, or a historical prophet. Jesus wasn't born in human flesh to help your golf game, or marriage, or career path.

He was born to save you from your sins. From the real guilt that your sins of omission and commission have created between you and your Creator God.

All God's true messengers still preach this good news today: God brings Himself glory by bringing salvation to all people through their faith in the Son of God – who lived and died to save them from their sins.

The perfect Lamb of God was born for sinful shepherds and outcasts like you and me – so that through His substitutionary life and death our sins might be taken away forever.

But He's not only Savior, but Christ, or Messiah. This means that Jesus is the Anointed One – the promised King of Kings who will sit on David's throne forever and restore peace to all of God's people.

Then to remove any doubt about who this baby truly is, the angel says He is the Lord. In other words, this baby is truly God. He is to be honored and worshipped and obeyed entirely as God Himself.

Is this good news to you today? That the babe of Bethlehem is truly Savior, Christ, and Lord? Have you honestly considered the truth of the angel's evangelism?

The angel told the stunned shepherds in **verse 12** that they could find this long-awaited Savior swaddled and lying in a feeding trough.

God was no longer just present among His people – He was now one of them. Incarnation. God in the flesh. Emmanuel. God with us.

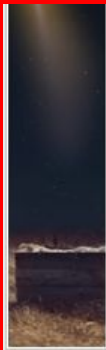
And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God

Because just as the angels praised God at creation according to **Job 38:7**, so likewise God's army of heavenly messengers could not restrain their joy at this start of the new creation! The holy of Holies was no longer in Jerusalem behind a curtain – God Himself was now in a humble feeding trough, accessible for the worship of all people.

The angelic army exclaimed in unison,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased. Or it may be preferable to translate the last phrase, *peace among those upon whom God's favor rests*, since the angels were praising God, not men.

Because God deserves to be praised and glorified above all creation – for He has brought salvation to all people through His Son Jesus,



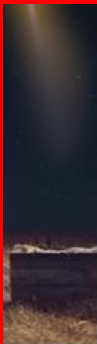
God's gospel is **revealed** by
God's messengers (2:9-14, 21)

- Honoring God
- Bringing salvation to all people
- Through the Son of God
- For your peace and joy

For your peace and joy

God gets glory every time a sinner receives peace through repentance and faith in Christ.¹¹ God's saving favor, or electing goodwill, brings peace through the call of repentance and faith.¹² And so you can't just hear this good news and go on with indifference.

No matter if you're an outcast, or a top 40 under 40,



God's gospel **requires** a
whole-person response (2:15-16)

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¹¹ Romans 5:1

¹² 2 Timothy 2:24-26

So what's your response today to the real Christmas story? Will you follow the shepherds' example?

In **verse 15**, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

Let's go and see!

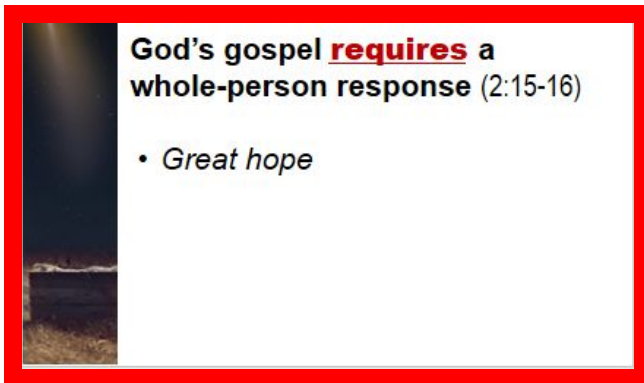
And notice... they didn't say, let's see this thing that has happened, which the angel has made known to us. No... they responded in light of what the Lord had made known to them.

Listen – when God speaks to you using any evangelist or preacher of His Gospel – you need to respond to God! Not to the messenger... don't become distracted by any intermediary God chooses to use. God's message demands a whole-person response of worship!

It was a huge sacrifice to leave the flock – shepherds can't just leave the flock any more than dairy farmers can take vacations. Someone has to watch over the sheep!

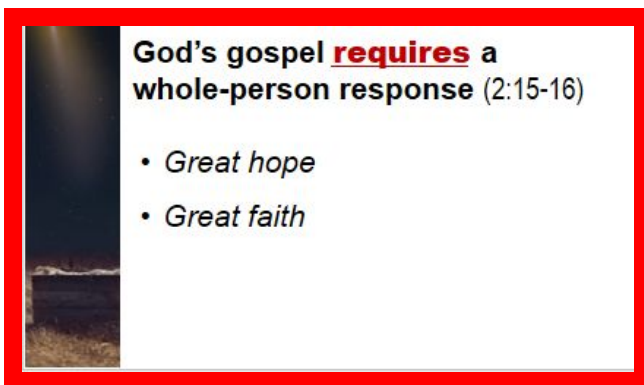
So after some discussion and quick planning – but **verse 16** makes it clear – with great haste – *they went and found Mary, and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.*

The initial emotion after being exposed to the holy glory of God's gospel was fear. But that fear quickly turned to



Great hope.

The messenger had brought good news of salvation even for them. There was no denying the supernatural power and conviction of the message they had received. And they responded together with,



Great faith

For remember, faith is believing the word of God and acting upon it out of a heart of worship, no matter how I feel. "Let us go and see!" they exclaimed!

We need to find the manger in Bethlehem that has a swaddled baby in it. We need to act upon what we have heard.

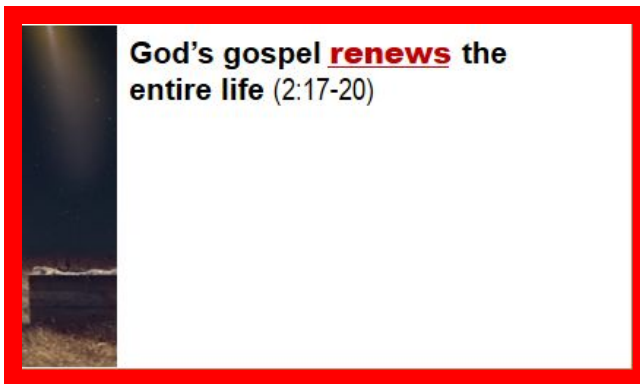
Such a whole-person response of worship is really the expression of,



Great love.

Great desire. Their hearts were now full of great joy and desire to know their Savior and Lord Christ even more.

Loved ones – when God opens your eyes to see and understand your salvation through Jesus Christ – it changes you. You can't just wink at Jesus in mental assent... you must worship Him with all your faith, hope, and love. No one can participate in the saving Gospel of God and not have their entire life revolutionized by His saving grace!



God's gospel renews the entire life (17-20)

Look at **verse 17**, when the shepherds had saw that everything was just like the angel had told them – what did they do?

They made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

For sure they told Joseph and Mary as they invaded their privacy with their new-born child on that first night. But **verse 17** implies they didn't stop with them. They spread the good news to all who would listen to them, and **verse 18** says that all who heard their testimony wondered at what the shepherds told them.

The angels had departed, but now the shepherds continued in their place.

The Gospel had changed their message and their very identify. Because of Jesus, they had gone,



From shepherds to heralds

When human shepherds encounter the Lamb of God, outcasts become evangelists!

Their whole purpose and outlook on life had been transformed by their hearing the Gospel, and responding to the Gospel in faith, hope, and love! Look at **verse 20**,

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen – just as it had been told them.

I believe the shepherds never got over their experiences that night. They must have talked and talked about it through the years together – told all their families the story hundreds of times. In fact - perhaps to the dismay of some of the doubters in their family – they were never the same after they met Jesus in Bethlehem.

For,

Main Point

The shepherds *model* the joy and wonder of God's gospel.

The shepherds model the joy and wonder of faith in God's gospel.

So how will you respond to the good news of God bringing salvation to you today through His Savior Jesus Christ, the Lord?

Will you,

Application

Follow the shepherds' response to God's gospel.

Follow the shepherds' response to God's gospel.

Will you be like Mary in **verse 19** who *treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart*? Mary

obviously didn't understand everything that God was doing. She didn't have all the answers, and didn't know all of the Bible. But she believed what God had revealed to her – the verb tense tells us that Mary continually and repeatedly pondered all these things...and she believed.

In contrast, the people in **verse 18** just wondered about what they had heard from the first New Testament evangelists for a time. For them, their amazement was just a passing emotion.

What will you do with the good news you have heard? Will you leave here today waiting to drown the conviction of this invitation with snow, and lights, and presents, and the passing of time? Or will you follow the shepherds' response – and with haste – today – believe that Jesus is the Son of God who is your Savior, Christ, and Lord?

Dear friend – I implore you to follow the example of the shepherds – turn from your sins and believe that God is able to save you through faith in Jesus Christ.

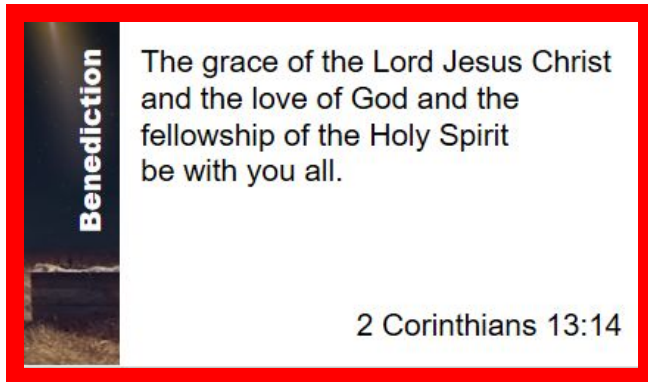
Model Shepherds

Luke 2:7-21

Let's Pray.

<Silent Night>

Let's pray our **Benediction** now as we are dismissed,



The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
2 Corinthians 13:14



Recommended Resources on Model Shepherds:

- Genesis 3:15
- Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-7; 40:3-5
- Jeremiah 31:15; 33:14-16

- Hosea 11:1
- Micah 5:2
- Malachi 3:1
- Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-23
- John 1:14
- Romans 8:3-4
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Galatians 4:4-7
- Philippians 2:5-11
- <https://www.vidangel.com/thechosen>
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-popular-misconceptions-christmas-story/>
- *The Hope of Christmas*, Our Daily Bread Ministries
- *The Dawning of Indestructible Joy*, John Piper

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Luke 1:48-53. God visits salvation on the hungry and humble, not the proud, or mighty, or rich. Discuss why God first revealed Himself to the shepherds, and not to Caesar Augustus or King Herod in view of 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 and Philippians 2:6-11.
2. Compare Luke 2:17-18 with 8:39. Do you believe the shepherds received salvation in Luke 2? Why or why not? Is a desire to share the good news of salvation with others an evidence of saving faith? Why or why not? Is it possible to receive salvation and not desire to tell others?
3. Read Luke 2:14 in various Bible translations, noting how most translators give the preferred meaning of peace to those whom God graciously favors, while a few translations give the meaning that only those who please God are to be objects of His favor. In the context, who are the angels praising and why? What is man's role in this grand plan of salvation?
4. Review Luke 2:9. While the prophets had spoke of future days when God's glory would return to dwell with His people, the glory of the Lord had been absent from His people ever since prior to their Babylonian exile (c.f. Ezekiel 10-11). Why is the glory of God in Luke 2 so significant to the shepherds? (c.f. John 1:14)

5. Compare Matthew 1:21 and Luke 2:21. What is so significant about the name of God's Son?
6. Discuss the three titles given to Jesus in Luke 2:11. What does each title mean, and why is each one important to you?