

Clarion Shepherds

Call to Worship: Psalm 8

1st Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

2nd Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

Hymn #164- *Angels from the Realms of Glory*

Hymn #160- *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*

Hymn #156- *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks*

Introduction

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

These words were spoken by God, through Isaiah the prophet, especially noting the distance that God will go to pardon sinners, no matter the extent or gravity of their sins, if they seek Him in humble repentance. They offer hope to those who, because of the magnitude and weight of their sin, would naturally believe that they are beyond hope. And so, God says, as it were, “Try Me. I am not like you. My grace, mercy and compassion are measureless, and I offer them freely to all who turn from their wicked ways and seek Me in truth.”

That said, the uniqueness of God, and the profound ways in which He works, as described by Isaiah, are not limited to His willingness to forgive sinners, but rather, it spills over into so many other avenues as well. God does things that would often distinguish Him from us and our doings. And in large part, He does so, all the more to magnify His glory and to exalt His Name. He is the God of profound paradoxes! We saw this at the luncheon last Sunday, when we considered Psalm 8, where the Lord stated that He ordains and perfects His praise out of the mouths of nursing infants and little children. In the past, we saw this, when God had spared only Rahab (a harlot) and her family, when He commanded the Israelites to utterly destroy every living thing in Jericho. [And even more profound is the fact that Rahab was part of the lineage, from which the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, came!]

Well, this evening, we find once again, one of those ways, in which, God does things quite differently than we would ever expect, as He announces the birth of the blessed Messiah, through the display of a chorus of glorious angels, not to kings, not to governors or Caesars, not

to religious Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees, but to a group of mangy, unclean shepherds! And they become a clarion call, for the Messiah!

For this evening then, we will take a look at this event, which is described here in Chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel.

I. An Angel Appears Before Shepherds

And so, we are told that in the same country (in the vicinity of Bethlehem), there were shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Now, this might sound odd and unusual to us, but oftentimes, shepherds, even in our own day (in other countries), actually live out in the fields, moving from location to location, to ensure that their flocks are well fed, well kept and well protected. Unlike the general population, they hardly settle down, and they tend to be a nomadic people, who move around from place to place. And such is the case, because they live for their animals. Their lives are wrapped up in the care of their animals.

This being the case, they are not the most social people in the world either (although, you may find some of them working together or near each other, as in this case). And so, from the first century, Israelite standpoint, they were outcasts, not simply by profession, but that's how people, in general, viewed them. And furthermore, they were generally raunchy, dirty, mangy, scraggly, and considered unclean. More often than not, you would not find shepherds being involved with temple worship. They didn't have the time for that, and as I said, they were viewed as unclean. Needless to say, shepherds were viewed as a dejected, worthless, "to be avoided," people, and you were looked down upon, if you pursued such a profession.

And so, the last place you would ever imagine for even a moment, that God would send his angelic messengers to, and especially to announce the birth of His Son, the Messiah, would be to some fields, where shepherds were grazing. Were you to guess, you would certainly guess the temple or to a palace, maybe a synagogue, and perhaps, even less likely, to the house of a well known, or moderately known individual or group of individuals, but not to a group of shepherds. You know, that when we have children even, the first people we contact are those closest to us (parents, siblings, close friends...etc). Imagine for a moment that when Prince Harry and Princess Kate had their first child, they kept everything quiet, and chose to reveal the

wonderful news to a group of street bums and panhandlers. And then, they would charge them to announce the news to everyone else. That would seem absurd to us, wouldn't it? But again, God's ways are not our ways.

And so, as the shepherds are doing their normal, "run of the mill" work, guarding their sheep at night from predators and such, certainly not expecting anything out of the ordinary to happen...just day in and day out tending of the flock...suddenly, an angel of the Lord appears, standing before them, and the glory of the Lord, we are told, shone around *them*. The normally dark, star covered field probably lit up, like the sky at a Gucci brothers Fourth of July, firework event. The glory of the Lord is generally very bright! And so, needless to say, they were greatly afraid. I don't know what kind of underpants shepherds wear, if any, but we can assume that some changes were made, before they headed off to see the Lord. But again, brethren, this is profound, because you only hear of the glory of the Lord (the Shekinah glory) appearing in the Most Holy Place of the Temple, and even that, on rare occasions from the past. But here, God's glory shines around these mangy, dejected, society rejected, shepherds!

And then, we are told in verse 10 that, "the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings (news) of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" And so, the angel alleviates their fears by telling the shepherds that they had news; indeed, great news that would bring joy to the entire world! And here it is. A child has been born into this world, today, right here in Bethlehem, the city of David's birth, who is Christ; who is Messiah, the Lord! Again, put yourself in the sandals of these shepherds! The Savior and Messiah, proclaimed from the beginning of time as one who would fix what our first parents had broken; the One who would break the curse of sin; the Seed of the woman, who would crush the serpents head; the Last Adam and Lord of all people, had entered our world, right then and there, in a nearby place, in the lowly city of Bethlehem. Out of the entire world, God sent His angel to reveal this incomprehensible truth; He trusted the greatest news in all of history, the very core and center of His great and glorious plan of redemption to these shepherds! What an absolute paradox! But, that's how God works, isn't it? He is not like mankind.

And then the angel gives the shepherds a sign, so that they, of all people, could go and see the child! It's one thing to give the proclamation to such men, but it's wholly another to say, "When My Son enters the world, I want Him surrounded by lowly, dejected, nobody shepherds." And isn't that fitting, that the One who would later eat with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners, and the One who would travel into the barren outskirts of society to care for lepers, would begin life in the presence of shepherds? It was like an early declaration of the type of people, to whom He would give over His life and time, to serve. From beginning to end, we see the heart of God, and the heart of Christ toward the outcasts and rejects of society. "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger" (vs. 2). You will find this glorious Lord and King, not in a royal bassinet, no not even in an ordinary crib, but rather, wrapped in swaddling cloths, lowly, in an animal's feeding trough. Wouldn't be to hard to locate this infant. He will be where you would never find a baby. There's your sign, another paradox; the Lord of glory, will make His way into this world in a way that would best represent His life and ministry... all lowliness and humility. Even from birth, the Lord of glory could speak, by His circumstances, in such a way, as to say, "Come to Me, come any and all...for I am lowly and gentle of heart, and you (whoever you might be) will find rest for your souls." Shepherds, swaddling cloths, manger...A beginning that marks a welcoming life for any class, any race, any nation, any people and any sinner, to come freely, to receive His salvation!

And if that weren't enough, the shepherds then behold the wondrous sight of an appearance of a multitude of the heavenly host, proclaiming the glory of God, because of what He was now preparing to accomplish through this Messiah:

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!' (Vs. 13-14). Again, keep in mind, this glorious display of chanting heavenly beings is only witnessed by a group of shepherds out in a field! What a display! Something tells me that no event at Nassau Coliseum or Madison Square Garden would compare to what they witnessed that evening! But, why all the big fuss! Why does God surround the birth of this Messiah with such a glorious heavenly display of cheering heavenly hosts? Because, this is the biggest deal in all of

history and the very center of everything for which this world was created and allowed to continue on. And because angels and heavenly hosts, being without sin, can see with the utmost clarity, what this means! They longed for this! They looked forward to this day with eager anticipation and curiosity, and here it was! Glory to God in the highest! Let God be glorified to the highest degree imaginable! Let this great event bring to Him the praise and honor and glory and worship that He so deserves! Why? Because, out of the sheer and incomprehensible grace of His divine heart, He has brought peace and goodwill to a fallen, corrupt, God-hating world! The creation, which was turned against Him by the wicked deception of the devil and his minions, was about to experience just reconciliation! Sinners would be blessed by God's good pleasure, wrapped up in the incomprehensible love that He has for them, because, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son for it!" The immense and glorious love of God; His profound peace toward sinners, was wrapped up in a living banner, which was just delivered, and now fixed in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths! Heaven can do nothing less than shout aloud such praise! And these shepherds get an unexpected preview; a visual sight of the glory of this scene of rejoicing, as God, in His profound wisdom and grace, tears open the clouds and reveals it to them!

II. The Shepherds Response to the Angelic Visitation

Following the vision, what do the shepherds do? How do they respond? Do they simply go back to their normal shepherding routine and say, "Well, that was cool." No. [Read verses 15-16]. They make haste and go to where the child is! They want to see Jesus, their Lord! They make use of the sign and go to the Christ child.

But, they don't just go to the child. [Read vs. 17-18]. They proclaim what God has told them, through the angel and the heavenly hosts, about this child. They speak of this blessed child, affirming His Messianic calling, and how He is the embodiment of God's peace and goodwill toward men. They preach the Gospel! The most unlikely of groups is entrusted with the most glorious of messages; many earthen vessels proclaim the glory of God and His gospel, because that's how God works! And because the message is indeed glorious, regardless of the vessels who proclaim it, everyone marvels over what they hear about this child! Mary ponders

and gives her heart over to meditating upon these things, and the shepherds then return to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they heard and saw, just as it was told them! The heavenly hosts have rubbed off on them, and now that they have seen the Christ with their own eyes, they join that heavenly chorus! [Read vs. 19-20]

Those shepherds went from the dejected routine of doing the ordinary work of tending to their flocks, to shouting aloud the praises of God, for what He has done. They became Clarion/Trumpet shepherds, and we can bet that, from that day forward, a certain, peculiar excitement was heard and proclaimed from among the fields, which Bethlehem and the surrounding towns and cities had not known before.

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Let the fact that God works in paradoxes encourage us to continue to walk by faith and not sight. While we cannot always understand present circumstances, and things may seem to be a certain way, we must remember that God's ways are not our ways, and He is a "big picture" God, who always accomplishes what He has set out to accomplish, even if it's through parting Red Seas, going back ninety-nine steps before going forward, or revealing His glory to shepherds. What can help us remain faithful at all times is keeping our hearts and minds fixed on the sure promises of God's Word, which always have, and always will, come to pass. And furthermore, we have a long line of history, both recorded in Scripture and outside of Scripture, which reminds us that God is always faithful. His ways are past finding out, but we know that He will always bring us, and all things, to the destinations that He has guaranteed in His Word. That's where faith comes in; trusting God to bring us where He has promised, no matter how the path that takes us there twists and turns.

2) If you are a Christian, rejoice in the fact that God has revealed His glory to you, which has led you to Christ. Like the shepherds, God has approached you, at some point in your life, and He has revealed the truth about Himself and His Son to you, which has led you to have faith in His Son. Never take that for granted! Like the shepherds, continue to proclaim the gospel of God's Beloved Son, and never settle back into a life of indifference to the Gospel. Friends, God has visited you! Most do not receive that glorious benefit! Now, be the Clarion call; be the

trumpet, that calls others to the same Christ, whose glory you have seen! [Ex: Samaritan woman at the well. “He told me all things that I have done...”].

And whatever your position in life; whatever your past life of sin has looked like, whatever your present struggles might be, always remember that God is pleased to use mangy, filthy, unclean earthen vessels, to proclaim the riches of His glory. He does not entrust His glorious gospel to the self-righteous, but rather, He puts it in the hands of redeemed sinners! [Ex: David Berkowitz; the son of sam]

3) The Gospel for the unsaved. “Seek the Lord diligently, and you will find Him!” In fact, if you find yourself seeking Him diligently, then you will know that He is already seeking you! [“No one comes to the Son, unless the Father who sent Him, draws them...”]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25