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- Part: 34 [Christmas: How Close Can You Get? Knowing Him for Salvation](#)
- Part: 33 [Christmas: The Only Gift Everyone Really Needs](#)
- Part: 32 [Christmas: Call His Name Jesus—At the Name of Jesus](#)
- Part: 31 [The Six Names of Christmas - Seeing Jesus as: Immanuel God with us](#)
- Part: 30 [The Six Names of Christmas-- Immanuel: God with](#)

The Shepherds



Part 14 (031224PM)

[Return to previous Page](#) | [Print](#)

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Luke 2:8-11 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 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. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Matthew 2:10-11 When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Luke 2:13-14 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, good will toward men!"

- Taxes were high; wages were low.
- Hypocrisy was rampant; honesty was rare.
- Freedom was gone; occupation was hard.
- The rich were getting richer; the poor were always struggling.
- Morality was ebbing; rebellion was brewing; cruelty was reigning.

Life for a shepherd in Century One was difficult at best. Cold nights, long days, distant family, and rare friends were part of the territory. Sheep stink and shepherds smell.

Sheep wander and shepherds search. Life was never restful; work was never done.

At the low end of Jewish society stood the shepherd. Away from the synagogue, absent from the Temple, and defiled by dead animals – they were outcasts to the Jerusalem crowd. Unable to even be a witness to special events they seemed almost outside of culture. But then everything changed.

That starry night on the hills of Bethlehem left a group of shepherds forever changed. What they heard and saw was burned into their hearts and minds. What they found was to forever change their lives. Luke tells us they went from the dazzling light show in the fields and searched until they found Him – of whom the angels sang. And when they found Him – they were never the same. In one moment everything they had ever gleaned from the Scriptures came alive.

God, angels, Heaven, Messiah, promises and prophecies became real at once– it all made sense. Sacrifices, lambs, offerings, sin, and forgiveness became intensely personal. The sheep they watched and sold became the pictures of mercy and grace. The Temple they served became theirs. The sacrifices for them. The pictures made sense, and they believed.

Life as a shepherd was monotonous and predictable. Sheep vary little in their habits; they walk so often down the same path it is soon a rutted canyon. Sheep are helpless – they can't even clean themselves. Sheep are dumb – they can't even find food unless they are led to it. Sheep are dirty – they walk around and collect any and all filth they come into contact with. Sheep are helpless, dumb, and dirty – and can only be cared for by the patient.

So a group of patient men, who sat on the same hills their grandfathers had sat upon, were watching the stars and talking that night – and then God came down.

The Shepherds remind us how God comes to mankind. God is the seeker. God is the initiator. And the shepherds were there, willing to listen and act. God can save the most distant, defiled and outcast

Part: 29	Us
Part: 29	Joseph & Mary: The King's servants
Part: 28	Lessons from the Wise Men Giving our Worship to Jesus
Part: 27	Simeon & Anna-- Single Hearted Devotion
Part: 26	The Humble Shepherds
Part: 25	Priests-- Indifferent People
Part: 25	The Characters of Christmas
Part: 24	Christmas Traditions: Their origins and meanings
Part: 24	Ordinary People: Zechariah & Elisabeth
Part: 23	The King's Glory
Part: 22	Joseph & Mary-- Does God have all of YOU?
Part: 21	So close and yet so far Zacharias, Elisabeth, Chief Priests and Scribes
Part: 20	The King's Seekers the Shepherds
Part: 19	The King's Seekers Magi and Shepherds
Part: 18	The Wonder of Christ's Love
Part: 17	The King of Christmas and Herod
Part: 16	What is Christmas
Part: 15	Simeon & Anna Finishing Fruitfully
Part: 14	The Shepherds
Part: 13	The Magi
Part: 12	Joseph & Mary Walking with the Lord
Part: 11	Zacharias and Elisabeth -- The 1st Spirit Filled Family
Part: 9	The Priests & Scribes: So close and yet so far
Part: 8	The Two Kings: Herod and Jesus
Part: 7	Joseph and the Magi
Part: 6	The Origin of Christmas Traditions
Part: 5	Are you looking for Christ this Christmas?
Part: 4	The Fourth Glory of Christmas: His Name
Part: 3	God With Us
Part: 3	Lessons in Worshiping Christ
Part: 2	Anna: Living a Life of Praise
Part: 2	God In A Manger
Part: 1	The Fullness of Time: The Day Jesus Was Born

- **They Listened to God when He speaks.** What a wonderful but fearful sight they saw. Yet they did not ignore what they witnessed; they did not run away from what they saw; they did not refuse to hear what the angels said.
- **They Came to God like they were.** Instead of backing away with the excuse of lack of education, lack of clothing, lack of standing – they welcomed God's message in wonder, in fear, in uncertainty, and in hope. There was no time to become someone else, God called them as they were!
- **They Responded to God at once.** What a picture of faith – they received the message and acted upon it. They didn't doubt, they didn't disagree, they didn't question, they didn't hesitate. They just heard and responded -- and they were first to see Jesus. They had little knowledge and great faith. Jesus would be moved by His parents soon, and they would have missed Him. Their simple faith is richly rewarded. The journey that began in faith will end in joy!
- **They Sought Baby Jesus until they found Him.** Luke uses terms to help us realize that they had to search for Him until they could find Him – and they did. They took what God had given them, no more and no less and that was all they needed to find Jesus – and they found Him. They searched for Him without giving up.
- **They Went against the tide/crowd.** In their day and time they were not welcome. Stay where you came from, go away, we don't like you -- they were outcasts; they were unwelcome in public. They smelled. Yet they came, they found, they believed, and they went away telling everyone they could!
- **They Told everyone they could the Good News.** Just like the rest of the New Testament would record – these shepherds went back to their old jobs – AS NEW MEN. If anyone is in Christ Jesus they are a new creation, old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new.

Now this Christmas time, will you be a shepherd? Will you experience the glad tidings of the Gospel? Do you experience great joy? Tonight chose to be like them and:

- **Listen to God when He speaks.** What a wonderful but fearful sight they saw. Yet they did not ignore what they witnessed; they did not run away from what they saw; they did not refuse to hear what the angels said.
- **Come to God like you are.** Instead of backing away with the excuse of lack of education, lack of clothing, lack of standing – they welcomed God's message in wonder, in fear, in uncertainty, and in hope. There was no time to become someone else, God called them as they were!
- **Respond to God at once.** What a picture of faith – they received the message and acted upon it. They didn't doubt, they didn't disagree, they didn't question, they didn't hesitate. They just heard and responded -- and they were first to see Jesus. They had little knowledge and great faith. Jesus would be moved by His parents soon, and they would have missed Him. Their simple faith is richly rewarded. The journey that began in faith will end in joy!
- **Seek Jesus until you find Him.** Luke uses terms to help us realize that they had to search for Him until they could find Him – and they did. They took what God had given them, no more and no less and that was all they needed to find Jesus – and they found Him. They searched for Him without giving up.
- **Go against the tide/crowd.** In their day and time they were not welcome. Stay where you came from, go away, we don't like you -- they were outcasts; they were unwelcome in public. They smelled. Yet they came, they found, they believed, and they went away telling everyone they could!
- **Tell everyone the Good News.** Just like the rest of the New Testament would record – these shepherds went back to their old jobs – AS NEW MEN. If anyone is in Christ Jesus they are a new creation, old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new.

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