

The Greatest Story Ever Told – Part 3

The Secret Is Out – God Told Us

The Shepherds

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Background

Luke gave this story about the shepherds for a reason. Jesus would come, not to the proud and powerful, but to the outcasts, the humble, those considered “last” on social lists. Because of this privilege, we have a responsibility to make known what has been revealed to us – we must make it known.

Central Truth

We have a responsibility to make known what has been revealed to us, BUT, what do we know?

The Shepherds

Luke 2:8-20

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. (ESV)

Micah 5:2

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting.”

Shepherds – Background: Who Are They?

Luke 2:8

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

- From the dirty manger, Luke moved to *the fields nearby*, outside the village. It was *night*. *Shepherds* were there, *keeping watch over their flocks*.
- Among the occupations, shepherding had a lowly place
- They were outcasts, not allowed in the city and not trusted by the general public, for often they were thieves
- Luke gave this story about the shepherds for a reason. Jesus would come, not to the proud and powerful, but to the outcasts, the humble, those considered “last” on social lists
- To these men God brought the first news of His Son’s arrival

- Shepherds also have other implications in this story of the Messiah's birth
 - King David, from whom this new King is descended, had been a shepherd most of his young life.
 - God had called him from that occupation to become a "shepherd" over the nation of Israel (2Samuel 7:8)
- **GOD IS a SHEPHERD:** Scripture often uses shepherds to symbolize all who care for God's people, including God Himself (Psalms 23:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:23; Hebrews 13:20; 1Peter 2:25; 5:2).¹

Observations About the Shepherds

1. They investigated, with haste, what the angels had told them – don't waste time
2. They made known what they saw – broadcast the good news far and wide
3. They worshipped God – glorifying and praising Him for all that they had heard and seen.

Main Thoughts

How Do We Make It Known?

1. Don't waste another minute – go find out for yourself! Get moving!
 - a) God decided to activate a bunch of untrusted amateurs with the greatest message the world will ever know. God bypassed all the professionals and focused on these amateurs. An amateur built the Ark; professionals built the Titanic. Which one would you rather be on?
 - b) They wasted no time to investigate what they had been told
 - i. They went with haste, found Mary and Joseph and the manger and then we saw it
 - ii. They made known that same midnight. These shepherds were the first evangelists
 - iii. They ran – the angelic visitation caused them to run with urgency and determination.
 - c) God activated them to function responsibility
 - i. People operate out of convenience instead of responsibility
 - ii. They were convinced about what they were told.

Fact – The Birth Was Hidden

- The birth of Christ was hidden from the political system – Herod
- The birth of Christ was hidden from the governing system – the Romans
- The birth of Christ was hidden from the religious system
- It was communicated to the priest Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth
- It was communicated to a teenage girl – Mary
- It was revealed to her fiancé – Joseph
- It was announced to the shepherds
- His identity was later revealed to a prophet (Simeon) and the prophetess (Anna) in the temple.

¹ Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). *Luke* (p. 42). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

2. This is not something to mind your own business about! God news (good news) needs to be shared!
 - a) Stand up for what you believe and broadcast the good news near and far. We simply cannot be quiet anymore. Society is questioning everything and everybody. People do not know what or who to believe.
 - Why are the shepherds so quiet today?
 - b) They were armed with the good news
 - i. They broadcast the “God news” of heaven to everyone they came in contact with “The Lord has made known to us”
 - God always requires a witness to the things He does on the earth
 - 500 people were witness to the resurrection of Christ
 - Let all things be established through the mouth of two or three witnesses
 - The shepherds made known what had been revealed to them widely, they did not hold the event to themselves, but they provided witness to Christ and His birth.
 - c) GOD NEWS: We need to hear not only good news, but we need to hear “God news”
 - i. What is the proceeding word of the Lord today? What is the Lord declaring and speaking?
 - Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word the proceeds from the mouth of God.
3. Stop trying to contain yourself – glorify and praise God
 - a) The natural response of the shepherds was to praise and glorify God for everything they had experienced seen and heard. Their hearts must have swelled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude and awe. What a thrill to hear from God, what a privilege to know that you have been invited by the almighty, what a joy to know that you received an invitation into and to glimpse into the greatest story ever told!
 - b) We sing because the angels sing
 - i. This needs to be a natural culture and style of the believer
 - ii. God can and should be praised anyway, anytime in every circumstance
 - It should be an expression of thankfulness and recognition of what the Almighty is going to do in and around us
 - It is spontaneous and it is full of life and joy
 - The scripture says, “Put on the garment of praise”.
 - c) It is a season to take a stand regarding what you believe, point people to Jesus - Jesus has to be enough!
 - d) Be strong in your beliefs! Convictions cast out fear.

Final Thought

“Just as they had been told”

- The message is true, it is reliable, it is from God
- This is the message – the Saviour of the world has been born.

This Shall Be A Sign

Sign – an indicator

- a. God is faithful to communicate what He is accomplishing by signs
- b. It is God’s way of confirming and affirming that we are on the right track with Him
- c. Although we should not look for signs, God provides them in His way and His time
- d. God provides signs as a means of His direction
 - Psalms 86 – Show me a token of good that I may not be ashamed...
- e. A sign is also known as mighty works (δυνάμεις)
 - i. The supernatural works of Christ and His Apostles are denoted by six different words in the New Testament, exhibiting these works under different aspects and from different points of view. Generally, a miracle may be regarded as:
 - A *portent* or prodigy (τέραξ); as Acts 7:36, of the wonders shown by Moses in Egypt
 - A *sign* (σημείον) pointing to something beyond itself, a mark of the power or grace of the doer or of his connection with the supernatural world (Matthew 12:38)
 - An exhibition of God’s glory (ἔνδοξον), Luke 13:17; *glorious things*
 - A *strange* thing (παράδοξον), Luke 5:26
 - A *wonderful* thing (θαυμάσιον), Matthew 21:15
 - A *power* (δύναμις); so here: a *mighty* work.²

Group Questions

1. What does it mean that Jesus is enough?
2. Why did God hide the birth of Jesus from the prominent and powerful?
3. Give three Biblical examples of a “sign” from the Bible. How does God use signs today?
4. Explain the six words used in the New Testament to describe the “mighty works”.
5. How can we live a life of perpetual praise and glorifying God?
6. What is “God news” vs. good news?
7. Why is God so determined to communicate the most important through the most common people? Give at least three other examples.

² Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 66). New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.