

Freedom Way M.B.C
Bible Study Lesson
Date—Dec. 8th 2022

**Keeping Christmas Alive
(The Shepherds Visit Jesus)**

Biblical Passage: Luke 2:8–20

Supporting Passages: Micah 5:1–6;
Matthew 2:1–6

Memory Verse: Isaiah 40:5

Biblical Truth: Continually glorifying and praising God is a biblical mandate for all Christians.

Context: The first three lessons in this series focused on the true meaning, the true joy, and the true gift of Christmas. This last lesson focuses on keeping the meaning, the joy, and the gift alive in our lives throughout the entire year.

INVESTIGATION

The Gospel of Luke has often been called “the gospel for the outsiders.” Nowhere is that more evident than in the invitation offered to lowly shepherds watching their flocks by night. The essence of Luke’s Gospel is vividly portrayed in the picture of shabby shepherds huddled around the newborn Messiah. This Gospel would present the story of how God’s love came to everyone, even those considered outsiders because of the dominant religious system of the day and because of their occupation. The story Luke told demonstrated God’s great love in the person of Jesus Christ for the marginalized, ostracized, and even demonized people of the world.

Luke understood how the outsiders felt because he was one himself. He was the only gospel writer who was a Gentile. His whole purpose in writing the Gospel of Luke under the Spirit’s inspiration was to convince a man named Theophilus of the truthfulness of Christ’s story. Luke wrote as an outsider (of the Jewish religious system) to an outsider to persuade him that this Christ is the Savior of the whole world. The Savior

invited tax collectors, prostitutes, and shepherds to share in the Kingdom of God with Him.

Like Mary, the shepherds would not likely have played in the remarkable drama of Jesus’ birth. The shepherds were lowlives. They were not known for their honesty. And they smelled like sheep. Yet the angel appeared to this group. The angel gave these commoners the details of Christ’s birth, down to the signs that would validate the angelic message. Like Mary, they too obeyed. After their visit, they were among the first to spread the good news of Jesus’ birth. Those who heard their message were amazed. The event in Bethlehem created a catalyst for glorifying and praising God.

IMPORTANCE

This passage illuminates the reality that Jesus is God and Savior. The birth story reminds us that Jesus was born of virgin and is God’s son. Jesus is God and is fully human. That allows Him to understand our failings and to grant us His salvation.

This passage also relates to the truth that People are God’s Treasure.

INTERPRETATION

Luke 2:8 The first invitation to share in the Savior’s birth goes out to a group of lowly shepherds. Recall that Luke opened Luke 2 with a reference to Caesar Augustus. The birth announcement of a Roman Emperor would have first been given to the Roman Senate. Here, the announcement goes to the lowly. Shepherds were social and religious outcasts. Their occupation made it nearly impossible to maintain the religious regulations of cleanliness. Interestingly, at least one commentator points out that the sheep used for the Temple sacrifices were pastured near Bethlehem. It is possible, but not certain, that the shepherds who came to witness Christ’s birth watched over the sacrificial lambs for the Temple.

Luke 2:9 Angels played a prominent role in Luke's Christmas account. They appeared in Luke 1 to Zachariah and to Mary, and later to the shepherds. Their appearance created quite a stir. These shepherds were accustomed to watching and listening closely for the movement of predators or thieves during the night. They never expected to see an angel, or a host of angels, visit them in the middle of the night. It is important to remember that angels do not have the cute and harmless appearance often portrayed in by childhood pictures and collectible figurines. They are creatures from a wholly different dimension. Their mere appearance was enough to strike fear into the hearts of these men.

Luke 2:10 The angel's first words were intended to calm the shepherds' fears. The shepherds had nothing to fear because the angel bore good news, not bad news. This good news was intended for all people. This good news message is intended first for all the people of Israel, but even beyond that, for all people everywhere. This announcement and event had a global perspective.

Luke 2:11 The angel revealed where the birth occurred, who was being born, and to whom the child was given as a gift. The angel called Bethlehem by its other name, "the town of David", since David himself was a shepherd much like those listening to the angel. The title also reinforced the royal lineage of the child, since the promised Messiah would come from the line of David. This child was none other than the long awaited Savior. The gift was given to the shepherds. While they certainly represented Israel and even all people, the force of the words was God's personal gift intended for them. In the final part of this verse, the angel clearly identifies the child as "Christ the Lord." This child is God Himself born in human flesh.

Luke 2:12 The angel told the shepherds that they would find the child lying in a manger wrapped in cloths. If the shepherds were surprised by the angel's appearance, they would be equally surprised by the description of the Savior's birth. If the

shepherds had any thought that their presence would not be welcomed at the place of birth, then news of the child lying in a manger alleviated their fears. This setting would have seemed very common to them.

Luke 2:13-14 After delivering God's message, the angel was joined by a throng of heavenly beings, likely angels. The shepherds got a glimpse of the continual praise of heaven, where angels eternally glorify God's name. The words they spoke revealed the content of their praise. First, this child's birth brought glory to God. This event finds its focus in the sovereign work of God. He alone is in control of the world's events. Second, this child's birth brought God's favor into humanity's world in a very tangible way. God made known His desire to usher in an era of peace between Himself and humanity through the birth of this child (Eph. 2:14).

Luke 2:15-16 The angel's announcement and invitation obviously inspired the shepherds, for they immediately sought the place where the birth had occurred. When they arrived at the location, they found it exactly as the angel had described. The shepherds were the very first people other than Joseph and Mary to give witness to the gift of God's Son.

Luke 2:17-18 After visiting the manger, the shepherds then took on the same mission as the angel who had originally delivered the message to them; they now became messengers of the gospel. The shepherds began to spread the word they had heard about this baby. Amazingly, others now experienced the same response the shepherds had initially experienced—wonder, awe, and amazement—as the shepherds bore the news of Christ's birth. The recipients of the news had become the bearers of Good News. All who genuinely encounter Christ must embrace this same pattern. Christians must be willing to pass that passion on to others as God provides the opportunity. Finally, some of the amazement the people expressed as they heard the shepherds tell their story had to come because God had allowed such fringe, outcast people to get the news first. The

message was certainly incredible, but so were the messengers. Prophets and priests did not declare the news, but shepherds.

Luke 2:19 To this point in the passage, words have traveled back and forth. Words traveled from the angel to the shepherds, from the host of angels to the world, and from the shepherds to other people as they spread the news. Conversation and declaration saturate this passage. And then verse 19 states, "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." No spoken words. No public announcements. No chorus of praise. A young mother simply caught her breath and reflected deeply on the child in her arms. This verse is the Sabbath rest of Luke 2:8–20. It gently reminds to the reader that in all the buzz and energy of the moment, there was a certain and sweet tenderness between this woman and this child. Luke 2:19 is a very human verse, for it portrays the experience of so many mothers with their child. Certainly, this child was indeed the Savior of the world, Christ the Lord. But he was also Mary's Son. Luke 2:8–18 declares the divinity of Jesus—He is God. Luke 2:19 reminds readers of His humanity. He was truly a little baby boy.

Luke 2:20 The shepherds returned to the fields from which they had first come. Although life returned to its normal routine, the shepherds' lives would never be normal again. They resumed their job as shepherds with a new joy firmly planted in their hearts. The unique part about this verse is that the shepherds return to the fields "glorifying and praising God." This was the same description given of the angels' activity (the same word is used for "glory/glorify" and "praise"). Luke used this description to show that the praise that filled heaven now made its presence felt on earth. Just as God the Father was surrounded in the praise of His angels, so God the Son too was surrounded in the praise of the shepherds.

IMPLICATIONS

One popular saying states, *The ground is level at the foot of the cross.* God welcomes everyone to receive His grace on the basis of faith in Christ. He will not turn anyone

away. But the reason the ground is level at the foot of the cross is because the ground is level at the foot of the manger. Christ did not become a beacon for all people only at the cross, during His final moments of life. From His first moments of life, nestled in the manger, He extended His offer of grace to whosoever. God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that whosoever might believe on Him would receive the right to have eternal life. The message of Christ's cross holds power because it is consistent with the message of Christ's cradle. God gave His gift to everyone—poor and rich, white and black, Jew and Gentile.

So, what about the lives of your learners? The manger teaches us that God is more than willing to invite and embrace the shabby outcasts of the world to share in His Kingdom. The cross teaches us that God is not just casually committed to this principle—He is willing to die for it. The salvation of people's souls is preeminent in the heart of Christ. Learners will benefit from considering how they value people. We must fully comprehend that anyone and everyone is welcome to worship at the feet of Christ.