

# IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

**SERIES: GOD WITH US (CHRISTMAS)**

**LESSON: SHEPHERDS RECEIVE THE GOOD NEWS**

**LUKE 2:8-20**

**12/13/20**

## MAIN POINT

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Christ's humble coming is welcomed with the highest of praise and excitement.

## CONTEXT

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Our passage today is Luke 2:8-20, an account of shepherds receiving news about the birth of Christ and thus making haste to visit the baby. This account is just one in a series of events surrounding Jesus' birth.

Up to this point, an angel appeared to Mary telling her that as a virgin she would be with a child who would be the Christ. She believed (1:38) and rejoiced at the news (1:46-55). In addition to her miraculous pregnancy, her aunt, Elizabeth, was also pregnant in her old age. Her son would be John the Baptist. Surrounding his birth, John the Baptist leapt in the womb when Elizabeth visited Mary (1:44). Also, Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband was mute until John was named (1:60-63). It is interesting to note all the spiritually confirming moments surrounding Jesus' birth.

The setting of our story is Bethlehem and nearby fields. Because of a census, Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem. Once there, she gave birth to Jesus. Yet, because there was no room in an inn, they laid the baby in a manger (2:1-7).

## INTRODUCTION

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As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Have you ever been privileged to be the first to receive special news? Did it feel special to be the *first*? Why do you think you were the first to hear as oppose to**

**someone else? Did you have the freedom to tell others or did you have to keep it to yourself?**

In our passage today, of all people, shepherds during a night watch were the first to hear the news of Christ's birth. Upon hearing the news, they have a mixture of emotions: initial fear, perhaps awe, haste-like excitement, bewilderment, and wonder.

## **EXPLANATION // ...believe Jesus is the Christ...**

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Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:8-14**

**Any speculation for why you think the shepherds were the first to hear of Christ's birth?**

In a nearby field to Bethlehem, some shepherds likely expected an average night of keeping watch over their sheep. The job doesn't sound pleasant or exciting. However, this night would be different.

Amidst the mundane task, an angel of the Lord appeared before them. We don't have a description of the angel per se. In fact, his defining characteristic seems to be that he is from God and somehow embodying a glory that shows he is distinctively from the Lord. This angel has come to make a scene. God, through the angel, wants to make a special birth announcement. He wants to get the attention of the shepherds in a way that is fitting to the occasion. The glory surrounding the angel was so strong that it surrounded the shepherds. God has successfully seized their attention.

The shepherds were seized with fear. This response is not uncommon. Who wouldn't be at least in shock from witnessing an angelic visit? Mary too was troubled and perhaps afraid (Lk. 1:28-30). Zechariah too (Lk. 1:11-12). But fear is the not the end goal of God.

Rather than fear, God wants the shepherds to find great joy. Indeed, this joy is not exclusively for them, but for *all* people. They, with everyone else, were to rejoice in the good news God is revealing.

Like a special birth announcement, the angel shares that Christ is born in the City of David. Old Testament prophecies predicted different elements of Jesus's birth. Isaiah 7:14 says, "Behold a

virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.” Micah 5:2 is a key prophecy saying that Christ will come from Bethlehem: But you, O Bethlehem. . . From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” The angel announces the good news of God fulfilling his promise of a Savior from Bethlehem—perhaps the very hometown of the shepherds.

The angel’s announcement continues. The angel wishes for the shepherds to see for themselves. I suppose anyone who had seen an angel with the glory that these shepherds had seen might not need any further proof to believe. But God desires for these shepherds to be firsthand witnesses. God tells them what to look for exactly—a baby laying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. You heard right! The Christ, Son of God Most High, isn’t in a palace, but in a lowly, humble manger. If it were not humble enough for God to simply come to earth, he came as a baby to rest in a manger. How marvelously humble!

But that is not all.

Before the shepherds decide to make haste, suddenly a multitude of angels/heavenly host appeared. They arrive, not with further announcement, but praising God for the announcement that has been given. For a moment the shepherds get to observe a heavenly scene of worship. Reading the event allows us to see just how great the event of Christ’s birth is. It is an event calling for the highest of praise. The angels seem to understand the gravity of what has taken place. They say, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” The humblest act of God coming to earth as a baby in a manger deserves the highest of praise.

**Does our culture seem to praise the humblest of acts? How so or how not?**

**Does our worship reflect anything close to the heavenly host?**

**Does Christmas seem to be for “all people?”**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:15-20**

As messengers, angels seem to only say and do what God desires, nothing more or less. Thus, after making their announcement, they return to heaven. The shepherds are left with an easy decision—of course they are going to Bethlehem and look for the baby. The Bible says they went in “haste” which expresses their excitement and eagerness.

They found Mary and Joseph just as the angel told them. The baby also was lying in a manger. Happily, they explained to Mary and Joseph what had happen—how an angel appeared to them and told them about a baby in a manger who would be the Christ, the Savior.

Those who heard their story found it credible. In fact, anyone who heard it, wondered at it all. Who wouldn't?

Luke, our author, makes an interesting distinction between the responses of people compared to Mary's response. Luke 2:19 says, "*But* Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." It is difficult to decide whether Luke intends for us to see a negative connotation with the distinction. If a negative connotation is intended, Luke wants readers to see the wonder and marveling by the shepherds as insufficient in some way. However, "but" may not imply a negative connotation, but rather express a difference in how she personalized the news. Viewed in this way, the shepherd's response is not considered to be negative, but appropriate. In light of Mary's perspective, it is understandable that her thoughts would go in a more personal direction than the shepherds'. As Jesus's mother, how special it must have been to know these extra events surrounding the birth of Jesus. It is worth treasuring how an angel announced her son's birth to others, that shepherds went in haste to find her special boy, and that a multitude of angels joyfully sang praises to God. How special! How memorable! Mothers treasure all sort of things surrounding their baby's birth, how much more when the baby is the Savior.

And yet, equally as much, how much to ponder. Up to this point, Mary has learned that Jesus is going to be the Savior for all people (2:10), holy (1:35), the Son of the Most High (1:32), will establish a throne forever (1:32-33), bring peace (1:79; 2:14), and the fulfillment of prophecy (1:70). On top of that, miraculous and abnormal events have surrounded Jesus's birth including her aunt Elizabeth's pregnancy in old age, Zechariah's muteness, John the Baptist leaping in the womb, her virgin birth, angelic appearances, God's timing of a census, and visits from shepherds. Even still, these events are happening in a very humble way—Mary herself is humble (1:38), Jesus was born in a stable (2:7), and the shepherds are the first to hear of the announcement. It is reasonable for Mary to want to ponder all these things.

**How do you typically respond to good news: wonder, treasure, or ponder?**

**How do you typically view Mary? What images of her typically surface in your mind? What qualities of Mary do you think are worth emulating?**

## **APPLICATION // ...have life in His name.**

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Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Let's be honest. What do find yourself pondering most about during Christmas season? Is it worth pondering about? Why or why not?**

**Let's take Covid into account. Normally Christmas season might feel busy and rushed (travel, shopping from store to store, attending Christmas parties, end of the year**

work responsibilities, etc.). Does this Christmas season feel rushed or slowed down? Does the adjustment allow you to treasure more? Ponder more?

## **PRAYER**

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Close in prayer, asking God to press this truth that was studied.