

## **The Shepherds**

### **Luke 2:1-20**

We have in our home a picture of the nativity and the shepherd's visit – which I think captures it well. Joseph is holding a lantern so they can see. Mary has lifted the blanket some so they can get a glimpse of the infant Jesus. She looks so young and yet so composed. Clearly, the shepherds all work for a living. They are represented by three men and three boys. All are looking on intently. One stands, leaning on his staff. He's the oldest of the group and his face shows the years of hard work. But his haggard face also shows a keen interest in the baby. One boy, elementary school age, has his hand on one side of the manger, on his knees, peering in with fascination. The shepherd boy on the opposite side looks to be like eighth or ninth grade. His hand is over his heart as he looks on. The boy in the center of the group is middle school age. His face shows a sense of wonder at the moment. The other men are behind the younger boys, their dads, with hands on the shoulders of their sons, as they take in the moment together. And on the bottom right, beside the manger, looking on as if it understands it all, is a lamb... foreshadowing the destiny and mission of Jesus.

We are often told that, as a class, shepherds were looked down upon by other people. That they were regarded as thieves, and their word weren't accepted as testimony in courts of law. They were considered ceremonially unclean. There is even a quote in the Mishna: "We do not buy from shepherds, wool, milk or [young goats] kids." However, some of this is based on information from a later period in history. So, this misfit reputation may be exaggerated. In Jesus' day, they may have been regarded more as regular working-class folk. Nevertheless, they weren't kings or governors or wealthy or powerful.

Verse 8 tells us this happened, "In the same region." That is, around Bethlehem. The Temple was only four miles away in Jerusalem. The sheep over which the shepherds kept watch may have raised for sacrifice there.

Marvin Vincent writes,

“There was near Bethlehem, on the road to Jerusalem, a tower known as Migdal Eder, or the watch-tower of the flock. Here was the station where shepherds watched the flocks destined for sacrifice in the temple... It was a settled conviction among the Jews that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, and equally that he was to be revealed from Migdal Eder.”

#### Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament

- The shepherds would watch over their flock from the second story.
- Where they birthed the newborn lambs in the lower portion of the two story tower.
- Shepherds wrapped the lambs in swaddling clothes to protect them from spot or blemish.
- Lambs would be laid in a manger until they had calmed down.

*And you, O tower of the flock,  
hill of the daughter of Zion,  
to you shall it come,  
the former dominion shall come,  
kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.*

Micah 4:8, ESV

If this is all correct, then the keepers of the sheep for temple sacrifice were the first to hear of the birth of the Lamb of God.

Let’s join the Shepherds and...

#### 1. See What the Shepherds Saw

2:9 “Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the *glory of the Lord* shone around them, and they were terrified.”

#### 2. Hear What the Shepherds Heard

2:10 “But the angel said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you *good news of great joy* that will be for all the people.’”

2:11 “Today a *Savior*, who is *Messiah* the *Lord*, was born for you in the city of David.”

Not only does the angel announce that Jesus has been born, but the angel describes who Jesus is. He is Savior – one who rescues those who cannot help themselves. He is Messiah – God’s anointed one, anointed as prophet, priest, and king. He is *the Lord* – not just a good man, but the Lord himself who has come to save his people.

### 3. Understand How the Shepherds Responded

2:15-16 “They *hurried off* and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the feeding trough.”

Halford Luccock called this the “First Christmas rush.”

Notice the word, *Found*: They found after some searching.

### 4. Imitate How the Shepherds Couldn’t Keep Quiet

2:17-18 “After seeing them, *they reported the message* they were told about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”

The shepherds had the kind of experience you tell about. They couldn’t keep quiet.

### 5. Observe How the Shepherds’ Visit Helped Mary

2:19 “But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them.”

Mary pondered these things in her heart. She doesn’t have the picture on the front of the box, she just has the most pieces of the puzzle. And she’s trying to put those pieces together to gain a more complete understanding of all that God is doing. The shepherd’s visit gave Mary more details and further confirmation.

## 6. Feel What the Shepherds Felt

Luke 2:20 “The shepherds returned, *glorifying and praising God* for all they had seen and heard, just as they had been told.”

Worship is the natural response of believers to a fresh glimpse of God.

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