

## THE SHEPHERDS SHARING

DECEMBER 25, 2022 | LESSONS FROM THE RESPONSES OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS |  
LUKE 2:8-20 | PASTOR DON SCHWING

How many here have brothers or sisters? That's quite a few. What were some of the challenges that you had growing up? I know sometimes we hear things like "I have to share a bedroom with my brothers." I think of the Adebeges, there's five boys and I'm sure they're sharing some rooms there. I had a sister, so we didn't have to share. We couldn't share rooms.

Think back to Christmas when you were a kid and some challenge maybe you had with your sibling. Imagine that there was this one present that you wanted, you'd really been holding out for all year. You had been asking your parents for months for this present. You found the Sears catalog, you opened it up, placed it in front of your dad's plate where he eats breakfast, you circled it twice for the thing that you wanted. It was that special edition Millennium Falcon. The one where the top opens up, it has some extra action figures in there, and you can press the button and you can get the sound of the engines coming out.

Christmas comes, you tear open your presents, and, finally, it's there. You open the box up, you take the Millennium Falcon out. It takes about ten minutes to undo all the little twist ties to get it off of the cardboard. You see the instructions, you throw them to the side because you don't need them. You get it and you press the button and it doesn't work. So maybe you check the instructions and you realize that it needs four batteries. D batteries. The big ones. Really? The only place you know that has D batteries are your dad's flashlights. So you take the batteries out of your dad's flashlights, you put them in, you press the button, and finally hear the authentically fake sound of hyperspace. You play with it all day. You take it to bed with you. Your little sister appears in the doorway and says, "Can I play with it? Please?" It's your sister. "Maybe I'll just let you look at it." She looks like she's asking so nice. She says, "Please." You think, "For a second?" No.

You know a lot of time, sharing is hard. When we have something that's ours that we've earned or received as a gift, we tend to hold on to it. It's mine. It's not yours. It's mine. I think that's why there's so many Bible passages about sharing. I think forgiveness is really just a form of sharing. It's sharing our grace with others. Sometimes there's things that's special that we want to share and are there things where we think it will really benefit others. Think about times that we share – there's this really new restaurant that opened up, or this is really great sale going on, or whatever it is. It's something that you know that will really benefit others. We just want to give it away because we want to help others.

This morning, we'll be seeing how the angel of the Lord shared the good news of great joy with the shepherds. Shepherding wasn't an easy task. It was unpleasant. It was sweaty. It was smelly.

You were out all night. If you had an education, or a skill, or any type of status, shepherding was not something that you did. But God uses them. The shepherds hear from the angels what's going on in Bethlehem. A multitude of angels appear before them and sing praises to the glory of God. After the shepherds experienced this, they go to Bethlehem to share what has been told to them and be known to them by the angels. And if they see the baby Jesus, they return back to their fields, sharing what they had seen, praising and glorifying God.

So today we're going to look at the shepherds. We're going to look at who they were. We're going to look at what and how they shared, and then we're going to see how we can share as well.

Let us pray.

[PRAYER] Dear heavenly Father, we thank you so much for gathering us to you this morning. We thank you for this day where we celebrate the birth of your Son, our Savior. Father, we're so thankful for us being able to gather together and we pray that what we brought for you so far has been honoring and pleasing to you. We pray for our message. We pray that the words that are spoken by me just barely be my voice, and allow the words just to minister to our hearts today. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, amen.

Our scripture reading today is from Luke 2:8-20, but we're going to start in verses 8-16. So let's stand together for the reading of God's word.

*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 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 among those with whom he is pleased!" 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." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.*

You may be seated.

It seems to me there's something romantic about being a shepherd. Sometimes I think I could be one. You're out in the pasture, you're tending to the animals, making sure they're fed. But it's really more than that. You're outside, hot or cold, rain or shine, day or night. You're not just the caretaker, you're also the fighter, you're the barber, you're the milker, you're the matchmaker, you're the vet. Just think about what's involved and taking care of your pet or pets. Now multiply that times 100 or times a 1,000. Scripture tells us that Job had 14,000. Wow. It's not a job that many people wanted to do. Nobody really wanted them around, but they were needed. They were needed for what they could provide. They were needed for the wool, they were needed for the sacrifices, they were needed for the milk.

However, the nature of their work kept them from normal religious functions. The work of keeping sheep made them ceremonially unclean. Also, I think, with the amount of work that was involved in tending the flock, and what they were involved in, it just would take so much intense cleaning to make them able to go to temple. But if they did come to the temple, then no one would be available to watch the flock. So they were sort of in this position where they just had to always be tending the flock and were kept absent from normal religious services. I think it's kind of ironic because the priests needed them for what they can provide, but didn't want them in the house with them because of what they did. Just as the priests wanted them for what they can provide, so did the people.

So you have these men out in the field at night watching the flock. I think since it's nighttime, the sheep are probably settled in a bit. I'm wondering if the guys that are there are sort of scheduling their watch, where they say, "Okay, Charlie, you have the first watch. You sleep for three hours. Me and Sam are going to stay up, and then we'll switch three hours later." Then all of a sudden, here comes an angel of the Lord. The angel appears to them.

I'm wondering, how did the angel show up? Was the angel sort of off in the distance, and the angel sort of walked towards them and they were wondering what it was? Or was it like – boom – angel is here. I think the angel showed up suddenly, because you can see how they responded.

It says – *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shown around them, and they were filled with great fear.* There are two types of fear in scripture. One is the all-filled reverence that we have for God. And the other fear is the type of fear we want to run for the hills. I think that's the fear that the shepherds were experiencing here. I think they were scared more than they could possibly imagine. Because the angels say, "Fear not." *Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.* As if that wasn't enough, a host of angels appeared with them.

So I'm wondering what type of group a host of angels is. We have like a flock of seagulls. We have a den of thieves. Was it a murder of crows or a smack of jellyfish? So what is a host? I don't have a scripture to us and tell us, but I think what's actually more important is how many is a host. It doesn't tell us here, but if we think back to Daniel, he describes a host of angels as 10,000 times 10,000. The angels fill the sky from one end to the other, glorifying God. Picture that. The sky filled more than any stars you could ever imagine. If you've gone camping up in the mountains where there's like no ambient light, where there's no light pollution, you can see a million stars. Now picture that squared or times 1,000. That was what the sky was filled with.

The first angel could have done this. The first angel could have just given all the glory to God. But the first angel's responsibility or role was to bring the information. It was the host of angels, the angels from heaven to give the glory to God for what God had done.

How do the shepherds respond to this? They leave with haste, without delay, leaving their flock, dropping everything to go see what the angels had said.

So in all this I'm wondering, not only why shepherds, but why the shepherds particularly. I mean, we had wise men, men of extreme renown, that knew of the coming King. God used them to celebrate the birth of His Son. But the Lord didn't come to them. Lord came to the shepherds. His glory didn't come to the wealthiest or the most educated or the most religious. The glory of the Lord came to the shepherds, one of the most humble professions of all.

Really, isn't this how Jesus came? Wasn't this His ministry? Isn't the only way that we accept Christ is through our own humility, and recognize that we need Him? Isn't it through our humility that we continue to grow in Him? God didn't choose any shepherds, God chose these shepherds. I think there's something special about them, just like there was something special about us when God chose us.

Just look at their response. First, after they experienced the glory of the Lord, the shepherds go to see the baby. I think it's important to understand why they went. They didn't go to seek proof. "The angels say this, now I'm going to go see if it was actually true." They just went to see the baby.

It says they *went with haste*. They went in a straight line right to Christ. Now if we move that over to our lives now when we work to be on that line getting from us to God, how many of us move on a beeline? Or how many of us zigzag our way, bringing into our hearts the things of the world, keeping us from that straight line, that beeline for Christ. We need to be on the straight path. But don't think that you're not strong enough, or you're not able, or you don't know how. God chose you. So whether you grew up in the church or came to know Christ later, or you had some of the consequences of choices that you have made, God chose you to be on the line for Him.

Do you realize that the first people that God shared that His Son was the Savior was the shepherds? Do you know who Jesus first shared that He was the Savior with? The Samaritan at the well. Two broken people. The humblest of humblest. The lowest of lows. Doesn't this make you happy that God uses ordinary people to bring about His glory and to share Himself with? Moses was a shepherd who led his people out of slavery. David was a shepherd who became a king. Now we're probably not going to lead a group of people out of slavery or become the king of Israel, but God will be using us just the same to bring about His glory.

God has shared His glory. Through His Son Jesus Christ, God has shared Himself with us. So the question becomes, what does God want us to do with this? I think the answer is revealed to us in the shepherds.

After they left and made haste to go find Jesus lying in a manger, they now go and share what was made known to them. If you pick up our story, the shepherds leave quickly and arrive at the stable. Picking up in verse 17 – *And when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

So here you have the shepherds seeking Jesus in Bethlehem. I wonder how they knew exactly where He was. Because the angels didn't tell them, "Hey, it's the fourth house from the left. You go to their stable and He's there lying in the manger." But I imagine when they went the Bethlehem and said, "Hey, are you aware of a baby that's been born in the manger?" He was probably the only one in town and people probably knew He's in that manger over in that area over there.

But there's two responses here to the shepherds sharing. It says – *When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.* First is the amazement of the individuals that he shared with. For me, I'm thinking that the shepherds aren't holding in this good news. I'm imagining they have the best news that they've ever heard of in their lives. They're shouting it out. They're doing the happy dance of all happy dances. Now imagine the best news that you've ever heard in your life. Now multiply that times 100 or times 1,000. I see that as what the shepherds are experiencing. It just pours out of them, this excitement, and the people are amazed.

Second is the response of Mary. *Mary treasured up these things and pondered them in her heart.* Her response was very different from everyone else's. Where everyone was amazed, Mary treasured what was shared and pondered them in her heart. I wonder what she had been thinking for the last nine months. She didn't really have the family support around her that she wanted for a 13, 14, 15-year-old girl that was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. I'm wondering if maybe she felt a little abandoned by God. Angel shows up and then nine months later this is going on. I wonder if she's saying, "Okay, God, I'm doing this really big thing for you. I'm in a stable here. I could use just a little bit of help." Here comes these shepherds, sharing everything the angels had told them. And she treasures them up. It gives her comfort as she ponders them in her heart. I'm thinking her response may have been just, "Thank you, guys. Thank you for that little bit."

Then after the shepherds share this, they return to their flock, praising and glorifying God. They just could not stop praising Him. They were so excited about what they heard, they just couldn't contain it and they just shared it with everyone.

We get like that sometimes today. We have really good news and we want to share it. Think about gender reveal parties, and baby announcements, or pictures you posted online, or engagements. These things we're just excited about. It could be monthly milestones of your kids. I've seen pictures, "this is my baby at one month and this is him at two months, and this is him at three months." We're just excited to share it. Sometimes we're really excited and we send out an e-card at Christmas and it has 47 pictures of our family. But we're excited. We're excited about all kinds of things and we love to share. Maybe sometimes it goes a little too far, our sharing, because sometimes it would be about us and not really about bringing good news of great joy.

But the shepherds had seen the baby and they shared all and everything that was told to them. When we see Jesus, like the shepherds, when we first witness Him and then believe, there's something that happens inside of us where we're filled with great joy, and we just want to share it. If you think about the shepherds, the shepherds were the first evangelists, the first one sharing about Jesus, the first witness and the first to believe. They're not priests. They're not

professionals. There's no special training. They just shared their experience with God and Jesus Christ.

How many here have shared Jesus Christ with someone? Anyone? Alright. How many of you are professional evangelists? See what I mean? When we experience Christ, anyone can share it.

Now what I think happens sometimes is we don't always feel comfortable sharing the gospel. Because sometimes we don't know what to say, or maybe we're afraid of saying the wrong thing. I think if we're honest with ourselves, there might be some discomfort. "Oh my goodness, someone's going to reject me." I mean, how many of us are willing to just walk up to somebody and say, "Hey, let me tell you about Jesus." It's not the most comfortable thing to do. I get it. I mean, who likes to be rejected? I mean, I don't like to be rejected any more than anybody else. I think the rejection nowadays is more than just "I don't want to hear it." Now I think that the opposition to us can even be greater. But that doesn't stop the need to share.

I'm wondering how do you think that people responded when the shepherds first started sharing? Now it says *they were amazed*. But *amaze* can mean a lot of things. It can mean wonder it can be admiration, or shock, or disbelief. I have to think that as they were returning back, praising and glorifying God, the response was probably the same. Not everyone believes. But also consider how Mary responded, how the shepherds sharing comforted Mary. She treasured what was said. Just imagine how comforting that was for this 14-year-old young woman that just had a baby.

When we share Jesus, we have no idea of what the impact is going to be. It may be rejection. But on the other side, it may be wonder. It might be snickering, but it also may bring someone comfort. The shepherds just shared.

When we experience Jesus, as most of us here have, we change from being receivers of the good news to givers. God's angel spoke to Mary, he spoke to Joseph, spoke to Zechariah, telling them specifically how they were to serve God. But the 400 years of God's silence of sharing prophecy with His people ended with the shepherds. God used hard-working, humble laborers who kept watch over the temple sacrifices to announce the arrival of His Son. I don't think any of them there were concerned that they were going to be out of a job. Because really Jesus was coming to be the last shepherd. So there was really going to be no more shepherds needed in the temple. They didn't care what the effect on them was going to be. All they wanted to do was go and share the good news of great joy.

God will use anyone anytime, regardless of our background, our experiences, or education, or our abilities to share His good news. At GraceWay, God has doctors, He has lawyers, He has police officers, He has accountants, He has FBI agents, He has carpenters, electricians, mechanics, plumbers, welders, farmers. The list just goes on and on. And God uses every one of us to share the good news. Some came to accept Christ at eighty, some did it at eight. Some were really struggling with life circumstances, some grew up in the church. Either way, we're used by God. Just like God used the shepherds. He wants the same thing from us – to worship His Son and to share.

As I mentioned, sharing Jesus can be hard. It's helpful sometimes if we know the right things to ask. We actually have a specialist here at the church. Denny Dunscomb leads our evangelism training at the church. On January 1<sup>st</sup> at the six o'clock service, Denny is going to be sharing for a bit how to share the gospel, this one particular technique from Evangelism Explosion. So I encourage you, if you want to learn how to share the gospel, come next Sunday night at six o'clock. I've seen him do it and he's great. I've seen him do it with kids. I've seen him do it with adults. I've seen him do it on the street in Trenton. When you see people respond to the gospel, there's just the joy that fills your heart as you share good news of great joy.

We don't know what impact our words will ever have. We don't know what the soil is going to be. The soil could be rocky, it could be fertile. We don't know if we're going to be reaping or we're going to be sowing. Either way we share. We don't know what impact the sharing of Jesus Christ is going to have. It could be outward, people filled with amazement. Or it could be inward, bringing comfort to someone who is struggling. But all we need to do is to share.

Let us pray.

[PRAYER] Dear heavenly Father, we thank you so much for gathering us to you. We thank you for the shepherds here at the first Christmas and the way that they were filled with joy of the good news. They just wanted to share. Father, I pray that for each one of us that we can have opportunities to share good news of great joy, that when we do that we can have the comfort to just share that your Son is the Savior of the world. That it is only through a relationship with Him that we can be in heaven and eternity with you. Father, we're so thankful for your Son. We're thankful for this Christmas Day that you've made for us and this time of celebration. I pray that as we head out for the remainder of our Christmas celebrations with family, that as we enjoy the time together as family, we enjoy the giving and receiving and the sharing of gifts, that we can see opportunities and find opportunities to share the good news of great joy this day. Father, we pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.