

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

**Glynde Lutheran Church**

**Sermon on Luke 2:8 – 20**

**Theme: “The outreach of the Shepherds”**

**“In joy, share the good news of Christmas with others”**

(No. 4 of “The values of Christmas: *outreach* with the Good News of Christmas)

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*DVD Spot: Excerpt from the Pilot episode of “The Chosen” re the birth of Jesus and joy and the sharing of the news with others*

<https://youtu.be/IVt14Ug-GOs?t=932> (watch from 15’ 32” – 18’ 33”)

### ***Introduction:***

Well, Christmas is almost upon us! It is only days now to Christmas Day itself, which we will celebrate this coming Friday.... How are you holding up? Are you looking forward to Christmas, or do you want it to be all over and done with?

This morning, we’re going to be looking at what the shepherd thought about Christmas, *about the birth of the Christ who is our Saviour*, and at how they responded to this event....

### ***Part 1: The response of the shepherds***

As shown in the pilot episode of “The Chosen”, the shepherds were a motley dirty bunch of blokes who were looked down on and despised by the religious establishment, *the good orthodox people in Jewish society*.

Why? Because the shepherds’ job of looking after sheep made it virtually impossible for them to worship on the Sabbath, and because of their work they couldn’t observe all the little details of the Law, *like hand washings and so on*, that the religious leaders said were important.

Also shepherds were regarded by the religious establishment and by people in general as being dishonest, because they frequently permitted their flocks to graze on other people’s land. And the owners of flocks distrusted shepherds because they thought that the shepherds were likely to kill one of their animals and give it to their own family.

As a result of their reputation as “sinners”, shepherds were not permitted to give evidence in a court of law, and they were even permitted to enter

the Temple in Jerusalem (*H. Wendt, Christmas the real story, 27, Brown, 420*).

Yet it is to a group of motley, dirty, despised shepherds that God first announces the good news of the birth of His Son *through His angel*.... It's a wonderful pointer to who God is, and how He feels about us, *no matter who we are*....

By including this announcement by the angel to the shepherds in His Gospel, Luke is making the point that *anyone and everyone* is welcome by God, and that *anyone and everyone is welcome* to come and see Jesus. It doesn't matter who you are, or what you have done, God loves you and you are welcome to come and to see Jesus. Anyone is welcome to come to Jesus, and through him to come into a relationship with God.

I love the words that the angel says to the shepherds. The angel says to the shepherds:

**“Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Saviour was born – Christ the Lord!”**

The angel is proclaiming the wonderful message of God to these shepherds, these “sinners”: that a baby has been born who would rescue them and all people from their situation of being separated from God because of their sin and their guilt.

“This baby”, the angel says to the shepherds, “is the long promised Messiah, *the Christ*, and he will be your Saviour, and the Saviour of all people”.

A sign of the truth of this message is now given by the angel to the shepherds. The angel goes on to say to the shepherds:

**This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” (2:12).**

The sign is not the fact that the child will be wrapped in swaddling clothes, *though this would have pointed the shepherds to that fact that this was a newly born child*. Apparently, as one commentator observes,

**“These swaddling clothes were strips of cloth like bandages, wrapped around young infants to keep their limbs straight. A child so wrapped would be recognised as newly born” (Marshall, 106).**

No, the sign of the truth of the angel's message is that they will find a newly born baby "lying in a manger" ....

And then the scene gets ever more spectacular! Luke tells us what happens:

**Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,  
"Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace to those with whom he is pleased" (2:13-14 NIV & TEV).**

Presumably, "with whom he is pleased" or *literally "of (God's) good pleasure"* denotes those "who receive or respond to the the Good News positively" (*Witherington, 103*). That's us, who trust in Jesus as our Saviour.

When the angels leave, and everything is back to normal again, *just the night sky and the sheep in the background*, the shepherds talk to one another about what to do. Luke tells us that:

**When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about" (2:15).**

And then Luke says:

**So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger (2:16).**

Pastor Harry Wendt, in his study *Christmas, the Real Story*, gives us a slide depicting what it might have been like. After finding out where in Bethlehem this newly born child is, the shepherds go to the back entrance of the house, where the animals are, enter in, and see the promised Messiah, *the Christ, the One who will be the Saviour of all people*.

The pilot episode of the shepherds going to see "the Christ", "the Saviour" of the world has them go to a stable in a cave out the back of a house.... Probably not so! No almost certainly so, when you look closely at what Luke tells us about the birth of Jesus....

And what do the shepherds say to Mary and Joseph and those present in the house?

Luke tells us:

**When they, *the shepherds*, had seen him, they made it known about the message which had been spoken to them *by the angel* concerning the child (2:17 NIV plus Nolland).**

In other words, the shepherds tell everyone present in the house what the angel said to them about the child: that he is the “Christ”, *the promised Messiah*, and the One who will be the “Saviour” of “all the people”. And that they would find this child “lying in a manger”.

Luke then gives us three reactions to all this: the reactions of those who hear what the shepherds say, the reaction of Mary in particular, and finally the reaction of the shepherds themselves. Listen to what Luke tells us happened:

**When they had seen him, they made it known about the message which had been spoken to them concerning the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. And Mary treasured all 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 (2:17-20).**

It's the reaction of the shepherds, though, that I want to focus on briefly. They return to the fields and their sheep “glorifying and praising God” for what they had heard and seen. Both the Children's Message story book, and the pilot episode of “The Chosen” highlight the shepherds joyfully sharing with all and sundry what they had heard and seen....

They have already done this with the people in the house where Jesus was born, and now, Luke implies, they share the good news of the birth of God's Messiah and our Saviour with anyone who will listen....

### ***Part 2: Our response***

The birth of Jesus, *God's King and our Saviour*, brought joy to the shepherds, a joy which showed itself in a desire to let all and sundry know what they had heard and seen...

Likewise, the birth of Jesus brings joy to us. Why? Why does the birth of Jesus, *why does Christmas*, bring us joy, and cause us to smile, even in the midst of hard times and difficult times? Well, because the birth of

Jesus, God's Son, reminds each of us that:

### **1. We are loved by God**

God could have left us to "stew in our own juices". You and I know what we deserve from God for the things that we've done which we are ashamed of, and feel guilty about.... We deserve God's punishment and His judgement. God could well have despaired of us, and given up on us! That's what we deserve from God!

But what has God done for us instead! He sent His Son, *part of His very self*, to be born as a tiny little baby for us.... That's how much God loves us! And the man Jesus showed us God's love, and told us about God's love for us, and then Jesus showed us the depths of God's love for us by suffering and dying for us on a cross.

Whenever I look at the baby in the manger, I am reminded of just how much God loves me, *and you, and everyone*. That brings a smile to my lips, even when I'm going through hard times: because I know, *through Jesus*, that I am loved by God. And, likewise, it can bring a smile to your lips, even in the hard times of life....

### **2. We are forgiven by God**

Furthermore, the birth of Jesus, God's Son, reminds us that we are forgiven by God (*again point to nativity set*). The baby in the manger grew to be the man on the cross, who suffered and died there "for our sins" (*1 Cor. 15:3; cf. Isa. 53*). As we trust in Jesus as our Saviour, we have a totally new life: we are healed of our past. We are each God's forgiven child. No more do we have to worry about past sins, and no more do we have to carry the weight of our sins on our backs.... If that doesn't bring a smile to your face, nothing will! That's why the Christian message is called "good news" (*Luke 2:10*).

### **3. We will be with God**

And the birth of Jesus reminds us, too, that one day we will be with God. The baby in a manger grew to be the man on the cross who suffered and died "for our sins". But he didn't stay dead. On the third day, on that first

Easter Sunday, God raised Jesus to life again, and gave him a new, resurrection body.

And likewise, God will raise us *who are His forgiven children* from the dead, *or transform us if we are still alive*, and take us home with Jesus to be with Him forever (1 Cor. 15:20; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). We don't have to be afraid of dying! We are each God's forgiven child as we trust in Jesus as our Saviour, *and nothing, not anything can separate us from God's love and His forgiveness.*

This can bring a smile to our face, even when we are crying because someone we love has cancer, or is dying from some illness. We can smile because we know through Jesus that death isn't the end....

Can I ask you now, "Is your joy bubbling over, as I imagine it was for the shepherds?"

"Are you telling all and sundry what you have seen and heard?" Are you 'glorifying and praising God' for the birth of Jesus, who is God's Son and Saviour?" And "Are you telling everyone about what Christmas is all about?"

Well, if you would like to do that, if you want to share the good news of the birth of Jesus this Christmas, let me give you a few suggestions as to how you might do this:

- \* **Share it in your Christmas letter, or in your Christmas emails or texts, or in your Christmas posts on Facebook**
- \* **Share it in your Christmas cards:** don't just write "Merry Christmas to somebody, love me", but share a Christmas greeting with them, a greeting which points them to Jesus, *the reason for the season*
- \* **Invite family and friends along to our Christmas Eve celebration, or to worship on Christmas Day**
- \* **Include Jesus and his birth in your Family Christmas:** read the Christmas story from Luke's Gospel, watch *The Nativity Story* or *The Chosen pilot episode*, and sing carols together

### ***Conclusion:***

Let's finish up. As the writer of the carol "Hark! The herald angels sing" puts it in his opening verse:

Hark! the herald angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.

**Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With the angelic host proclaim:  
Christ is born in Bethlehem.**

*Hark! the herald angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King (LH #33 v. 1).*

Let's share this good news with as many people as possible this Christmas and into the New Year.... May God bless you and me as we do this 😊

### ***Addenda:***

1) Listen to what Ken Bailey has to say about the birth of Jesus in this book *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*:

- \* **Joseph was returning to the village of his origin. In the Middle East, historical memories are long, and the extending family, with its connect to its village of origin, is important. In such a world a man like Joseph could have appeared in Bethlehem, and told people, "I am Joseph, son of Heli, son of Matthat, the son of Levi", and most homes in the town would be open to him.**
- \* **In every culture, a woman about to give birth is given special attention. Simple rural communities the world over always assist one of their own women in childbirth, regardless of the circumstances. Are we to imagine that Bethlehem was an exception.**

**Was there no sense of honor in Bethlehem? Surely the *community* would have sensed its responsibility to help Joseph find adequate shelter for Mary and provide the care she needed. To turn away a descendant of David in the "City of David" would be an unspeakable shame on the entire village.**

- \* ***In any case, if Joseph had failed to find shelter in Bethlehem, he would naturally have turned to Mary's relatives Zechariah and Elizabeth, who lived nearby "in the hill country of Judea (Kenneth Bailey, p. 25-26).***

2) Harry Wendt, using Ken Bailey's material, has this to say:

- \* **Most likely they were welcomed into a home that had a guest room, but the guest room was already occupied ("there was no room in the *guest room*").**

The host could not ask those who were already living in the guest room to leave. However, since people in that land at that time were used to living in close quarters and slept on mats on the floor, it would not have been a problem to find room for Mary and Joseph elsewhere in the house. At night, mats were rolled out for sleeping. In the morning, they were rolled up again and stored against the walls – so that sleeping space might again become living space (*H. Wendt, Christmas the Real Story, 22-23*).