

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS: THE VISITORS

(Advent 2018)

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." ¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (Luke 2:8-18)

THE EXAMINATION

- ___ 1. An angel appeared to announce the birth of Jesus to shepherds who were in Bethlehem
- ___ 2. The reason Bethlehem became a center for raising sheep was because of the abundance of green grasses and foliage nearby
- ___ 3. Gabriel, God's announcing angel, said to the shepherds: "*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you....*"
- ___ 4. Being a shepherd in Israel was an occupation held in high esteem
- ___ 5. Most shepherds were often in their early teens
- ___ 6. Both boy and girl shepherds were in the fields tended sheep
- ___ 7. Bears, wolves, lions, and leopards lived in the wilderness region where shepherds tended their flocks
- ___ 8. Shepherds were guided by the star to the place where Jesus lay
- ___ 9. A choir of angels sang to the shepherds: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.*"
- ___ 10. Before returning to their sheep, the shepherds told others about Jesus

THE EXPLANATION

- A. In Jesus day, a baby's birth brought the whole community out to celebrate; but only shepherds and wise men came to see the infant Jesus
- B. Shepherding is one of the oldest vocations of the Hebrews
 1. Shepherds were at the bottom of the social ladder
 - a. Shepherds were considered spiritually unclean
 - b. Shepherds were not allowed in the Temple's inner court to worship
 2. Shepherds were fully responsible for the care of their sheep

- a. They protected their sheep from bears, wolves, lions, leopards and thieves
 - b. They provided food and water - green pastures and quiet waters
 - c. At night, they brought the sheep into the fold - acting as the gate
3. The Bible is full of references to sheep and shepherds
 - a. Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), Moses, and David were shepherds
 - b. God is acknowledged as the "*Good Shepherd*" (Psalm 23); Jesus calls himself the "*Good Shepherd*" (John 10:1-30)
- C. Notice the enthusiasm around the angelic announcement
 1. The announcement of the birth of Jesus as "*Good News of Great Joy*" stands in contrast to the annual announcement of Caesar's birthday as "*Good News*" (*euggelion*)
 2. The announcing angel was joined by other angels to praise God
 3. The shepherds hurry into Bethlehem to find the child
 4. The shepherds "*spread the word...about this child*" and all were amazed!

THE ELUCIDATION

- A. If we understand shepherding, the words, "*Good Shepherd*" become clearer
 1. Shepherds lead their sheep to "*green pastures and quiet waters*"
 2. Shepherds don't drive their sheep, shepherds lead them
 - a. Sheep follow; they are hesitant of doing something new/different
 - b. Shepherds go before their sheep to show them the way
- B. We are to follow the Shepherd: walk the paths He chooses
 1. Like sheep, we often find it difficult to distinguish a cliff from a path

"We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way..."
(Isaiah 53:6)
 2. Keeping our eyes on the Shepherd provides comfort, courage, protection

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." (Psalm 23:4)
- C. Jesus, our Passover lamb, born among the Temple flocks of Bethlehem, visited by shepherds, is our faithful Shepherd
 1. God chose to announce His Son's birth to lowly shepherds
 2. Are you willing to follow His voice where He leads?