

Why to Shepherds©

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Luke 2:8-20

For a few minutes, I'd like you to think about the answer to this question –
“Why did the angels appear to shepherds?”

In that day, shepherd was a very common occupation, or lifestyle. You recall that David, when he slew Goliath, before he became King, and when he was anointed by Samuel was a shepherd. At one point in his life, David gave us the Psalm which begins, the Lord is my Shepherd....

In the Old Testament, the prophets lamented that the people were like sheep without a shepherd. The shepherd's job was a very lowly one. Long days and nights spent outside, in the wilderness, taking care of their flocks. They led the sheep to green pastures for their food and to flowing streams to quench their thirst. They protected them from wild animals and kept them from getting lost. They went and found any sheep who might wander away from the flock. Sheep without a shepherd were helpless to defend themselves from their enemies.

Genesis 49:24 tells us that the Mighty One of Jacob, the Lord God, would send forth the Shepherd, who would be the Chief Cornerstone of Israel. The New Testament states in several places that Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise.

Isaiah 40:11 (KJV) He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:6 -- From Bethlehem shall come forth the one who will shepherd my people....

John 10:11 – Jesus says, I am the Good Shepherd, and I will lay down my life for my sheep.

So, when the angels appeared to the shepherds, theirs was a message from God that the Great Shepherd had been born in Bethlehem! But they did not see the entire picture. Lambs are born in stables or other such humble circumstances. Unknown to everyone at the time, a special Lamb had been born in that stable in Bethlehem. The Bread of Life had been born in the House of Bread.

But again I ask – Why did the angels appear to shepherds?

These were the lowliest, poorest people of that region.

Why didn't they go to the spiritual leaders, who knew the Scriptures, and give them the Good News? Why didn't they go to the Rabbi's, the synagogue leaders, and tell them? Why not give the news to the political leaders, even to the Roman king himself?

Why? Because they weren't interested – they didn't care. They had their own agenda, their own problems, their own interests, and they didn't have time for anyone else, particularly someone who might want to change their plans. They probably DID get the news, but they couldn't believe it – a baby born out of wedlock to a poor Jewish family, one who was birthed in a cow's stall and placed in a dirty feeding trough to sleep? This baby would never amount to anything of significance.

A contemporary praise band, 4Him, has a song that says it well – “What a Strange Way to Save the World.”

Even today, many people want the manger scene out of the public eye. It is an affront to their proud sensibilities! Most people then, and now, are simply too proud to accept such a humble beginning for the One who would usher in God's plan of salvation and become the Cornerstone of His Kingdom. It takes a great leap of faith to accept such a silly proposition.

Why come as someone fully dependent on others if you are the one who is almighty and sovereign?

People just have a problem grasping the truth that life is not about power and glory – it's really about love and caring, and humility is the key to spiritual life.

Jesus later said, "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Jesus, speaking directly to Peter, with a message for all His followers, said, "Go, and feed My sheep." He also said, "Follow my example – you shall be servants..."

So, the Christmas story gives us a vivid picture of who we are to be – we are to be the shepherds. The message has come to US. We are to humbly bow as children before the baby in the manger, acknowledge Him as our true King and our personal Shepherd, to go and spread the Good News that God Himself is in our midst!

What about you? Do you come into the Christmas season with a spirit of humility and joyous praise, or are you too busy with other things? Are you caught up with all the festivities and presents, or do you sense the awesomeness of the event as you kneel before the throne of straw? Are you enthralled by the glitter, noise and business all around, or do you sense the cool, damp ground around the manger and smell the musty odors of the cattle stall? Are you focused on the joy of having your family around you, or are you enthralled by the quiet presence of a small, helpless baby, in whom rests the ultimate fate of mankind?

It is my prayer that you will have at least a few moments during this holiday season to humble yourself before the manger and truly experience the wonder of Christmas. Perhaps tonight will be one of those moments for each of us. As you leave tonight, I hope you will have the joy of the Christ-child in your heart and sense the shepherd's staff in your hand.

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