

December 25, 2021
Christmas Day
Luke 2:1-20

Why shepherds? Have you ever wondered that? Why shepherds? The angels could have appeared to any number of people. They could have appeared at the temple before the priests and Pharisees. They could have appeared at the palace of Herod, Pilate, even Caesar himself. They could have shared the news of Jesus birth with the villagers in Bethlehem so at least the locals could gather around the newborn Savior and rejoice. Why lowly shepherds of all people?

I think I know why. I think the Holy Spirit explains why through St. Paul in First Corinthians when he writes, *“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”*

God had indeed entered the world, entered our humanity itself, that first Christmas. But it was nothing glorious to the naked eye. It was quite humble; the young bride and her new husband relegated to the stable part of the house because the guest room was crowded with other family members who were in town for the census. Mary was likely exhausted from her labor and Joseph overwhelmed with the reality being the step-father of God’s own Son! The scene was likely quite quiet, save for the occasional cry of the Christ child Himself. Not a whole lot of glory showing.

Who could show up to such a scene then with no boasting or pride? I’m pretty sure that emperors, kings, governors, priests and Pharisees would have easily scoffed at this being the promised Messiah, ridiculously lying in the manger. Perhaps the townspeople also—you know

how people compare their place to their neighbor's. Plus word gets around, they probably all know that this baby is a little bit early in arriving for the newlyweds.

No, I think the lowly shepherds were chosen to receive the angelic announcement for a very good reason; they were lowly shepherds and they knew it. By virtue of their low standing in society they were simply the best suited to come worship the newborn king, for despite the modest setting of a stable and the peasant parents, they would not bring any boasting, any pride in themselves, to the manger. They would simply arrive and give worship, honor and praise to the baby and to the Father above because His promise of salvation had arrived.

Each Christian should take this example of the shepherds to heart. The core of the sin which made our redemption necessary is humankind's failure to humble ourselves before God. Remember, it was the temptation to "be like God" that lured Eve to bite into the forbidden fruit. Idolatry, the making into a god that which is not God, has always been mankind's foremost sin. The First Commandment "You shall have no other gods" is first for a reason. Therefore I think God chose to send the angels in glory to only the shepherds because only they could come close to worshipping Him rightly in His humble estate.

It also bears remembering that when this child grew and was glorified in the work for which He was sent, suffering and dying under the burden of our sins on the cross, nobody worshiped. People scoffed and mocked. God became the lowliest, the curse of sin, for us that we might be saved.

Now that He is victorious, risen from the dead, and ascended to His rightful place of glory at the Father's right hand, the example of the shepherds for us is all the more important. Who didn't receive the blessing of being clued in on the arrival of Christ at Bethlehem? Those who would exalt themselves and boast before Him.

Who won't receive Christ rightly as He comes to us in blessing these days in the 21st century? Those who would exalt themselves and boast before Him.

Ecclesiastes says, "*There is nothing new under the sun*" and the same can be said of Christ arriving on earth today. 2000 years ago He arrived as a little baby; nothing spectacular looking. Today He arrives in the Word, the washing, the supper; nothing spectacular looking. Both stand as the Son of God coming to do His work of forgiveness, life and salvation.

Who receives Him rightly? Those who know they have no standing to do so.

I know we've all heard this before, but we are so bone-headed in our sinful arrogance that it bears repeating over and over again. We and our world are so steeped in sin that nothing of ourselves ranks before Holy God. Our earthly standing, our good works, our supposed morality and right-thinking—the purity of Christ puts it to shame. When we come before Him, our demeanor should be completely longing and thankfulness for the blessings only He can bring.

The proud weren't invited to the manger, and the proud still have no place before God. Nobody can boast before Christ. That's not how Jesus works.

*"When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, **not because of works done by us in righteousness**, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

It's all Jesus, and He is for those who believe it's all Jesus.

I've always read one part of the nativity story as maybe kind of tragic. "*And when [the shepherds] saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.*"

Folks “wondered”, but it doesn’t say anyone else went to see Jesus. I don’t think anybody did. I’d bet the messengers through whom the message was delivered, lowly shepherds, likely turned folks off. They didn’t carry the worldly honor to be accepted. If a king’s herald or yes, some glorious angels, brought the message, then sure, they’d believe. But not shepherds.

The word the shepherds spoke? God’s Word. Not their own. Words of promise. Words of forgiveness. Humble means—shepherds—but they were conveying the Gospel of God.

Water, bread, wine, clumsy words from a pastor—to the senses not glorious and awe-inspiring. But God’s Gospel is being delivered by humble means. It’s how God was working in Bethlehem. It’s how God was working on Golgotha. It’s how God works today through His church.

Today we celebrate the baby in the manger; Jesus Christ fully God and fully man. Know Him as the glorious Savior He is, despite how things may look to the world. Come to Him as a shepherd, humble and unworthy, but called by His grace to receive all of His blessings.

Amen.