



Luke 2:8-12

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

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

I've mentioned before that my mom and dad had some land just outside of Cumby, TX which is not far from Sulphur Springs, TX. When I was a kid, I learned to drive a tractor, work an idiot stick, haul water for the orchard and generally do the things that farmers do. I worked hard when it was hot. I worked hard when it was cold. I learned why bodark trees are also called iron wood and why bees are so important to our ecology and our economy. I learned what it meant to be responsible and how challenging life can be for independent farmers. Living mostly in the city and commuting on weekends to do farming gave me an appreciation for life outside the city that most young people don't understand today. Maybe it is why I like being in Fort Stockton so much.

When living in the city, concerns are shifted to traffic, the smell of asphalt, zero lot lines and the struggle to find a little privacy without the blare of horns and industrial noise. Where a chance of showers is considered a curse, rather than a blessing. You just don't find many city folks sitting out on their porch at night or taking a walk in the park. It is much more difficult to focus on community when the goal is to avoid contact with other people when possible. I'm not saying any of that is actually wrong. It is just a different way of doing life and it comes with its own struggles and challenges. Many people who live in the city become accustomed to this kind of life and find themselves uncomfortable when they leave the city limits behind them. When they leave one city, they are always looking for another city.

Living in the country is quite different and doesn't appeal to city folk much. But I think that may be because they haven't seen the wonder. You know, the wonder that you can only experience when you leave the lights of the city behind you. The wonder that you can only experience when your body aches with the days accomplishments and you can step out in the yard and look up to the heavens and watch as the night sky overwhelms you. That experience where you feel like you can reach out and touch other side of the universe and the stars, oh, the stars shining with a brilliance you will never be able to find in the city. It is that point when you realize just how wonderful creation is and the magnificence, magnitude and awesomeness of our creator.

This is our fourth message on The Angels of Christmas. Our first message was on the "The Angel of Herald" where Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the temple to let him know that his wife Elizabeth was going to have a child and that he was to name the child John. The second message entitled the "Angel of Fulfillment" found Gabriel visiting Mary to let her know that she was going to have a child, even though she was a virgin, and that this child would be named Jesus and He would save the people from their sins. The third message, which we explored last week, was the "Angel of Assurance". This angel appeared to Joseph in a dream to assure him that what was happening around him, was a God event brought about through the Holy Spirit. He was assured that Mary had done nothing wrong and that the child to be born was a blessing from God. The

angel's purpose was to provide assurance for Joseph as he made decisions regarding Mary and the advent of the Christ child.

In all three of these cases, God steps into the lives of these individuals to help guide them as they find their place in the story of the nativity. In order to do this, He speaks into them using Angels as His carrier wave. The importance of "The Angels of Christmas" is not a side story to the nativity. Think of the Nativity story as a quilt with each vignette like a square of fabric pulled together to form one unit, with the angels being the thread. Each story is complete in and of itself, but when joined together they create a much bigger picture of the nativity and this enables us to see the nativity as a whole, rather than separate stories.

Today we will be discussing "The Angel of Announcement". This particular story is a little different from the previous three. While the stories of Zechariah, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Joseph and Mary show us the roles that are being put into place to support not only the birth of Jesus, but also the raising of Jesus and the support he will receive throughout His earthly ministry. Today's story deals strictly with the main event that we celebrate every year at Christmas, the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I need for you to see this scene in your head. These shepherds live in the wonder that we cherish because we live in the country. We can appreciate what that

night so long ago must have been like. We can visualize the environment. The night air is still and the heavens are already opened up before us. We can put ourselves in the shepherd's sandals because we share that same night sky experience. So, let your mind go there. Let it fill with the wonder of the night sky. Sheep are generally very quiet at night. They don't get noisy unless they are in an unfamiliar area or happen to hear or smell the presence of a predator. And so, our story today finds shepherds outside of town, keeping a watch over their flocks. They are probably resting because there just isn't much to do for shepherds when they have settled their flocks in for the night. The air is quiet with an occasional "bleat" from a lamb and a rustle of resettling. This night is not unlike so many other nights where they stand watch over the flocks, ready to protect them from predators and ensure that none of the sheep wander off. They may even be taking turns getting a little sleep. The night is not so different than if we were to step outside the city limits of Fort Stockton and gaze at the heavens. Silent Night. Holy Night. All is calm. All is bright. There is no anxiety. There is no anticipation. Just shepherds, their sheep and a sky full of stars.

And then things changed:

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

A single lone angel appeared to them and what had been illuminated by stars is now illuminated by the glory of the Lord. There is no thunderclap. There is just a regular night that suddenly wasn't just a regular night. The scripture tells us that an angel of the Lord changed the entire atmosphere from one of calm, to one of being terrified. We always fear what we do not understand. We also fear change. Fear is what happens when we are forcibly moved outside of our comfort zone. It has to be beyond disconcerting when this angel suddenly appears against the backdrop of the quiet, peaceful night.

But the angel knows this. He doesn't even give them time respond before he says:

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

I truly believe that angels live for moments like this. It is one thing when an angel is required to deliver bad news or walk into a situation that they know is not going to go well. But this situation is one of those "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" moments. This moment was a game changer for the human race. This was moment that God sent His son to earth in human form so that a new covenant could be written, prophecy could be fulfilled, the relationship between God and mankind could be mended. This was the "God with us" moment. "Emmanuel!" And God sends his messenger, an angel, to...
shepherds, abiding in the fields?

He didn't send the angel to tell Caesar Augustus or Herod or any other political, military or religious leader. He sent the messenger to shepherds. Why do you think he did that? I mean, this was the Son of God. The Messiah! The Prince of Peace! The answer to prophecy! Emmanuel! God with us! Don't you think some important people should have been involved? So really, why send this messenger, this angel, to some shepherds? These shepherds are not going to be capable of greeting the Messiah properly, are they? They are just poor, hardworking individuals, just like most of us. And because they are shepherds, they are probably pretty dirty and smell like sheep. You would not welcome them to your Christmas party in the condition that they were in.

Have you ever worked in an office environment? Every salesman on the planet knows that if you want to talk with a CEO, a project manager or anyone on the senior management staff, the person that you need to spend your time getting to know is the receptionist, the secretary or the administrative assistant. They are the gate keepers. There is also that one person in the office that if you want to communicate a thought or an idea, and you want it to reach the ears of everyone in the office, you tell that person. That person will not be a manager or supervisor. Information travels faster and more completely at the bottom level of the food chain. That is because the person that is at the bottom level of the food chain has absolutely no authority to decide what can be shared and why. It is not part of their responsibilities.

It was no different when Jesus was born. If the angel had told Caesar Augustus, he probably would not have taken notice. We also know that King Herod already had designs to prevent anyone that might challenge him to come to power. If the angel had gone to Herod with the story of the coming Messiah, the killing of all the male children in Israel might have occurred much sooner. He certainly was not going to tell the world that a new king had been born.

No, the absolute best way to spread the good news of the birth of Christ had to occur at the lowest level where politics and hubris would not interfere with the message, where the decision to share this exciting and wonderful news was not relative to the responsibilities of those involved. Because the angel presented the message to the shepherds, the message remained simple, pure and full of excitement. Let's face it, those who were in power were not going to get excited about the coming of the Messiah. After all, the political ramifications alone would have terrified them. It was the down-trodden, the distressed, the people who had been hurting for so long and who had been waiting for salvation that would best receive such a message. Those waiting and watching for the coming of the Messiah, the one who would deliver them from oppression. Not necessarily those preaching about the coming, but those who believed and embraced it. Where the hope of the Messiah's arrival was the foundation of their faith. A person is far more likely to share a message that is anticipation and excitement surrounding it. The children of God had waited 500 years for this announcement

and as far as Herod was concerned, it could have gone on another 500 years. He did not share the excitement and anticipation of this message like his subjects did.

Jesus taught that if we want to be exalted, we need to humble ourselves. Luke 14:11 says **“For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted”**. Shepherding was a humbling experience. There were few occupations lower than being a shepherd. Any yet, here is the message of God being spoken into these humble shepherds even as Christ is being born. The world changed, not when He began His ministry, but with His birth. And as if to put an exclamation point on it, this King, this Messiah, this Son of the Almighty God, this Prince of Peace was born in a stable, surrounded by animals, with a feeding trough for a bed. Born to a poor carpenter and his wife. Born into the humblest of circumstances. Born to serve, not to be served.

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Christ is born! Not into a mansion! Not into the halls of government! Not into splendor. Not with any of the surroundings that he deserved. But into an environment that spoke into the purposes of his ministry. Into a life of service for

people who would ultimately crucify him. Into a purpose of sacrifice for all of mankind. Into a life guided by and exemplified in love, faith, hope and humility. A life that set aside the old covenant and brought into being a new covenant that allowed for an unprecedented relationship between all people and the Creator of the Universe.

Let us see this child, lying in a manger, ready to revolutionize the world by turning everything that we believe in upside down. God knows exactly what He is doing. And the choice of sending the Angel of Announce to these poor shepherds so that they could take this of the birth of the Christ Child to the world, shows not only how important this message is, but that the ultimate receivers of this message would be all-inclusive. What a glorious statement to the nature of the grace and perfection of our creator.

Do you hear what I hear? Christ the Lord is born! The prophecy fulfilled. The Kingdom established. The salvation of the world is at hand! Joy to the world!

AMEN

We will continue our study of the Angels of Christmas on Christmas Eve with a short message on The Angels of Glory where we continue this passage in Luke. I look forward to seeing all of you there. God bless you all!

