

Is God With Us?



Study the Scriptures

Luke 2:8–20 NLT

⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.

¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

The Shepherds: Outcasts as *Proclaimers*

In contrast to the other characters of the Christmas narrative, enter the Shepherds. They were not the holy family, the white-collar innkeeper or the sophisticated Magi. No, they were not those people. Possessing only the wrong kind of reputation, these were simple men with simple needs: a dry bed, strong drink, good stories and enough open space between them and “the camp” of the religious culture.

Simple people, maybe, but certainly not accepted. Shepherds were known in those days as liars and thieves. They were not welcome in the local synagogue much less the Temple in Jerusalem. In court their testimony was considered worthless. I mean, who would believe a shepherd? No wonder they kept to themselves. They had given up asking, “Is God here?” Their circumstances spoke to them loud and clear—He is not.

But, when God needed heralds to announce the arrival of Jesus, He chose them. The largest gathering of angels ever seen from planet Earth sang for them. They sang of a peace, which would now be available to all people, even those outside the camp. The irony is not lost; the liars become the star witnesses. Those who had stopped asking the question were given a clear answer. God is here!

Without instruction, they raced to see the baby and then told everyone who would listen what they had heard and what they had seen. Who would believe a shepherd? Yet, “All who heard the shepherd’s story were astonished.”

Questions

- Why did God choose the shepherds?
- How did this event change the lives of the shepherds?
- How does God’s presence change your life?

Reflection

The shepherds led a simple life that allowed beauty to pursue them. Nature itself must have called to them on their watch. Are we allowing beauty to pursue us in our over-extended lives? This week, create an inviting space to delight in something simple. Here are a few ideas:

- Turn off your car radio for a few days.
- Get in nature by yourself.
- Play with a toddler.
- Listen to the stories of the elderly.

Guided Prayer

Who in your life feels most like an outcast? Consider this prayer for them (adapted from a Celtic blessing):

Lord, I pray for _____

May they have the courage to befriend their longing for eternity,

May they have a sense of something absent enlarge their life,

May they live in the neighborhood of wonder,

May they know that they are ever embraced in the kind circle of God.

Proclaim

The shepherds simply told what they saw and heard. Find a safe friend and risk telling them what you have seen of God. Tell them what you are learning about His workings in our world.*

*Adapted from “A Guide to Advent” from Urban Skye Community