

God's Sovereign Glory
(in a Lamb)
Luke 2:1-21

People sometimes see a difference between glorifying God and being happy as though serving God robs a life of joy. But because we believe God created everything, knows best how everything works and has commanded us accordingly, glorifying God is the best way to be happy.

God can't give us happiness apart from himself because it doesn't exist. Jesus modeled this by enduring the cross for eternal joy (Hb 12:2). There was no other way to it than obedience to the Father and it merited him a reward that far surpasses the humiliation and pain he endured.

Over the last three weeks we have seen how God has glorified himself through people, the earth's rulers and even nature. The whole point of the incarnation is God's glory which is, synonymous with our happiness.

First: God's Glory in Kings 2:1-6

The whole point of this is to demonstrate that there is only one Sovereign – God and that all creation, people, presidents and nature, are an orchestra directed by his omnipotent wand.

Note: The great thing about Christianity and what sets it apart from all other religious stories, is that it is set in real time, recorded with real people and real events.

In this way, God sovereignly moved to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem so that Jesus's birth would fulfil prophecy and leave no doubt that he is the Messiah.

Second: Angels, Shepherds and Sheep

Many of you have been to this shepherd's field and stood in this cave where Jesus was born.

a) Say 'Goodbye' to Shepherds

Israel's two great leaders: Moses and David, were both shepherds. It was their shepherding hearts that enabled them to lead Israel.

God repeatedly compared himself to Israel's shepherd and the nation as his flock

Psalm 79:13 – *But we your people, the sheep of your pasture*

Isaiah 40:11 – *He will tend his flock like a shepherd*

John 21:15 – *Feed my lambs....16 – Tend my sheep....17 – Feed my sheep*

John 10:11 - *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

1 Peter 2:25 - *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

1 Peter 5:4 - *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

Say 'Goodbye' to Shepherds because the ultimate Shepherd has appeared.

b) Say 'Goodbye' to Sheep

In Abraham's time, people were largely dependent on sheep for their lives and living using the wool and sheepskin for clothing and the meat for food. From Abraham to the modern time, sheep abound in Israel.

- Job had 14,000 sheep (Job 14:2)
- When Solomon dedicated the Temple, he sacrificed 120,000 sheep (1 Kings 8:63)
- Approximately 2 million sheep were slaughtered each Day of Atonement
- The High Priest killed two goats:
 - He laid hands on one, confessed Israel's sins and killed it - propitiation
 - He laid hands on the other, confessed Israel's sins and drove it into the wilderness – expiation

The OT is filled with sheep:

1- Eden's Lamb

Genesis 3:21 - *And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*

2 - Moriah's Lamb

Genesis 22:8 - *Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."*

Genesis 22:13-14a - *And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"*

3- Egypt's Lamb

Exodus 3:3-6 - Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. **7** - Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. **12-13** - For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

4 - Isaiah's Lamb

Isaiah 53:1-12 - Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

5 - John's Lamb

John 1:29 - *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Caveat: But we all know that

Hebrews 10:4-7 - *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"*

6 - The Lamb Jesus

1 Corinthians 5:7 - *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

Now, think all the way back to Eden –

Isaiah 61:10 - *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,*

Philippians 3:8-9 - *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*

Third: How did the shepherds know where to look for Jesus?

We all know Micah 5:2 - *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

But Micah 4:8 is even more specific –

Micah 4:8 – *And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem.*

The 'tower of the flock' is the Hebrew phrase, **Migdal Edar** and means 'watch tower of the flock.' It was often used as a military tower to protect the town, but shepherds also manned it to oversee and protect their flock. Bethlehem's flock were destined for Temple sacrifices.

"This Migdal Edar was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks that pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but it lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage from the Mishnah (Shekelim 7:4) leads to the conclusion that the flocks which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices."

Albert Edersheim in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book 2, Chapter 6.

First mention - **Genesis 35:16-20** - *Then they [Jacob and his family] journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷ And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son." ¹⁸ And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. ¹⁹ So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), ²⁰ and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. ²¹ Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.*

(Interestingly, Rachel is not buried in the family tomb with the Sarah and Rebekah. She is buried in Canaan, the Promised Land. Unlike Rachel's first son, Joseph, Benjamin was born in Canaan, the Promised Land. (Jesus is Rachel's sorrow turned to joy – Jeremiah 31:15; Matt 2:16))

Rabbis pictured the place where Rachel died in Genesis 35 and 'the tower of the flock' in Micah 4, as *Migdal Edar*. Only blind people could not see it (John 3:3; 2 Cor 4:4).

Thus, the fields outside of Bethlehem became the place where a special group of shepherds raised the lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. Being themselves under special Rabbinical care, they would strictly maintain a ceremonially clean stable for a birthing place. The Tower of the Flock was used for birthing ewes, and the surrounding fields were where these shepherds grazed their flocks. These shepherds customarily kept their flocks outdoors twenty-four hours a day every day of the year, but brought the ewes in to deliver their lambs where they could be carefully cared for, wrapping the lambs in swaddling cloths to protect them from injury, often placing them in a manger, soon after birth. This is the place that Joseph took Mary. It was in this special stable at "Migdal Edar" that Christ was born!

These Luke 2 shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their sheep by night were shepherds who resided near Bethlehem and the shepherds from "Migdal Edar." These were the men who raised sacrificial lambs that were sacrificed in the Temple. They were well aware that the Targum hinted and many of the rabbis taught that Messiah might well be announced from "Migdal Edar" at Bethlehem. The angels only told the shepherds that they would find the Babe wrapped in "swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." There was no need for the angels to give these shepherds directions to the birthplace because they already knew. When the angelic announcement came, they knew exactly where to go, as Luke 2 indicates, for the sign of a manger could only mean their manger at the tower of the flock!

Conclusion:

Talk about an impossible target. Untold billions of lambs were born, and innumerable lambs were sacrificed each year – year after year.

But it all came down to one Lamb.

What glory for God. What happiness for us. No wonder it is, “*good news of great joy*” (2:10).

Community Groups:

- 1 – Read the text.
- 2 – Define sovereignty.
- 3 – How is God truly the only sovereign?
- 4 – How is Christ the ultimate Shepherd?
- 5 – How were sheep used in Israel?
- 6 – Work your way from Eden’s lamb to Jesus as ‘the lamb of God’ and discuss each.
- 7 – How do each of these lambs prefigure and point to Jesus?
- 8 – How do Isaiah and Paul express salvation?
- 9 – How did the shepherd know where specifically to look for Jesus?
- 7 – How does all of this lead us to awe at God’s glory?