

The Birth of Jesus
Part II
Luke 2:8-20

8

*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field,
keeping watch over their flock by night.*

Luke has given us a lot of names so that we can fact check the history of Jesus's birth.

But the irony is that unnamed shepherds are the first to hear the Announcement about the birth of Jesus whose name will be above all names (Phil 2).

Shepherd = *poimen* = to protect; from *poimaino* = to shepherd

Keeping watch = *phulasso* = to watch as a military guard or sentinel; to guard and keep safe

The NT uses *phulasso* of guarding truth (1Ti 5:21, 6:20, 2Ti 1:14)

The text does not say, "Now there were in the same region scribes and Pharisees, keeping watch over their scrolls and religious rituals"? Nor does it say, "There were in the same region kings and princes keeping watch at the palace."

The good news of the Savior's birth came first to a most unlikely group of people. Shepherds were near the bottom of the social ladder. They were uneducated and unskilled, increasingly viewed in the post-New Testament era as dishonest, unreliable, unsavory characters, so much so that they were not allowed to testify in court. Because sheep required care seven days a week, shepherds were unable to fully comply with the man-made Sabbath regulations developed by the Pharisees. As a result, they were viewed as being in continual violation of the religious laws, and hence ceremonially unclean.... Shepherds were....lowly, humble people; they certainly were not the ones who would be expected to receive the most significant announcement in history.

John MacArthur

According to the Mishnah (Jewish oral tradition), shepherds were under a ban. They were regarded as thieves. The only people lower than shepherds at that particular time in Jewish history were lepers.

Kent Hughes

Then again, it's only fitting that under-shepherds would value and pronounce the arrival of the Good, Chief Shepherd and Great Shepherd (John 10:14; 1 Peter 5:4; Hb 13:20).

This is simply another illustration of God's unmerited grace bestowed on those who would not and could not merit his favor; on those who are, in the world's estimation, lowly and almost outcasts. Then again, this is the story of the Gospel –

Deuteronomy 6b-8a - *The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers,*

Ephesians 2:8 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*

1 Corinthians 1:26-30a - *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 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; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus,*

James 2:5 - *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?*

Per the teaching last week, it is probable that the very sheep these men were tending in the fields that night were being prepared for slaughter at the Passover in Jerusalem a few months later. So it is symbolic that the shepherds who were watching the Passover lambs would be invited to Bethlehem to view the birth of the Passover Lamb of God (1 Cor 5:7), the fulfillment of Abraham's foreshadowing words, "God will provide for himself the lamb" (Gen 22:8).

9

***And an angel of the Lord appeared to them,
and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.***

Just like the shepherds, this angel is not named. When compared to Jesus's name, there is no other name (Acts 4:12). Every other name loses its significance when compared to His name (Phil 2:5-8). What is most important is not that the world knows our names but that Jesus knows our name (John 10:14) and that he gives us a new name (Rev 2:17).

Appeared = ephistemi = suddenly stood = It is used in Luke 24:4-5 to announce that Jesus was alive and in 1 Thess 5:2-5 to announce the sudden coming of the Day of the Lord.

Luke 24:4-6a - *While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen.*

Gr/Glory = doxa = dokeo = to think, judge, honor, respect = to give a proper opinion.

Hb/Kavod = importance, weight, heaviness.

ILL – The difference between a microscope and telescope is that a microscope makes small things look big and a telescope makes big things look more their correct size but still never as large as they are. When we ‘magnify’ God, we see God through a telescope.

Shone around = *perilampo* = *peri* (around) *lampo* (shine)

Acts 26:13 - *At midday, O king [Agrippa], I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.*

This is the same Glory that appeared to Abraham in Ur (Acts 7:2), the same Glory as Moses encountered on Mount Sinai (Exod. 31), the same Glory as in the Tabernacle (Exod. 40:34-35), the same Glory as appeared at the dedication of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 8:11), the same Glory as Ezekiel saw depart the Temple (Ezek 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23). Now for more than 500 years the nation of Israel had been without a visible sign of God’s presence among His people. Now the Glory for which Israel had so long waited had been revealed to humble, believing shepherds in the field, not unbelieving priests in the temple.

Gene Brooks

Phobeo phobos megas = *they feared a great fear*

Fear is the normal response when encountering angels Dan. 8:15-18; 10:7-9, 16-17; Matt. 28:2-4; Luke 1:12, 26-30) or saw the glory of God manifest (Isa. 6:1-5; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; Matt. 17:5-6; Mark 4:41; 5:33; Acts 9:4; Rev. 1:17).

Isaiah cried out, “*Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts*” (Isa. 6:5), and Peter exclaimed to the resurrected Jesus, “*Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*” (Luke 5:8).” And John wrote, “*When I saw him [glorified Jesus] I fell at his feet, as dead*” (Rev 1:17).

Revelation 1:7 - *Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.*

10

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Fear is not the end in Christianity. Fear serves a purpose. It ends in *charan megalen* = great joy!

Wiersbe observes that "Fear not!" is one of the key themes of the Christmas story (Luke 1:13, 30, 74; and see Mt. 1:20)." MacArthur adds that "God says to His people, as He did to Abraham, “Do not fear” (Ge 26:24; cf. Jdg. 6:23; Isa. 43:1, 5; 44:2; Jer. 46:27-28; Lam. 3:57; Dan. 10:12, 19; Mt. 14:27; 17:7; 28:5, 10; Lk 5:10; 12:32; Rev. 1:17).

Good news = *euagellizo* = *eu* (good) *agello* (proclaim). It is a secular word used for any declaration of any good news.

Isaiah 52:7 - *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

Isaiah 61:1a - *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;*

“To all the people,” which has the noun *laos*, is generally used as a designation for the Jewish people and was meant and understood only in this sense: “to all Israel”; but to all Israel because God was now fulfilling his great promise to Abraham and to Israel (Lk 1:55), a promise, indeed, to Israel alone, yet one that would extend salvation to all nations through the Seed of Abraham. ‘**People**’ at this point likely points to the people of Israel, but the larger narrative of Luke-Acts indicates that God’s people will expand to include all people regardless of nationality. James makes this point at the end of the Jerusalem council:

Acts 15:14 - *Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people [laos] for his name.*

*The good news the angel proclaimed is for all the people. **Laos** (people) refers first to Israel (Lk 1:68; 7:16; 19:47; 21:23; 22:66; 23:5, 14), since “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22; cf. Ro 1:16). But the promise of salvation is not for them only. Praising God after seeing the baby Jesus in the temple, Simeon said, “For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel” (Lk 2:30-32). Significantly, *laos* in Lk 2:31 is plural, while it is singular in Lk 2:32. Simeon’s words reflect the truth expressed in Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 60:1-3 = “Nations will come to your light”; cf. Isa 9:2; 42:6; 49:6-9; 51:4)*

John MacArthur

Luke 2:31-32 - *Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.*

11

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

How important is the phrase, “this day” when “the fullness of time had come” (Gal 4:4)?

Luke uses it 11 times in Luke and 9 times in Acts to signify the dawning of the era of Messianic salvation as the fulfilment of God’s redemptive promises.

First-century Palestinian Judaism was characterized by intense longing for God to deliver his people based on Old Testament promises. The Gospels bear witness to this expectation. Both Testaments however, bear witness to active expectations that God would act through his agents to fulfill his promises around the time of Jesus’s birth. The Gospel infancy narratives echo this same expectation and proclaim boldly that Jesus fulfilled all these hopes and dreams. Sadly, the

people transformed God's promises of salvation into material or physical deliverance, primarily from the Romans.

Bethlehem was not commonly called 'the city of David.' This was reserved for Bethlehem. But the shepherds knew that their shepherd king had been born there.

Savior = soter from sozo = to rescue from peril, to safely deliver. It is an OT concept where the word is translated soter in the Septuagint.

Note: Septuagint (LXX) = Septuagint, abbreviation LXX, the earliest existing Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew. The Septuagint was created in the 3rd century B.C. for the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt where Greek was the common language. The name Septuagint (from the Latin *septuaginta*, "70") was derived later from the legend that there were 72 translators, 6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel,

Psalm 27:1 - *The LORD is my light and my salvation (Lxx = soter = Savior); Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?*

Psalm 62:2 - *He only is my rock and my salvation (Lxx = soter = Savior), My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken.*

Psalm 79:9 - *Help us, O God of our salvation (Lxx = soter = Savior), for the glory of Your name; And deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.*

Psalm 95:1 - *O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation (Lxx = soter = Savior). Isaiah 45:15 Truly, You are a God Who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior (Lxx = soter)*

Isaiah 45:21 - *"Declare and set forth your case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior (Lxx = soter); There is none except Me.*

Isaiah 62:2 - *Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth, Say to the daughter of Zion, "Lo, your salvation (Lxx = soter = Savior) comes; Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him."*

Jesus' very Name is essentially a synonym for Savior because Jesus means "He will save His people from their sins." (Mt 1:21) Mary herself declared "*And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.*" (Lk 1:47)

He is distinguished from secular saviors like Zeus or Apollo or Hercules by the titles, 'Christ' and 'Lord.'

Christ = christos from chrrio = Anointed one

Lord = kuris from kurio = might or power

The name Lord (kurios) has already been used by Luke 16 times in chapter 1 to refer to God or Yahweh (Luke 1:6, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 25, 28, 32, 28, 45, 46, 58, 66, 68, 76) and here the angel gives the same title to this newborn Babe! The implication is clear. This is not just any baby, but is God clothed in flesh and blood, the God-Man.

12

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

Sign = semeion = a token to convey a particular message. In the Gospel of John, it is a “miraculous sign” that points to something of deeper spiritual significance (John 2:11,18).

In that night to find a baby wrapped in cloths would not actually be the sign, but to find such a baby in a **manger** would have been unique and thus it would have been a clear **sign**. Under normal circumstances, one would not expect to find a newborn in an animal feeding trough.

Find = heurisko = to search and discover

Manger = phatne = feeding trough (We discussed it last week)

We also discussed swaddling clothes last week.

13

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

Suddenly = exapihenes (Luke evidently loves this idea)

Acts 9:3 - *As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;*

Keep the context in mind. It had been over 400 years since the Jews had received a corporate word from God and it had been that long since the glory of God had appeared in such manifest special form. In this case a solitary angel was suddenly joined by a multitude of the heavenly host. What a sight for these simple shepherds who were considered ceremonially unclean by religious men, were being serenaded by God's spectacular angelic choir!

Let us mark who they were that first praised God, when Christ was born. They were angels, and not men,—angels who had never sinned, and needed no Saviour,—angels who had not fallen, and required no redeemer, and no atoning blood. The first hymn to the honor of “God manifest in the flesh,” was sung by “a multitude of the heavenly host. Let us note this fact. It is full of deep spiritual lessons. It shows us what good servants the angels are. All that their heavenly Master does pleases and interests them.—It shows us what clear knowledge they have. They know what misery sin has brought into creation. They know the blessedness of heaven, and the privilege of an open door into it.—Above all, it shows us the deep love and compassion which the angels feel

towards poor lost man. They rejoice in the glorious prospect of many souls being saved, and many brands plucked from the burning. Let us strive to be more like-minded with the angels. Our spiritual ignorance and deadness appear most painfully in our inability to enter into the joy which we see them here expressing. Surely if we hope to dwell with them forever in heaven, we ought to share something of their feelings while we are here upon earth. Let us seek a more deep sense of the sinfulness and misery of sin, and then we shall have a more deep sense of thankfulness for redemption.

J.C. Ryle

Multitude = *plethos* = *throng of large number* (“ten thousand times ten thousand; Dan 7:10; Ps 68:17).

Host = *stratia* = *army* (in classical Greek). Here, an army of angels.

Acts 7:42 - ...*the host of heaven*...

Praising = *aineo* = *approval, commendation, admiration, awe, worship*

Genesis 49:8 (LXX) – *Judah, your brothers will praise you.*

Luke 2:20 - *And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Revelation 19:5 - *And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.”*

14

***“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”***

Glory = *doxa*

The angels praised God at Creation (Job 38:7), and now they praised Him at the beginning of the new creation. The whole purpose of the plan of salvation is "glory to God" (see Eph.

1:6, 12, 14+). God's glory had dwelt

- a) in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34) and
- b) in the temple (2 Chr 7:1-3) but
- c) had departed because of the nation's sin (1 Sa. 4:21; Ez 8:4; 11:22-23).
- d) Now God's glory was returning to earth in the person of His Son (John 1:14). That lowly manger was a holy of holies because Jesus was there!

Highest = *hupsistos* = *hupsos* = height from *hupsi* = aloft

It is a descriptive name for God who is the Most High. The adjective is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew name of God, *el Elyon*

Gen 14:18 - *And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)*

Peace = erene = to join or bind together what has been previously separated.

Shalom is different. It is not just the absence of conflict but means well-being, health, prosperity, security, soundness, and completeness.

Pleased = eudokia = eu = well and dokeo = to seem, to think

The Christmas message of this passage should make us sing year-round. The substance of the angels' song is instructive. It was first upward as they glorified God in "the highest" heavens, and then it was outward as it pronounced "on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests"—peace, wholeness, well-being for those who have been favored by God's grace.

15-17

19

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

“But” is a term of contrast. The shepherds shared their story. Mary kept hers in her heart.

Treasured = suntereo from sun = with and tereo = to guard, keep

It is in the imperfect tense which means “she kept on pondering...”

Pondering = sumballo = sun = together and ballo = to cast. The idea is to converse or carry on a conversation in an effort to draw a conclusion. Mary spoke to herself about these things

Mary had been told that her child was God’s son. Above all others she knew that the Messiah, the very Son of God, had now come. She had been through so much: pregnant, yet unmarried; the possibility of being found out and of rumors heaped upon rumors; the discussions with Joseph and with her parents; the long trip from Nazareth; the exhaustion of giving birth without help in a stable; the visit of some rough-hewn shepherds with an amazing story of the heavenly host’s proclaiming the praises of God. Mary was tired, as weary and exhausted as a person could be. So much had happened, and she was at the very center of it all. No one could even begin to know the thoughts that had filled her mind for nine months, nor could anyone know the feelings and emotions of the experience. The wonder, the amazement, the astounding reality was too much to talk about. She said nothing, only pondering in her heart what was happening and would continue to happen. Her heart was her baby book.

Luke 1:1-2 - *Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,*

Did Luke talk to Mary?