

Shepherds Were Special Guests

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Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-20

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before 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; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

God let various people know of Christ’s birth. Of course, we know of Mary being visited by an angel to say she has been chosen to be the mother of God. An angel visited Joseph in a dream and assured him that it was an act of God that Mary was with child. The 3 wise kings were given by God the wisdom to figure out from scriptures and prophecies when the Christ child would be born and how to find the place where he’d be born, by following a certain bright star.

But the shepherds were not given advance notice. In fact, they were special guests in that they were told by an angel right after Christ’s birth. And right after the angel told them of the great news, a host of heavenly angels suddenly appeared and shouted in praise “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” Those shepherds were among those God favored, being special guests who were no doubt close enough to travel and arrive soon after Jesus was born.

We may see the sense of the wise kings arriving with gifts. But why the shepherds? The small and select group of people God allowed to know about and see the newborn King and Prince of Peace, the Lord and Savior of the world, included the shepherds because of several reasons. Shepherds have a special place in God’s heart. Throughout the Bible God is referred to as a shepherd and the people as sheep. Most all of us know the 23rd Psalm that begins “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall be in not want.”

In the New Testament, Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd, In John 10:11-14:

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf

coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—

Before Jesus was baptized and when first meeting John the Baptist, we read in John 1:29, “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Not only was Jesus known as our Good Shepherd, but when it came taking away our sins Jesus was the sacrificial lamb, as was used in the Old Testament to offer to pay for sins.

Though to those who don’t know all of the ways God is seen as a shepherd, how the caring of sheep is like that of the care of God to his creation, and how Jesus takes and owns that imagery for himself, they may think it strange that the shepherds were given a special announcement with angels and told to go and see the new born king soon after his birth.

Have you ever felt that kind of special treatment? I’m sure you have, when the host of the party seats you in a better seat or gives you an appetizer and/or dessert for free, or even a free meal! If it hasn’t happened to you, I’m sure it’s happened to a family member or someone you know. But even if it’s a small act of being treated as a special guest, I’m sure you can remember seeing you right away without the regular appointment scheduling or something else.

When I was a youth, I remember my dad’s friend asking if I’d like to go to see the Pistons. Well, let’s just say my family didn’t go to sports events unless it was a big church event to go see a Tigers baseball game and having group seating as far back as possible since they were the cheapest seats. Of course I said yes! And he surprised me with courtside seats and whatever I wanted to order. I got a big roast beef sandwich, which I was embarrassed taking a big bite out of and they got me on the big court screen with a big mouth of food looking with shock at the camera. But I laughed after everyone else did in support of having a great time watching the players right in front of me!

I share that because that’s just a little bit of the excitement and the memories the shepherds had when hearing they were special guests with front and center space to bow before the promised Messiah, the Lord God and King. They were not only amazed by being visited by God’s angels, but then to see the amazingly humble scene of Jesus in a manger.

I read again how they responded after seeing the Christ child:

¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.... ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

They left in awe and in praise and excitement...I could imagine them literally walking and even jumping with excitement saying something like, and I’m of course writing as I come up with

this with them possibly saying, “Can you believe what just happened? We just saw the Son of God, the Messiah, and the new born King! Let’s hurry and tell everyone that we were special guests, along with kings and royal gifts. We just hurried and got there, we guess because God wanted us shepherds to be there. We know Jesus is our shepherd as well as the lamb to be sacrificed to save us.”

They told everyone they could about what happened with the host of angels, Christ in a stable and manger, that they were right there with Mary and Joseph. They would tell the story every time they could, even later when Jesus was doing all sorts of miracles, when he was arrested and crucified, and of course when Jesus rose from the dead. Those shepherds were heard telling the story and that they had met Jesus when he was a newborn.

God wants us today to realize that we are Jesus’ sheep who were once lost but are now found; to see how we do not have to fear because Jesus is always with us; that Jesus leads and guides us I life as we seek to follow him; allows us to have his Good News to share with all so they too may know Jesus and the gift of salvation to have and to share; and to live joyfully and fully with the knowledge of the promised life eternal one day in heaven.

I pray the excitement of Jesus having come to earth, having lived and loved, and dying and rising again will not diminish in our lives. I pray that we will not walk away from moments of God touching our hearts with such amazement when we experience God in various ways and just let it fade away. I pray that we will all keep the fire of God’s Holy Spirit within us burning brightly through prayer, being present with God in all ways and times, in how we serve one another and strangers, and in every possible way in our lives so that we will be living letters and witnesses of Christ’s love and saving grace.

When all is said and done, I pray that what God will say to us will be that we loved Him with all we were and had, all that God granted us; and that we loved others as Christ told and showed us how to. May God saying “Well done, my good and faithful servant” include us never losing the excitement of what God did in sending his son, Jesus Christ, to the world to give the gift of salvation.

More than getting excited when you get front row seats, special guest treatment, being recognized in front of others by the owner of the place, or having met a famous person as a special guest, may we never lose the excitement of knowing we are followers of Jesus Christ, our Good Lord and Shepherd. That is my prayer for you. If you need a renewal of joyful excitement, pray and take time to think of what Christ did for you in saving your very soul and giving you purpose in life until you are granted eternal life. Amen.

This week we ask you to pray for Corky Naumann who has been hospitalized after several falls and being disoriented. Prayers also since she tested positive for COVID. Your prayers are greatly appreciated.