

WHEN THE NIGHT WAS FILLED WITH PRAISE

Luke 2:8-20

INTRODUCTION: Christmas is not about a special day but about a special gift of God's Son. Christmas day comes and goes but the gift of Christ is for all eternity. Jesus was born to give His life for us so we may receive the give of eternal life.

1. THE NIGHT WHEN THE SAVIOR WAS BORN. (2:8-12)

The shepherds were in the field keeping watch over their flock by night somewhere outside of Bethlehem. While we do not know the names of these shepherds, God did. These were some local shepherds caring for their sheep that required 24/7 responsibility. In the days of Jesus, shepherds were despised. They were considered as second-class citizens. They also were thought by some as being vile and filthy. Shepherds were dirty and people looked down upon them although their service was very important.

Shepherds protected their sheep from danger. They guided their flock to good pastures and fresh drinking water. Sheep wanted slow-moving streams of water; otherwise, they would be afraid to drink from the stream. Shepherds cared for the health of their sheep. Shepherds would at times join with other shepherds and split the night watches watching the sheep.

We are not told how many shepherds were together that night when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to them. With these shepherds, the Bible says that the glory of the Lord shone around them causing them to be afraid. The angel had their attention and then he spoke saying, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." (Luke 2:10) These ordinary shepherds probably had seen some amazing signs before at night but nothing like this. The angel calmed them down before continuing to speak to them.

The angel spoke again to the shepherds saying, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:11-12)

The angel brought the light of God's truth to those shepherds that night in the field. The Word of God was fulfilled as Micah had prophesied saying, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little

among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2)

Isaiah, the prophet, stated in Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." The angel told the shepherds that the child born in Bethlehem is the Saviour who is "Christ the Lord." Gabriel told Mary that her Son would be called Jesus. When Gabriel appeared to Joseph he said, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) The word "Savior" means someone who saves or rescues another from danger.

The message to the shepherds made it clear that Mary's Son was Christ the Lord. As Christ, He is the anointed one of God, the Messiah of Israel. Then the angel said that He is Lord which means that Jesus is God manifested in human flesh. Gabriel told Joseph as recorded in Matthew 1:23, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

As John proclaimed in John 1:4-5, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Jesus said in John 12:46, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."

2. THE NIGHT WAS FILLED WITH THE HEAVENLY HOST PRAISING GOD. (2:13-14)

Mary said in Luke 1:46, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." This is what David meant in Psalm 34:3 when he said, "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together."

This was what the heavenly host was doing in praising God. The word "host" is a term used for a military army. The army of heaven joined in praising the birth of Jesus. The shepherds were overwhelmed and amazed by the angel and the heavenly host. The angel of the Lord and the other angels gave praise to the newborn King. The host of heaven knew the greatness, glory, and majesty of the newborn King. The shepherds were in the center of a heavenly worship service. Hallelujah! Our praise and worship should grow greater and greater as we discover how magnificent our King of kings is. All glory belongs to God in the highest.

The message of "peace, good will toward men" is directed to those in Christ. He is the Prince of Peace. Jesus said to His disciples in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." This season some of us may have doubts and worries. Others may be losing hope. We need to think once more of God's great love expressed to us through the gift of His dear Son.

3. THE NIGHT SHEPHERDS VISITED THE HOLY CHILD. (2:15-19)

After the angels had gone back to heaven, the shepherds went to Bethlehem. They came with haste and found Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus.

The shepherds were obedient to the Lord's Words as spoken by the angel. The Bible says in Luke 2:15-16, "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."

When they arrived in Bethlehem, they saw the babe lying in the manger just as the angel had said. When they looked into the face of the baby, they were looking into the face of God. It would be impossible to capture the excitement of the shepherds. Their hearts must have been racing and their hands trembling as they told of their experience.

The shepherds shared with Joseph and Mary how the angel appeared to them while they were tending to their sheep. The shepherds repeated all that the angel told them concerning baby Jesus. The angel said baby Jesus was "the Savior, who is Christ the Lord." The angel gave them a sign as recorded in Luke 2:12, "And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

The conversation between Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds confirmed to them all that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. The excitement in that stable would have been breathtaking as they shared their experiences. The words of Gabriel rang true, "For with God nothing shall be impossible." The shepherds had acted on faith. The Heavenly Father rewarded and encouraged them because of their faith. Blessings follow those who live by faith.

Mary and Joseph shared with the shepherds the miraculous events preceding the birth of Jesus. Joseph described how the angel appeared to him in a dream, telling him Mary had conceived by the Holy Ghost and the baby was to be named Jesus. Joseph also explained how the angel told him that the baby would also be known as "Immanuel which means God with us." The eyes of the shepherds grew large as Joseph told of his experience.

Mary quickly began telling the shepherds about the angel Gabriel appearing to her. The angel told Mary she would be the mother of the Son of God, and she would call His name JESUS. The shepherds listened intently as Mary told them she was a virgin, but the angel said she would be with child of the Holy Ghost. The shepherds were obedient to God's message. They responded by faith. They were blessed by God and privileged to be the first ones besides Mary and Joseph to see the Savior. We need to remember that God rewards faith.

4. THE NIGHT SHEPHERDS GLORIFIED AND PRAISED GOD. (2:20)

The shepherds returned home as different men. We learn of the shepherds praising and glorying God. Their clothes were dirty and their body odor was strong; however, there was something different about these shepherds because they had a new heart. Anyone would think that the King of kings would have been introduced to the religious, the powerful, the rich, the famous and important people. Besides His earthly parents, Jesus was introduced at His birth to common shepherds. They were dirty, smelly, common working people. This is God's way of saying none are too low to be reached with His grace and none are too great not to need to be saved by His grace. God sent His angels to common, rejected men with the glorious message of hope and acceptance. All that was needed to belong to God was faith in Jesus Christ and repentance of sin. They were nothing to look at on the outside, but these men were new creations in Christ. They were rejected from society, but they were the sons of the King of Glory. The future is glorious for those washed in the blood of the Lamb. We will live in heaven with no more darkness. We'll be in the presence of the glory of God.

LESSONS FOR LIFE:

1. The angel announced to the shepherds that a Savior was born.
2. We need to obey the Word of God like the shepherds.
3. We should be praising the Lord like the shepherds.
4. We need to be telling others about Jesus being the Savior.

