

PP The Shepherds' Christmas *Adventure*

Text **Luke 2:1-20**

12/17-18/2016

We are looking at 4 Christmas *Adventures* from the bible, all brought about by angelic visitors

PP And you want to notice that the '*Advent*' in Adventure is italicized, as it means the arrival of a notable person or event, while '*adventure*' signals something that is about to happen

The Christmas advent is a preparation for the church to remember that God came in the form of a baby His name Jesus, to save the world

And it is an opportunity to remember again that the bible speaks of a second advent, the return of Jesus for His church

Our *adventure* today is to prepare the world for His return, and what we are seeing in these sermons is that the adventures in the bible have a great deal of application for us today

Let's look closely at the fourth and final time an angel appears to proclaim the coming of Jesus

PP 1-God's *Adventures* reflect His perfect control

PP "*Then the LORD said to me... 'I am watching over my word to perform it.'*" Jer. 1:12

As chapter 2 opens, we have a world-wide, Roman Empire-wide census sent out, something that was done every 14 years

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria." Luke 2:1-2

PP It goes out from '*Caesar Augustus*', which is a combination of two titles: Caesar is *emperor* while Augustus means *holy*

He was the first Caesar to be considered a god and was hailed as '*the savior of the whole world*'

When he died in 14 A.D., people comforted themselves, reflecting that Augustus was a god and that gods do not die

His name was Gaius Octavius, the grandnephew of Julius Caesar, who defeated Antony and Cleopatra and consolidated the Roman Empire

The command for a census to be taken was usually done for taxation and military draft

To calculate the wealth and might of Rome and it usually took 2 years to complete

The Jews were exempt from Roman military service so for Joseph, he was registering for taxes

The custom of the Jewish people was to register by tribe, clan and family and in order to do that they would need to travel to their ancestral city and for Joseph son of David, that was Bethlehem

"And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child." Luke 2:3-7

The Jews despised living under Roman rule, so fiercely did they love their land and freedom Centuries earlier, when they were defeated and many of them taken to Babylon, Psalm 1

PP "*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*" Psalm 137:1-3

They are in their land, but their land is not their own, and they chafed under the rule of Rome

It was a dark time in Israel, one in which they felt that their God had abandoned them
But there was a promise from the Old Testament 700 years before concerning this little town

PP “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.” Micah 5:2

Though 1400 miles away, Rome’s command sent Joseph and Mary slowly traveling the 80 miles south from Nazareth to Bethlehem

It was a little town 6 miles southwest of Jerusalem and high up 2400 feet above sea level, a beautiful climate of mid 70’s in summer, high 50’s in winter

Its name means *House of Bread*, perfectly fitting for the birthplace of the Bread of Heaven
And while this pretend savior of the world decrees this census, he unwittingly carries out the sovereign plan of God that the true Savior of the World would be born in Bethlehem
Perfect timing with Mary’s imminent delivery and the census of Rome....God is in control!!

Yet still, in the midst of this, it seemed that God was anything but in control

“And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Luke 2:6-7

The word ‘inn’ is interesting when you think back to first century hospitality

Inns were commonly built around the four sides of an inner court, generally two stories high

Primitive stairs reached up to the lodging rooms, and you brought your own blanket and pillow

On the ground floor the animals were stabled and cargo securely stored in rooms

Some inns were one story and the stables were on the outside of the lodging rooms

But an inn could also be a single guest room of a house, and in Bethlehem, it is known that the stables were often in the abundant nearby caves

We are told that **‘there was no place for them in the inn.’**

Usually the reason given for this is that so many Jews had gone there to register

A more likely reason is that there would have been many Roman officials there conducting the registration and taking the available rooms

Whatever the reason, there was no place for them in the inn, and many believe that they were forced to stay in a limestone cave where the animals were sheltered

How difficult that must have been for this young couple, especially that they knew Mary’s baby was the Savior of God’s people

Could there not even be a warm, comfortable place to give birth?

There are times when it seems God is not in control of all the parts of these adventures!

Yet even this was part of God’s plan, for John would write in his gospel,

“Jesus was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to his own, and His own people did not receive Him.” John 1:10-11

This rejection began even at His birth, and continued through His entire ministry

But that was about to change with the most unlikely of people

PP 2-God’s Adventures often involve very unlikely people

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.” Luke 2:8

Shepherding was an honorable career beginning all the way back with *Abel*

And some very famous people were shepherds, including *Moses, Abraham and David*
PP But as early as **Genesis 46:34**, they began to be despised: ***“for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.”***

This attitude was not entirely unwarranted, for they were often an untrustworthy group
They were not trusted by the general public, regarded as thieves, whose testimonies were not even allowed into a Jewish court of law

After the New Testament era, they were increasingly despised by the orthodox religious Jewish leaders to the point that the only Jew considered socially lower, were lepers

They came under a rabbinical ban and labeled unclean, because their work prevented them from observing the religious requirements of Judaism, the washings and Sabbath

Yet there were some who regarded them as a meditative class of men, accustomed to silence and contemplation as they spent months’ outdoors with the sheep

Both their rejection from others, and their tendency toward quiet communion in their hearts makes their reception of the birth announcement of the Savior of the world spectacular

Don’t miss the singular form of ***‘flock’*** as these were men hired to watch over a shepherd’s flock
I believe it points to the flock, the church, that Jesus, the Good Shepherd will watch over as well

A group of them were taking turns *keeping the watch*, when a life-changing event occurred
“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.” **Luke 2:9**

It has not been since Daniel that an angel had appeared to humanity, but now, one had appeared to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and now to these shepherds

At this point it is one angel, but the glory of the Lord shone around ***‘them’***, the shepherds as well
And the shepherds were ***‘filled with great fear’***

Think of the last time you were terrified out of your mind, not a pleasant memory I’m sure

They were so afraid that the angel immediately put them at ease with ***“Fear not”***

And he immediately tells them why...because the angel had come to announce a royal birth

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:10-11

In that day, royal birth announcements were made to the elite class first, being the Priests and important religious people

Isn’t it wonderful that the first people to be told of the birth of Jesus were shepherds?

I cannot emphasize enough that God chooses the bottom rungs of society to do His greatest work

He simply doesn’t need the elite to accomplish His great work, and His work is about good news

PP 3-God’s Adventures Center on the Good News of the Gospel

One critic of modern news channels said, *“The evening news is where they begin with ‘Good evening’--and then tell you why it isn’t.”*

But the angel’s ***‘good news’*** is truly good news and it is ***‘for all the people’***, even shepherds who were near the bottom of Jewish society

It is very interesting to note that these were likely not shepherds of ordinary, common sheep

Rabbinical law required sheep to be kept in the wilderness, and any sheep found between

Jerusalem and Bethlehem were subject to being used as temple sacrifices

Flocks for those sacrifices were kept all around Bethlehem, so likely this flock was destined for sacrifice and these shepherds charged to preserve them from injury or disease of any kind, for only a spotless, undefiled lamb could be brought to sacrifice

PP God instituted the sacrificial system because *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”* **Hebrews 9:22**

Sin brings death, and the sacrifice of an animal was allowed by God to be a substitute for the sinner, a constant reminder that a sinner can live, but only at the expense of another

The animal's death could only cover over sin, but a perfect sacrifice would come by which God would do more than cover sin, He would remove it, forever, ridding a person of guilt

That perfect substitute for us, the perfect sacrifice would be Jesus Himself, the Lamb of God, and He would remove sin the soul of a believing sinner

This flock of sheep destined for sacrifice pointed to our greatest substitute, *‘Christ the Lord’* *‘Christ’* is not Jesus' last name, it is a title, as is the word *‘Lord’*

PP *‘Christ the Lord’* was a title for the Messiah, the anointed One of God, ruler over all creation He is the *“baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”* **2:12**

After declaring this, the angel is joined by *“a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’”* **2:13-14**

PP Our word *‘multitude’* is translated from the Greek word we get plethora from

It means fullness, and some think perhaps every angel in heaven filled the sky from horizon to horizon proclaiming the eternal gospel, peace to those who receive God's good will, called grace

We'd have a hard time understanding how beautiful to those shepherds was the word *‘peace’*

In 27 BC, probably 23 or so years before this event occurred, Caesar Augustus declared the *Pax Romana*, the Peace of Rome

It was a cease fire throughout the Roman Empire, but it was enforced by Rome's occupied military might, having no power to bring peace to the hearts of people

There was no good will toward each other that the Pax Romana could create

True peace begins between God and a person, then goes from person to person

This is an evidence of having received Christ as Lord and Savior, that the peace of God given to you is given freely to others, even those who offend us

The peace of God is life changing, and we see this with the shepherds' response

PP 4-God's Adventures are life changing and often career sustaining

“And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.”

Luke 2:16

Earlier, in verse 7, Mary *“gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger”*

Luke doesn't mention it, but one of the first things they did for a newborn baby was to rub the body with salt to clean the skin, but also because they believed it hardened the skin

Then the baby was swaddled to keep the baby warm, protect the internal organs and keep the limbs straight for proper growth

Sometimes they swaddled with a large square cloth that had a long strip sewn into a corner

More commonly, either strips of cloth or a long strip, 5-6 yards long and 4-5 inches wide, was wrapped around the limbs and body of the baby

The Savior of the world was swaddled, and then *'laid in a manger'*

A manger was not a beautiful bassinet but literally a trough for animals where food and water was placed, and common to Bethlehem were caves where animals were kept

The shepherds find Mary, Joseph and the baby *'lying in the manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them...And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.'*

Luke 2:16, 17-20

The gospel is good news about God's salvation for people, and it was meant to be shared!

The shepherds made it known, they talked about it, and this was their Christmas *Adventure*

And notice that they didn't decide to go to Rome, or down into Egypt or across the Arabian desert to do this, but right back to their flock, where they would soon encounter other shepherds who needed to hear about this same good news

The gospel is life changing, but often career remaining

It is good news that is given you and I, to be shared right where we are!

PP (All these on 1 slide) God is in perfect control of the adventure He has called you on!!

PP And those adventures usually involve the most unlikely of people, who often say *'Why me?'*

PP That adventure will center on the good news of the gospel

PP And it will rarely require you to change your situation or career...for that is where the good news needs to be shared

Amen?

Pray