

III. Advent in Biblical Perspective
Life Portraits from the Nativity
“Shepherds and Wise Men: Jew and Gentile, Rich and Poor”
Matthew 2:1–12; Luke 2:8–21
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We will start by looking at Luke 2:8–21 which says [8] *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [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. [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. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths 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,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

[15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

[21] And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

My guess is that you like me have family memories associated with Christmas that are pretty significant. I have been blessed with them throughout my life as I remember them and try to replicate them. One of the memories had to do with our home in Charlotte, North Carolina becoming the focal point at Christmas while I was growing up. That meant that both sets of grandparents, my mom, my dad, my three sisters, my aunt and her family, my two uncles and their families and other cousins who would try and work their way into the gathering because my mom was a good cook. Eventually after the Christmas Day meal, particularly the men would say ‘How did you get here? What road or highway did you take? What was the way you took to get here?’ Usually after that was ‘How are you going to go back? Are you going to go back the same way you came?’

As I thought of this and as I was preparing for this study, I couldn’t help but think of all the people that made their way to the birth of Christ. How did they go or get to Jesus? And then how did they go for Jesus after they had come to Jesus? We have looked at Mary and Joseph and today we’ll look at the shepherds of the field and wise men of the East. How did they come to this place in Bethlehem where Jesus was born and where did they go and how did they go when they left Bethlehem? In the next study we’ll look at two more there at the manger that no one tends to think about and that’s the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Then we’ll finish up our last study with Simeon and Anna.

We'll look at the shepherds of the field first. How did they get to Jesus and what was the way they went after seeing Jesus and what was the way they went with and for Jesus? These are shepherds in the field in that region according to the text. The region is Bethlehem or David's Royal City. These shepherds are just outside of that city in the fields. These shepherds would be Jewish and they would not be considered trustworthy. They would be at the bottom of the rung of the social order found throughout Israel. In fact, a shepherd was not allowed to give testimony in a court. Yet this is the hometown of King David who began as a shepherd right here in these fields. These shepherds are in the occupation and the same occupation of the fore bearer, David, of the One who is being born in Bethlehem, Jesus, who comes from the line of David. We see this in the Matthew 1 and Luke 3 genealogy. They also have the same occupation of the One being born which is King Jesus, who is the Great Shepherd who will lay down His life for the sheep. Yet in the eyes of the world these shepherds are meaningless.

Bethlehem had many sheep around them because Jerusalem is where all the sacrifices would take place and Bethlehem was in close proximity, only seven miles away from Jerusalem. These shepherds are at best filling a slot in the demographics of the nation but this Jewish part of the population were the down and outers. However it's interesting to see how they got to Jesus for someone came and told them. God sent angels to tell them. God sent an angel who was then backed up with a choir of angels that was a significant testimony from the host of angels.

This angel starts out by saying to the shepherds in Luke 2:10, *[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**.* This is a unique experience that angels come and speak. This is the fourth time God has broken silence since the Old Testament – Zachariah, Mary, Joseph and now the shepherds. They were filled with fear when this happened. Luke 2:9 says *[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.*

I love the King James Version of Luke 2:9 which says *[9] And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were **sore** afraid.* What does it mean to be 'sore' afraid? I recently had surgery on my foot and it is currently surgery sore so I don't want anyone to step on my foot. Yet this past Thursday night a young boy came running up to me and planted his cowboy boots on top of my foot. It was the greatest proof I've had in 20 years that I'm saved for 20 years ago I would have grabbed his legs and made a wish but I kept it together. In other words, when something is sore you don't touch it! You recoil from any contact. The glory of heaven has now descended into the fields of Bethlehem to announce that One greater than King David is being born right there as the glory of the Lord arrives and the shepherds are recoiling.

The angel tells the shepherds not to be afraid because He has a unique message. This unique experience is followed by a unique message. I bring you the Gospel. I bring you Good News of great joy. The Gospel brings great joy to those who hear it in their heart and come to Christ. They have come to the One who came to them and for them and in this unique announcement we have a birth announcement unlike any other birth announcements. When a couple is expecting a child we usually will see a birth announcement from the parents with the specifics of the baby and they ask people to enter into their joy with them, but not this announcement. The angel does not say 'born unto Mary and Joseph' but he says 'I bring you Good News of great joy, for **unto you** is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord and what we need to relish is that it was given 'for all the people.'

We praise the Lord for the adopted father, Joseph and the appointed mother Mary, but this Baby came to you, one of you, for you with great joy. Who is this Baby? We don't put the

weight, height, or length but we say He is the Christ the Prophet who is the fulfillment of all the Word, who is God's final Word, a Word in flesh, the Priest, the One who will bring the sacrifice for our sins and He who needs no sacrifice will be our sacrifice. He is the Prophet, the Priest and the King that has come to this stable to be born for all the peoples to get Good News with great joy. So He has come to us and for us.

How did the shepherds get to Jesus? They received a message of Good News from messengers who brought the Good News. As soon as the angels left them it says in Luke 2:15, *[15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, **which the Lord has made known to us.**"* It was the Lord through the messengers bringing His message that He has made known to them that a Savior is right here who is born for you and you're invited. So they went and made no excuses for the text says they went with haste. So that was their way to Jesus.

What was the shepherds' way with and for Jesus? They go away telling everybody what was told to them about this Jesus and they go away praising God. They are praising with worship and telling as witnesses of Christ and they are full of joy. The text says they are rejoicing in their joy and these people are now changed. When they leave everyone hears through their worship and their witness of what the Lord has done, but they're not the only ones that get to see Jesus.

Sometime later wise men from the East get to see Jesus. We don't know how many but we just know there are more than one. Because there were three gifts given people tend to assume there were three wise men but they now come to see Jesus. Let's look at this incident in Matthew 2. Now I want to look at their way to Jesus and their way with and for Jesus like we did with the shepherds.

Matthew 2:1-12 says *[1] Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, [2] saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." [3] When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. [5] They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

*[6] "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

[7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. [8] And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." [9] After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. [10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

When we hear from the East, today we would think Iraq and Iran. Back then we would think Babylon, Assyria and Medo-Persia. So they came from the East. Also when a king wants to talk privately with you it's generally not good news and Herod would kill anyone he thought was a rival to him. Maybe they don't know all of Herod's reputation but all of Jerusalem is

troubled when he is troubled. Herod knows what these wise men have come to do and that is to worship this King. Do people know that you love to worship the Lord and that the Lord's Day is precious to you? That becomes a witness in and of itself. The wise men don't have a hidden agenda. They have come to Him and have come to worship Him.

Who are these wise men? They are not Jews but they are Gentiles. They are not down and outers but they are up and inners. These wise men would be part of the court of a king. How did they get to Jesus? Same as the shepherds, they received a Word from God but the Word from God to them didn't come in a field.

This is speculation but it came to them hundreds of years before in the archives of Babylon, Assyria and Medo-Persia, where the Word of God could now be found. Why? It was because in the captivity of those in Israel was a man named Daniel and men called Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who became counselors to kings. They served for 70 years two different empires and five different dynasties. Daniel was put over the wise men of those dynasties. Those wise men would have been educated particularly in the area of astrology. They would have had all the wisdom they could gather from around the world. It was their job and to be ready for the king when he asked for that wisdom.

Here is another speculation I have and that is there is no way that Daniel who was faithful to God's Word would not find a way to get God's Word into the curriculum of educating wise men. These wise men that went to Herod had been in the Pentateuch particularly in Numbers 24:17 in which through a prophet Balaam came a prophecy that a star for Jacob to declare a scepter (a king's ruling symbol) of Israel will rise. That's why they called it *His* star that they saw rise. I have gotten the articles and videos of what happened with the planets around this time but I've done my work on this and I'm just a simple guy. I think this was like Jonah's fish where God just made this particular star at this time. I don't need a constellation of constellations to get me by this. I think it was *His* star and it had a purpose, just like that fish was Jonah's fish. This star rose in a very unpatterned way to that these wise men right to Jerusalem and not to Bethlehem, because God wanted them to get the message to Herod.

After the message is given to Herod the wise men get more wisdom from God's Word from unbelieving wise men for they are given the prophecy that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. God's Word is powerful even if an unbeliever gives it to someone. God reaffirms it to the wise men as the star reappears and rises again that led them on the seven mile trip to Bethlehem where they find Jesus. There was about a three month to two year gap between the time the shepherds saw Jesus and the wise men saw Jesus.

We know that some time has passed. There is a key word in the text which is 'inn' and it doesn't necessarily mean a commercial inn but a reserved room, like an upper room. It would have been a guest room and Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus probably went to some of their relatives because that is where they are all from in the line of David. When they arrived to pay their taxes there wasn't any room left so they were led to the bottom floor where it was like a cave with a floor over it which was the floor of the first floor and then created an upper room as a second floor for guests. So that cave that was the stable area was where they went initially but by the time the wise men arrive they are in the house. The pressure of the tax season is over so room was made available and now Mary and Joseph were in the house. The wise men now visit with Mary and Joseph having been led by God's Word.

The wise men bow and worship the King of Kings. From their treasures they worship with their gifts and they rejoice exceedingly with joy. Literally their joy rejoiced in the rejoicing of their joy. I think they are trying to get across to us that when God's people get saved are filled

with joy that rejoices. Would anyone accuse you of being filled with joy that rejoices in being filled with joy exceedingly? You might think 'I'm rejoicing' so let your face know it. Let people see it. Shepherds do it. Angels do it. Even kings come and do it. I just don't think we should be above it. I think we need to get in on it.

Now how did the wise men go when they left seeing Jesus? The Lord comes to them in a dream. Herod is about to start killing kids between three months of age and two years of age because if at all possible he is going to make sure he is going to destroy this rival, this King. You can be assured if these representatives of kings came back they would have been destroyed to but the Lord protected them. The Lord told them in a dream to guide them in His providence to send them another way so according to the text they went back a different way.

That is what happens to God's people when they get saved for they are different and their way of life becomes different. It was a way of sacrificial worship for it was shown in their posture for they bowed. It was shown in their possessions for they gave sacrificially of their treasures. There was joy. There was a changed life. They went a different way. Their life was a new way, an assured way, a secured way. Their life was a divinely guided way providentially. Their life went back to their own country to be worshippers and witnesses back there yet were sent back a different way because of the One they had met and when God spoke they followed. They were going the way the Lord leads them for Jesus and with Jesus.

I want to leave you with three takeaways from this study. The first one is E.E.E.E.E. which stands for everyone evangelizing everybody everywhere every day. Nobody is going to get to God without the Word of God getting to them and the message of God has to come through messengers. How did Mary get to the place where Jesus is? God sent a messenger with His Word and she surrendered. How did Joseph get here? God sent the message through a messenger and he obeyed. How did the shepherds get here? God sent a messenger with a message and with great haste they obeyed. How did the wise men get here? God sent His Word through Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and unbelieving counselors of Herod and they got to Jesus.

How did you get to Jesus if you're saved? My guess is that it wasn't just one person who told you but several told you the Word of God that Jesus saves. It was Good News of great joy and that is what God has called us to do with no discrimination. There is male and female at the nativity. There are rich, poor, up and inners, down and outers, Jew and Gentile that come to the nativity and it goes to fields, palaces, and foreign lands to bring men and women to Christ. It goes to every demography of all of life to bring to eternal life.

Our nativity outreach event that spans three evenings had 7500 people come through and I was amazed at the diversity of people that came through. We get to follow up with all those who filled out cards and I think of all that is around me in this community that is constantly diversifying. We see all this diversity around the nativity so what should we be doing? We should be personally engaged in evangelism for all these outreach events we have do not accomplish anything if we are not going to men and women and telling them about Jesus. Follow up with them, stay connected with them. It just becomes us having another blessing which I'm all for but I want to bless people with the Gospel. I want people to know that Jesus Christ is the Savior of sinners.

Why aren't we (everyone) evangelizing everybody everywhere every day? I guess for some of us were just indifferent. If that's the case then I need to ask you to forgive me. If you're indifferent to where people are going to spend eternity in the pit of the lake of fire called hell, then perhaps I haven't said it enough or clear enough that people in their sins apart from Christ

are headed to a righteous judgment of eternal condemnation. Can you be silent if you know this? Maybe we're fearful and I will tell you to look to Jesus for perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18). These wise men and shepherds weren't fearful and their life was at stake. Don't be fearful.

Perhaps you are embarrassed to evangelize. Then don't be ashamed. Let's be among the unashamed. Paul says in Romans 1:16–17, *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

I tell you this not in accusation but I tell you this out of a heart that longs for you to know Christ, perhaps some are silent about Christ and have no joy because we don't have Christ. We go to church but we haven't come to Him. I plead with you today to come to Him. If there is any reason you think is valid not to surrender by faith and repentance to come to Christ then I will take whatever time you need to tell me your reason not to receive the gift of eternal life that saves you from your sins, gives you the joy of the Lord and sends you away from hell to a new heavens and a new earth.

A second takeaway is evangelism will inevitably be met by adversity from the kingdom of darkness, but God is able. Herod brings some adversity. Satan brings some adversity. There will always be adversity to evangelism but God has the answer to all that adversity. So come to Christ. The obstacle I think is the biggest to our sharing the Gospel with everybody everywhere every day is within us. May the Lord replace that by being within us.

The last takeaway is whoever comes to Christ is never the same in their new life for and with Christ. You now have overflowing joy, an unstoppable joy, a visible joy where people actually see us rejoice with our joy, and a changed life because He redeems you and renovates you. Jesus doesn't do fixer uppers but He does a total renovation. He makes you into a palace for the King. You have the precious privilege of sacrificial worship exhibited in posture as we bow, exhibited in giving sacrificially and exhibited in joy that is glorious and joyful.

Finally, you get to be a sanctified tattletale. A tattletale is always telling on somebody. I was walking on the playground in the sixth grade and there was a tattletale. This girl is now a friend of mine on Facebook which I can hardly believe. I happen to see a dead rat and I picked it up. I happen to have a secret crush on my sixth grade teacher. Her car was unlocked and I felt that dead rat deserved to be in that car. The next thing I know that tattletale went to that teacher and told her who did it. I then went home to get a note signed that 'Ike did it' by my parents and that was not a good moment. My dad had heard the sermon on 'don't spare the rod' but he hadn't heard anything about 'time out.' So then the rod came but I remember my then Facebook friend tattletale. I'm asking that we all be sanctified tattletales.

People ask 'Why do you have that joy? Why do you love to worship? Why are you so confident moving forward in life?' You can tell them Jesus did it. I'm telling on Jesus. I am what I am by the grace of God. In fact, He not only did it but He is it. He is my life and He is the One that made me have Him as my life. He invites you to come to Him.

For some it is not Christmas Eve until they have turned on the BBC and the King's Chapel at Cambridge University has its Christmas Eve service of lessons and carols. It always starts with the carol *Once In Royal David's City* as the boys choir comes out to sing it. They don't know and those watching don't know who is going to sing the first verse as a solo until they walk out. As they are walking out the director turns to one of the boys and says 'you sing' and he sings because they are ready.

You never know when you get the opportunity to tell on Jesus so be ready. He's my Savior, the Good News of great joy! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. This Jesus whom we celebrate His birth has been born so that we could be born again. If you would like to pray with someone to commit your life to Jesus right now, today then please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would love to pray with you about any issue but a commitment to Christ we'd love to pray most with you. For those of you who have come to Christ pray right now, 'how can I with the shepherds, the wise men and the angels, be a messenger of the Message – Jesus saves – to the up and inner, the down and outer, to the male, the female, the rich, the poor, to palaces and to fields?' They hear the rolling sound Jesus saves. He was born that I might be born again. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

SHEPHERDS IN THE FIELDS

- I. The Way to Jesus
- II. The Way With and For Jesus

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

- I. The Way to Jesus
- II. The Way With and For Jesus

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

- I. *E. E. E. E. E.—Everyone Evangelizing Everybody Everywhere Everyday*
- II. *Evangelism will inevitably be met by Adversity from the Kingdom of Darkness – God is able*
- III. *Whoever comes to Christ is never the same in their new life for and with Christ.*
 - *Overflowing Joy*
 - *Changed lives*
 - *Sacrificial Worship*
 - *Sanctified Tattletales*