

Michael McGowan

Luke 2:1-20 – *By Humble Means*

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Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to 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. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

What an amazing scene:

An angel appears out in the fields.

Get out of your mind a Precious Moments angel—

A small, fragile thing with big, cute eyes...

Hovering with wings, fluttering like Cupid.

In Scripture angels are anything but cute and reassuring:

Cherubim—

A type of angel in Genesis guarding the east entrance to Eden...

A type of angel in Ezekiel's vision—

Are animal-human hybrids.

They have 4 faces: a lion, ox, eagle, and human face.

They have 4 wings to cover their bodies and to fly.

Their appearance is like burning coals...

And they speed back and forth like flashes of lightening. (Eze 1)

Other angels—

Like seraphim—

Have 6 wings...

Covering their feet and head and flying...

They worship around God's throne night and day. (Isa 6; Rev 4)

Still other angels are more human-like in appearance—

We'd probably recognize them looking like people—

But they're probably no less frightening.

Whenever we have an angel appear in Scripture...

The next thing we see is people falling down in fear.

And why not?

Not only do these angels appear out of nowhere...

They're accompanied by an intense light.

The angel at the tomb after the resurrection in Matthew's Gospel...

Is said to have an appearance like *lightening*.

Why wouldn't people be afraid?!

My guess though, is that it's not so much the unexpectedness of the visit—

It's not so much the brightness of the light...

Or even the bizarre form these angels may take—

No, my guess is that it's the feeling they get:

Inside their gut something tightens up...

They find it hard to breathe.

It's like that adrenaline rush you get when you suddenly sit up in bed after a dream where you're falling.

It's that feeling of shock and amazement...

When you can't make your body move no matter how hard you try.

God—

The creator of the universe—

Has sent his representative...his angelic messenger...

To earth, to deliver a very important message.

There's a flash of light and the people fall down in fear.

Seeing God's glory—

Coming into contact with even a reflection of God's holiness—

Causes this reaction in humans.

What an amazing scene...

God bringing a message to earth...

Accompanied by the heavenly host of angels.

You'd think something this intense—

Something of such importance—

Would be destined for nobles, kings, or even pharisees....

But this message is delivered outside of a small town—

Outside, in the fields surrounding Bethlehem—

To a group of shepherds.

Some ancient documents and scholars today portray shepherds in quite a negative light.

At their worst shepherds are said to be:

Dishonest thieves;

Unclean according to the standards of the law;

Working in a despised profession...

Grazing animals on land they don't own.

They represent the outcast and sinners of society.

Other scholars say shepherds aren't quite that bad.

At their best shepherds are said to be:

Humble;

Working lowly jobs;

Sleeping under the stars with their animals.

The poor of society...

But by no means the outcast.

So, at their worst shepherds were despised...

And at their best, they are probably forgotten and overlooked.

Maybe it's a bit like how we feel about ourselves:

On our best days we sit on boards of non-profits...

Or hold important positions in our organizations...

Faithfully carrying out our work.

On our best days we're humble...

And redirect any recognition to God or to someone else.

On our best days we're generous with our time and our money...

Though we may not have a lot to give.

On our best days we're patient and loving with our families and strangers.

Nobody is writing news stories about us—

The average passerby doesn't notice us—

We just exist and go about our business.

On our best days.

On days that aren't our best:

Maybe *we* are a bit dishonest;

We judge people based on the way they look...

Or the way they drive;

We aren't as patient or humble as we'd like;

We struggle to break patterns of habitual sin;

And we're fed up with our work...

Wanting to do something more meaningful.

On days that aren't our best we feel lonely...

Like no one cares or notices us...

We feel broken...

And being overlooked kind of hurts.

But it's to such people, the shepherds—

To the sometimes dishonest...

Sometimes despised...

And always unnoticed shepherds—

That God sends his messenger.

God comes to the ordinary—

To the simple folk...

God comes to the blue-collar workers of Israel—

With a message that is going to rock the world.

God sends an angel and the heavenly host to the shepherds.

God doesn't send the message to Caesar Augustus...

He doesn't send the message to Herod...

He doesn't even send the message to the religious leaders...

The pastors or priests or pharisees.

God sends the message to ordinary people—

People like you and me—

People who on our best days go relatively unnoticed...

People who struggle with sin and doubt on our worst days...

People who sometimes struggle to get by in every sense of the phrase.

God says, "This is my message..."

"And, oh yeah, it's *for you*."

What is this message that was *for* the shepherds?

What is this message that is *for* ordinary people like us?

"A Savior has been born to you."

"The Messiah, the Lord."

"The rescuer is in your midst."

"These thousands of years you've been waiting..."

"These thousands of years you've been suffering and struggling..."

"These thousands of years you've been crying out..."

"Well, your rescuer is here..."

"God's Anointed One..."

"The One who will set everything right."

"The Lord is now here..."

"And He is *for you*."

God brings the good news of the Messiah's birth to the lowly shepherds...

And he brings it to you and to me.

Don't let this surprise you...

Because this is how God works...

By humble means.

We've seen God work this way in our Advent series—

Looking at Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary—

People who were insignificant and even despised...

Being used by God to bring the message and means of God's redemption.

God sends his Son, Jesus, into the world.

And, we'd expect that he would be zapped down from heaven...

And seated on a great, big throne for everyone to see...

With nobody but the "most important" people catching a glimpse of him...

Body guards and an entourage that keep away the common people.

But no, he's born into the world as an infant...

The same exact way as all of us come into the world.

The great rescuer is born and set in a feeding trough...

And the first people to know of it—

Outside of Jesus' family—

Are the shepherds.

What a humble God...

A God who relates to us.

A God who knows our plight and comes to us.

A God who invites us to come to him...

Not just invites us but makes a way for us.

God brings the message of salvation to us where we're at...

He comes to us!

He initiates relationship with us! ...

The poor, lowly, and forgotten.

This is our great God.

"For you, a Savior has been born."

“He has come into this world *for you.*”

May we follow in the steps of the shepherds...

Allowing ourselves to be led to this newborn king.

And may the good news not end with us.

May we be so filled with joy and wonder and God’s Spirit...

That we cannot help *but* to tell the world of this good news.

Amen.