



# gracefellowship

Series: The Journey to Christmas  
Date: December 18, 2022

Title: Our Journey Seeks Joy  
Passage: Luke 2:1-21

Advent Reading: Peace (2 Thessalonians 3:16 and Colossians 3:15)

Today is the final Sunday of Advent! The next time we gather together will be on Dec. 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Farmer's Market where we will have our Christmas service and celebrate the first arrival of Jesus! The celebration of Advent is meant to help us on our Journey to Christmas by reminding us that we wait for the return of Jesus with Love, Hope, Joy and Peace. I hope that you've taken time already to slow down, reflect on the past year and remember that no matter what path your journey has taken, God is still good and He is still in control. Not only that, but He loves you immensely!

So far in our series we have talked about being people, like Mary, who say, "Yes" to God, and being willing, like Joseph, to trust God even when we don't fully understand what He is doing. Today we are going to look at Luke 2 and spend most of our time thinking about the message of the angels to the shepherds and how they responded. If you have a Bible, go ahead and turn to Luke 2.

I will be the first person to admit that I struggle during this time of year. I'm usually pretty good through Christmas and the New Year because there are so many activities going on, parties to attend, and fun events to enjoy- not to mention my favorite Christmas music and movies are constantly playing around me. But then the long, dark, somewhat cold winter sets in and I can often face seasonal depression. I'm tired all the time; I'm unmotivated; my ability to dream big goes into hibernation. And if you were to ask me how I'm doing, my response would probably not be, "I'm just so full of joy!" Nope. I'm full of bitterness until the sun stays up past 7 p.m. Anyone with me?

And yet, as Christians, we are called to be full of joy! So, what does that mean? How do I find the ability to have joy in all my circumstances?

Before we answer those questions today, let's meet some shepherds who got a special announcement and invitation to be the first people to meet Jesus.

**:: Luke 2:1-21**

**1 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.**

**21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.**

Mary and Joseph have made the journey to Bethlehem. Luke tells us while they were there paying their taxes and registering in the census, the time came for the baby to be delivered. The Son of God entered the world only to be laid in a

manger. We've talked throughout this series about the fact God does not do things in the ways we do them. If you and I were in charge of the birth of the Savior of the world, we would have put him at least in a 4star hotel! Again, I think this speaks to the reliability of the biblical account- if you were trying to make the story believable, you would write a much different account. However, because Luke is not making up a story, but simply conveying historical facts, we have the Son of God, the Savior of the world born in a manger.

The next thing you would not do if you were trying to write a grand narrative about the Savior of the world being born is to send angels to shepherd fields with the grand announcement of the birth of the Messiah. However, there is something important you should know about these shepherds:

These weren't your every day, run of the mill, shepherds! These were the shepherds of Migdal Eder: The Watchtower of the Flock. Bethlehem is about 6 miles from Jerusalem. The fields outside of Bethlehem were used for grazing sheep and birthing lambs. These lambs were specifically raised for the Temple sacrifices. Which means these shepherds raised and inspected lambs they knew would be utilized for the purpose of cleansing sins in the sacrificial system.

Every year as a kid I was given a solo to sing in our Elementary School Christmas program...and every year it was The First Noel. I guess if your name is Joel you automatically get assigned The First Noel. But there is a line in the song I never appreciated until I learned about Migdal Eder. "The First Noel, the angels did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields where they lay." The line is, "to certain...shepherds."

### **God is intentional and deliberate with His message.**

He could have sent anyone He wanted to be the first visitors to meet the Messiah. But because God's plan was for the Messiah to die for our sins, God sent the shepherds who inspect the sacrificial lambs.

- What did John the Baptist call Jesus? The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

We may have chosen people of much higher social standing to meet the Messiah if we were in charge of that.

### **God's purposes override our logic.**

It was no accident that the shepherds received this message. And here's the beauty of this story as it continues to unfold two thousand years later: it's no accident you are receiving this message of salvation through Jesus today! Even if you don't currently believe in Jesus as your Savior, God is planting the seeds of His message in your heart with a specific purpose!

So, now that we know who the angel is talking to, let's remember what he told them.

"I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

The typical Jewish mindset was that the Messiah was coming to set the people of Israel free from Roman occupation and return the glory of the Kingdom of David to the Jews. But the angel has a different perspective: this will be good news that causes great joy for all people! No one is excluded from the good news of the birth of the Messiah. Jesus had come to save everyone. Roman occupation was the least of the world's problems! Every single person alive on planet earth is a prisoner to sin and is locked up in the kingdom of darkness. Jesus came to shine light on the whole world and rescue us from sin. His first Advent was a rescue mission. When He returns He will set up His earthly Kingdom and bring absolute peace to the world.

**:: Isaiah 49:6**

**6 he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."**

God's plan is global! Salvation is available to the entire world. God is not content to let people perish in their sins. He send Jesus to pay for our sins so we can have eternal life if we accept His gift and yield our lives fully to Him.

Let's look back to the shepherds for a minute. You have to imagine they were terrified and confused. Shepherds were some of the lowliest people in society. These shepherds had to be looking at one another saying, "This angel got the wrong address. I think he is supposed to be up at the house of the High Priest in Jerusalem!" So, the angel gives them a sign that this message really is meant for them.

"You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Wrapping a baby in the same types of cloths you might wrap a lamb in when it was born wasn't uncommon for peasants, but laying a child in a manger certainly was! When the lambs meant for sacrifice at the Temple were born they would be inspected to make sure they were without blemish and then wrapped in cloths to keep them pure and laid in a manger to make sure they were not trampled. When the shepherds heard that sign, they had to be thinking, this is a message truly meant for us- no mistake by God. When the angel told them to go and search for the child they knew they weren't going to a palace or a courtroom or the Temple, places where they were unwelcomed, they were going to a place where a poor family had placed their child into a feeding trough!

When we think today about what kind of sign God may give us to find His Son, we don't look to the manger, that's just the starting point of the story, we look to the cross and the empty tomb. But much like the shepherds, while Jesus has

come for all of us, we still have to seek Him out. When the angels left the shepherds they immediately left their post and went to find the baby!

They were told a gift of joy had come but they had to go seek it out. And here's what is amazing about the shepherd's story: seeing Jesus changed everything for them. Once they found the gift of joy they began to spread the word about what they had been told. And Luke tells us that all who heard them were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. Here's why that is fascinating: Shepherds weren't considered credible witnesses; they couldn't even testify in court. Again, if you were trying to make up this story and not base it in historical fact, you would have chosen different messengers than the shepherds to be the first people to see Jesus after His birth.

But the same thing plays out at his death and resurrection. Women were also not allowed to testify in a court of a law. They were seen as unreliable witnesses. But who does Luke tell us sees the tomb empty for the first time? It's the women. Who does Luke record as having first contact with the risen Jesus? It's the women! If you were trying to convince people that a man had died and come back to life, you would have written the story much differently- unless it's true! If you are trying to be historically accurate and convey the truth that Jesus was born in a manger and raised from the dead, you include shepherds and women in the story, because that's how it happened!

The shepherds became the first evangelists of Jesus because they found a joy that changed their lives. Remember what the angel proclaimed: I have good news of great joy, which is for all people.

That's very general- the Savior had come for all mankind. But the angel got more specific: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born for you."

**The good news of Jesus is for everyone. The good news of Jesus is for you. In Him you find great joy!**

Jesus is where we find joy for our lives. Even people who don't believe in God are looking for peace and happiness. One of the pagan writers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century expressed how the world felt the need for peace and a savior:

**"While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy; he cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns for more than even outward peace." –Epictetus**

The fact that the Savior was born is the good news that causes great joy.

Where are you looking for joy? And understand there is a difference between happiness and joy.

**Happiness can be circumstantial; joy persists despite our circumstances.**

- This is why when people try to find joy in wealth it's never enough.

- If you try to find lasting joy in relationships, they may fail you.
- When you think joy comes from achievement, you are always left needing to accomplish more.
- If you hope to find joy in pleasure or entertainment, you will never reach you have those needs fully met.

Joy isn't found in things, it's found in a person. Joy is found in knowing Jesus. You can have happiness and find a certain level of joy in your life without Jesus; but full, lasting, unending, immeasurable joy comes from knowing and following Jesus.

**There is one last thing that brings joy to the shepherds: God's word to them was true.**

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen, which were just as they had been told.

If you want more joy in your life spend more time getting to know Jesus in His Word. **We find joy when we search for Jesus and He is most easily found in His Word.**

Some of you don't believe the Bible is true or you have a difficult time submitting yourself to the authority of the Bible. Keep following the evidence. Ask your hard questions and then go on a legitimate search for truth. What if the shepherds had heard the angel's message, seen the choir of angels appear in the night sky, then determined they had more important or pressing things to do than to go on this little baby Jesus scavenger hunt the angels talked about? Do you think their lives would have been changed? I doubt it!

If you want the joy Jesus provides seek after him whole-heartedly. The shepherd's night out in the fields started the same way so many night before had begun. It was all routine and monotonous. But their night ended with them rejoicing and praising God! Jesus made the difference! And He will make the difference in your life as well, if you seek for Him and spend time making a true exploration of His Word.

- Pray
- Response