

**12/21/25 How Christmas Changes Ordinary People
Luke 2:8-20**

Welcome...

One of the things I love most about Christmas is the beautiful carols we sing—songs that celebrate the birth of our Savior, Christ the Lord. From “Angels We Have Heard on High” to “What Child is This?” to “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” these songs fill this season with joy. I love singing them here at Cornerstone with you, my church family, and at home with my own family.

But what makes Christmas truly special isn’t just the songs we sing or even the story we tell. It’s the reality that we know the Savior—that we have a living, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Sometimes people ask, “How do you know it’s all real? How do you know the story of angels appearing to shepherds and announcing the birth of the Savior isn’t just a fable?”

We know it’s real because the Spirit of the Lord transformed ordinary shepherds—moving them from fear to wonder, from wonder to witness, and from witness to worship. And that same miraculous transformation is still happening today in ordinary people like you and me.

So, the real question of Christmas is not, “Do you know the story?”
The real question is, “Have you met the Savior?”

Let’s read in Luke 2:8–20 how the ordinary shepherds met the Savior and were changed in three extraordinary ways....

Main point: Luke 2:8-20 reveals three extraordinary ways the birth of Jesus changed the lives of ordinary shepherds and continues to change lives today.

From Fear to Wonder verses 8-12

From Wonder to Witness verses 13-18

From Witness to Joyful Worship verses 19-20

My prayer is that you experience this same transformation, that a living faith in the Savior will move you from fear to wonder, and from wonder to witness and from witness to joyful worship.

I. From Fear to Wonder

Luke 2:8 doesn’t tell us much about who exactly the shepherds were. No adjectives are used to describe them. It just simply says “there were shepherds staying out in the fields and keep watch over their flock by night.”

Throughout the history of Israel, shepherding was a noble profession. Abel was the first to have this job, followed by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and of course, David. The Lord Jesus calls Himself a shepherd and we’re compared to sheep, which is anything but a compliment.

By the time we come to the first century however, shepherding has lost its luster. Shepherds made up the lowest class of people, coming in just ahead of the lepers. In the Talmud, which is a collection of interpretations and insight from the rabbis, we read these words: “No help is to be given to heathen or shepherds.”

Shepherds were:

- Considered ceremonially unclean. Because sheep required care seven days a week, shepherds were unable to fully comply with the man-made Sabbath regulations developed by the Pharisees. As a result, they were viewed as being in continual violation of the religious laws, and hence ceremonially unclean.
- Isolated and forgotten. Because their flocks needed to move around to find new grass and fresh water, they never stayed in one place for long.
- Treated with contempt and mistrust. When it came to their flocks they were suspected of stealing from others and would often confuse “thine” with “mine.” Their testimony was never allowed in court because they were so unreliable.
- Known to be brash and bold. Living out in the fields away from society made them unappealing to most people. Most of them had foul mouths and were ready to fight at the drop of a hat.

So, who is God going to entrust the greatest message ever sent from heaven? That’s right, to a bunch of dirty, smelly shepherds.

Actually, this isn’t so unusual, is it? God has always worked wonders for the forgotten, for the despised, and for the lowly. From the very beginning of his time on earth, Jesus came to those who felt horrible and were humble. Jesus said in Matthew 9:12-13: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick...For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Jesus reached out to sinners like Zacchaeus and Levi, prostitutes and the demon possessed, strangers and Samaritans.

Luke 2:8-9 says...

Think of how rarely life-changing news comes while doing routine work—washing dishes, driving to work, folding laundry. Yet phone calls and messages that alter the course of our lives often come in the middle of very ordinary moments. The shepherds were not seeking an encounter with God; they were simply doing their job. Christmas reminds us that God often meets us not when life is impressive, but when it is ordinary.

But notice how angel begins the announcement to the shepherds in verse 10, “Do not be afraid.” This is usually the first thing an angel says when speaking to any mortal man. Because in Matthew 1:20 the angel of the Lord said to Joseph, “Do not be afraid.” In Luke 1:30 the angel said to Mary, “Do not be afraid. “And now in Luke 2:10 the angel said to the shepherds,” Do not be afraid.”

There must have been an angelic handbook under the chapter heading under “How Messages to Humans” it says that the angels are to begin all conversations with the words "Do not be afraid."

Why is that? What is there to be afraid of? Notice verse 9 says, “when the angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, they were terribly frightened.” It was the presence of an angelic being forces me to recognize that there is an even more powerful God who sent that angel.

And when someone is confronted with the reality of the reflection of God's holiness in His messenger, then the reaction is overwhelming fear. In Isaiah 6:5 the prophet Isaiah gets a glimpse of the glory of God (the magnitude of God’s power, perfection, and holiness) and declares, "Woe is me!" I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts". Not only did Isaiah get a profound sense of utter ruin and unworthiness upon seeing God's majestic holiness in the temple; he recognized his own sinfulness and that of his people."

Whenever we come face-to-face with God's holiness, we fall apart because of our sinfulness. Peter had this response in Luke 5:8 and said to Jesus: "Get away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man."

So, in verse 9 "when the angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, they were terribly frightened." The shepherds fear made sense—they were sinners standing before the glory of God. But the message they heard changed everything. Verses 10-11...

The Greek word for good news is literally the word from which we get "evangelize." This is good news of great joy. The Greek word for great here is "mega" which means exceedingly, large, loud and mighty. It's a superlative of greatest degree. Wycliffe translates it this way: "I evangelize to you a great joy."

Verse 12 says... This message is for "all the people" but I want you to notice the word "you" as well. It's for the whole world but it must also become deeply personal.

Because of this great news of a Savior, the shepherds are to exchange their great fear for great joy! Why?

In order for us to be reconciled to God we need forgiveness of our sins. When the angel announced the birth of Jesus to Joseph, he said, "Give Him the name Jesus because He will save his people from their sins" Matthew 1:21

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.

But salvation is not automatic. It requires repentance and faith. We see a change in the hearts of the shepherds, a change that moves from their head to their hearts to their hands and feet.

That movement—from fear to faith—is the beginning of repentance.

Repentance begins when you stop running, stop hiding, and stop trusting yourselves—and instead turn toward what God has revealed. The shepherds didn't stay frozen in fear. They believed the message, and Luke says they went with haste to Bethlehem. That turning—that going—is what repentance looks like.

To repent is to turn from fear to faith—trusting not in yourself, but in the Savior God has sent. To believe is to go to Jesus—placing your full confidence in who He is and what He has done for you through His life, death, and resurrection.

If you have never repented and believed, the invitation of Luke 2 is for you today. Turn from sin. Turn from self. Go to Christ in faith. And when you do, God promises forgiveness, new life, and lasting joy.

And for those who already belong to Christ, Christmas calls us again to repentance—to leave what keeps us fearful or distracted and to return to ordinary life with renewed worship and obedience.

The question Luke leaves us with is simple: Will you stay in the fields of fear—or will you go to the Savior and forever be changed?

God changes ordinary people in extraordinary ways. The first evidence of this transformation is when we see the shepherds moved from fear to wonder. The second extraordinary change is when the shepherds move:

II. From Wonder to Witness

Verses 13-15...

While the angel was speaking to the shepherds something even more amazing took place. The Greek for multitude is “myriad” which could be translated myriad! It is the Greek word for 10,000, the highest number for which there was a word, so the term multitude signifies a large group. The appearance of so many angels at once is unprecedented in Scripture.

All heaven broke loose with rejoicing at the birth of the Son of God. The angels knew Jesus as the second person of the Trinity before His incarnation, where they saw His eternal glory. They understood that the fall had transformed the human race into sinful rebels against God, but they also knew that God had provided a way of salvation for man through Christ.

Jesus said in Luke 15:10, “I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Robert Stein writes, “The angelic chorus of praise reflects the transcendent pinnacle of all thought and action; the highest of all truths; the supreme reason for all that exists—the glory of God. The ultimate purpose of the good news of salvation is to save sinners so they can join the angels in glorifying God.”

The angels ascribed glory to God in the highest; that is, heaven. On earth, the lowest place in comparison with heaven, they proclaimed peace among men with whom He is pleased. The peace of which the angels spoke is the peace with God that results from salvation (Rom. 5:1; cf. Acts 10:36). Through faith in the Messiah, the “Prince of Peace” God and sinners are reconciled (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18–19; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20–22).

The peace of which the angels spoke is only for men with whom God is pleased. That does not mean that He gives salvation to those who please Him by their good works, since Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us...

The Greek text literally reads, “men of His good pleasure.” Salvation peace belongs to those to whom God is pleased to give it; it is not a reward for those who have good will, but a gracious gift to those who are the objects of God’s good will.

Can you imagine the shepherds seeing and hearing the angels?

Have you ever had someone say to you, “You won’t believe this—you have to come see it for yourself.”

I remember when we first moved here to Atascadero our friends, the Covingtons, told us that we had to go to Yosemite. And when we did, we entered the park and exited the Wawona Tunnel, pulled over into a parking lot and have an iconic panoramic view of El Capitan, Bridalveil Fall, Half Dome, Sentinel Rock, and Cathedral Rocks.

No photograph or explanation can replace seeing it with your own eyes. Not only did the shepherds see the multitude of angels, they heard the angels praising God.

The announcement moved the shepherds to action setting off an evangelistic “chain reaction.” What they were told they must investigate, and they must do so immediately.

The angels did not give the shepherds every detail; they gave them a promise and a direction in verse 11, “for today in the city of David there has been born for you, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

The shepherds' response illustrates the first two things involved in a person's coming to faith in Christ: they heard the revelation from God that the Savior had come, and they believed that revelation. In Romans 10:14 Paul described those same two steps (in reverse order): "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?"

Verse 16 says...

This is pretty amazing in itself because shepherds normally did nothing quickly. They were patient men, accustomed to moving slowly through the pastures. The Bible is clear that belief must lead to action, or as James 2:17 says: "...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is a dead faith." The shepherds could have doubted or delayed but instead they acted and they moved.

The shepherds responded in faith and verse 16 says "they came in a hurry" to Bethlehem. Bethlehem means "house of bread," the ideal birthplace for the Bread of Life (John 6:35).

They wanted to see the baby with their own eyes. And here is the irony. Unclean shepherds came to a smelly stable to see the Holy of Holies lying on a bed of hay. They leave their sheep behind to visit the Lamb of God. A millennium earlier, David kept watch over his father's sheep in this same pasture and now they see the Son of David born in the City of David.

And after being in great awe in the presence of Jesus they knew that they were now managers of the message. They came to see the Lord and now they head out to herald the good news.

Look at verse 17...

The word "made known" means to "make known in such a way that people can understand." We're here today because they couldn't keep quiet.

The shepherds responded in faith and "came with haste." They "hit the bricks" and did so promptly. Like Mary in Luke 1:39, they responded immediately, as we should, to God's word, "this thing which the Lord has made known to us."

Coming to Bethlehem, they saw exactly what they were told. God was true to His word. There was Mary and Joseph and the Babe, the little Lord Jesus, lying in a manger. They saw with their own eyes the Savior, the Christ, the Lord.

The verb found in Luke 2:16 means "found after a search." The shepherds knew what to look for: a newborn Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And they found Him! They worshiped Him and marveled at God's grace and goodness and the miracle He had wrought for them.

These shepherds are good examples for us to imitate today. They received by faith the message God sent them and then responded with immediate obedience. After finding the Baby, they reported the good news to others.

Verses 17-18...

The astounding nature of their message, coupled with the eagerness and enthusiasm with which they shared it, caused all who heard it to wonder at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

The Greek word for “wondered” is used frequently in Luke’s writings (Luke 1:21, 63; 2:33; 4:22; 7:9; 8:25; 9:43; 11:14, 38; 20:26; 24:12, 41; Acts 2:7; 3:12; 4:13; 7:31; 13:41). From the very beginning the life and ministry of Jesus Christ caused people to marvel and be amazed.

When the shepherds heard the good news of the Savior’s birth, they immediately sought Him out and began to tell others about Him. And while shepherds were not permitted to testify in court, but God used some humble shepherds to be the first human witnesses that prophecy had been fulfilled and the Messiah had been born. Now you and I have been entrusted with that great privilege of telling others the most incredible news of our Savior.

On Friday I was talking with someone out in town and asked them what their plans were for Christmas. And after they shared their plans, they asked what are your plans? I said “My plan actually starts on Sunday when I preach a message called How Christmas Changes Ordinary People and then I shared how Christmas is about Christ and how knowing Him and trusting Him changes our lives. Christ was born; we must be born again.

You see the Christ born into this world must also be born in your heart and in mine. Some will receive Him. Some will reject all. All should be confronted with Him.

We have seen how changed ordinary shepherds from fear to wonder, and from wonder to witness, and third:

III. From Witness to Joyful Worship

Verses 19...

In addition to the normal thoughts that go through the mind of any new mother, Mary had many other things to think about. Back in Luke 1:30-33...

No doubt Mary recognized her child’s divine calling and destiny. She considered God’s redemptive purpose, how just as He had promised, He had sent a Savior to redeem His people.

Listen to this poem written by Christina Rossetti:

“In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed,
For the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.
Shepherds may have gathered there,
Angels and archangels in the air,
but His mother only in her maiden bliss
worshiped the Son with a kiss.
What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd I’d give Him a lamb.
If I were a wise man I’d do my part,
but what can I give Him? I’ll give Him my heart.’

The greatest gift you can give to Jesus is to love Him with all your heart and embrace Him as your Savior, Your Christ, Your Lord.

And the greatest gift He gives to you is eternal life. Look at what happened in the shepherds’ lives.

Verse 20...

After the angels were gone, after the wonder of the sky filled with praise, after seeing the baby lying in a manger, Luke tells us something simple but powerful in verse 20, “The shepherds went back...”

They went back to the same fields. The same sheep. The same night air. Nothing about their circumstances had changed—but everything about these shepherds’ hearts had changed.

They now had a new song in their heart and good news they had to share. Keep quiet? Not a chance! Their hearts were transformed. Having met the Christ, the Savior, the Lord, they would never be the same. They continually glorified the Lord. They constantly praised His Name.

They didn’t just wonder about what they saw, they worship Him who they saw.

And the beauty of Luke 2 is this: the way Christmas changed them is the same way Christmas still changes us today.

I love what Corrie Ten Boom once said: “If Jesus were born one thousand times in Bethlehem and not born in me, then I would still be lost.”

It’s time today to make sure that Jesus is born in you. What does it look like to be born again?

John 1:11-13 tells us, “Jesus came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

In all of the biblical counseling I do, this is my goal: to help people adore Jesus, to live glorifying and praising God for redemption and His presence in our lives. As counselors we can give people advice, we can even provide accountability, but what is needed above all else is that the counselees’ heart adores, worships, and abides in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we see in the shepherds how Christmas changes ordinary people. God doesn’t always remove us from ordinary life—He transforms us within it. We go back to our jobs, our families, our responsibilities. But if we have truly encountered Christ, we don’t go back the same.

The real question of Christmas is not, “Do you know the story?” The real question is, “Have you met the Savior?”

Because when you do, like the shepherds, you return to everyday life changed—from fear to wonder, from wonder to witness, and from witness to joyful worship.

Let’s pray...