

THE WITNESS OF THE SHEPHERDS

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By Pastor Stan

Luke 2:1-20

PASTOR STAN WEESE

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INTRO.

-- The Golden Globe nominations were announced this past week. Of the movies nominated for best picture the only one I have seen was George Miller's movie Mad Max: Fury Road. I say it's George Miller's movie, but you never see him in it. Yet, even though you never see him on the screen, the entire movie very literally depends on him because he is the movie's writer, director and producer.

That's somewhat similar to the way that God the Father works in the Christmas story. He never makes an open center-stage appearance; yet the entire event depends on Him - He is the writer, director and producer of the miraculous story we call Christmas. His plan was - and is - for people to be the witnesses to what He has done. The first witnesses were a most unlikely group of shepherds.

Cf., Luke 2

I. The Birth of Jesus (vv. 1-

A. The Only Account of Jesus' Birth

-- This is the only account of the actual birth of Jesus in the Bible. Mark's Gospel starts with Jesus' baptism at the beginning of His earthly ministry. John's Gospel summarizes the Christmas story in one masterful statement, "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us." Matthew records events right before and after the birth but not anything about the birth itself.

B. No Mention of God or Anything Supernatural

So Luke is the only one who describes the actual birth of Jesus. However, there's no mention of God or anything supernatural in Luke's report of the birth. In fact, it could appear as if God had forgotten all about Mary and Joseph. Someone reading this story for the first time could think how sad for this couple to have to go through all this and for the baby to have to enter the world this way. How unfortunate that something that should be a happy occasion should turn out to be such an ordeal.

If God is anywhere in this story, He appears to be on the other side of the universe, uninvolved and unconcerned about what's happening. Nothing could be further from the truth.

II. The Angel's Announcement (vv. 8-14)

A God Is in Sovereign Control.

-- These verses are powerful evidence that God the Father was anything but a passive observer of the events in Jesus' birth. Quite the opposite - God was the writer, producer, and director of the entire story. He was sovereignly and providentially guiding each participant to fulfill His plans precisely as He had ordained.

Caesar's decree was God's decree long before Caesar ever made it. Caesar was God's servant and instrument. Caesar's decree was the means that God had ordained to fulfill the plans for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem.

-- God's control included the smallest details - not only the requirement for Joseph to travel to Bethlehem but also the timing of that trip to occur in the final days of Mary's pregnancy. God's sovereign planning included no room in the inn so that Jesus would be born in the stable, wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a manger bed.

B. God's Sovereign Plans Extended to the Witnesses.

-- And God's sovereign plans extended to those who would be the witnesses of Jesus' birth - the shepherds who were watching their flocks in the fields just outside Bethlehem. It was a surprising choice. Shepherds were at the bottom rung of the social ladder. They were held in such low esteem that their testimony was shunned in legal proceedings. But God delights in making surprising choices, in choosing

those whom the world looks down on or overlooks entirely.

1 Corinthians 1:27-28 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **²⁸**God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are

III. The Shepherds' Witness (vv. 15-20)

-- There is a two-fold dimension to the shepherds' role as witnesses.

A. Go and See. (v. 15)

-- First, to be witnesses they must "go and see."

v. 15

-- Witnesses must first experience the truth of the good news in a first-hand, personal way. It isn't enough to be aware of the truth or to simply believe that it's factual.

The angel didn't just announce the fact that the Savior had been born; instead, he went on to give the shepherds a sign that would enable them to find Him. God doesn't want the shepherds - or us - just to know that Jesus has been born; God wants us to find His Son.

-- So as soon as the angels were gone, the shepherds went into Bethlehem and found the baby and saw Him for themselves. But not just for themselves.

B. Go and Tell. (vv. 17-18, 20)

-- The shepherds told everyone they could about what had happened, what they had seen and experienced. They didn't "go and tell" because of a command - actually, the angel never commanded them to do anything. Their telling was a spontaneous overflow. It was the natural response to the amazing things that they had experienced. They were so excited they had to tell the story.

-- That's the best kind of witness - somebody who has experienced something amazing and wonderful and can't wait to tell the story to others.

CONCLUSION

The shepherds are a great example for us. Have you experienced God's love personally? You've heard the Christmas story of His love - that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, but have you ever gone to see for yourself - have you ever experienced God's love that comes to us through Jesus?

Maybe you've experienced God's love, but it no longer fills your heart and soul with excitement and overflowing joy that you can't contain.

I read a story about a little 5-year-old boy who was in his first Christmas pageant. He was part of a group of shepherds that didn't say anything - just stood off to the side. But when it came time for the Nativity, he worked his way through the group and went over to look at what was going on in the stable. Then, excitedly he turned and looked out to the audience and shouted, "Mommy! Daddy! Mary had her baby, and it's a boy!"