

Title: An Unexpected Welcome

Text: Luke 2:8–21

While serving as the Executive Director at Love INC in the Tri-cities, I got to know a lot of important people in our community. Pastors from various churches, successful business owners who were substantial donors to the ministry, and even those in significant political positions (representatives, senators, mayors, etc.)

But one morning, when I pulled up to the office, I parked across the street at the Community Mental Health building, and there was a group of social misfits standing together, smoking cigarettes and chatting with one another. As they saw me get out of my vehicle and start to walk to the offices, they all yelled out to me, “Good morning, Mark!”

You see, these were our clients at Love INC. And they were the sweetest, most kind-hearted people you’ll ever meet. No pretense – genuine people who loved me. And by far, they are the most significant people I have ever had the privilege to meet in that role.

I’ll never forget that sweet and genuine welcome to work that morning.

God taught me a lesson that morning – to value people over position.

Why? We tend to value outward appearance and people's social success. The higher they are on the social ladder, the more respect and worth we ascribe to them.

God is not like this at all. Throughout the Bible, God chooses unexpected people for His important tasks—Moses, Rahab, David, Gideon, Mary, and The 12 Disciples.

And, in today’s passage, The Shepherds.

God dispatches his holy Angels to speak to an unlikely group of people to welcome a very special baby to this earth.

An Unexpected Welcome from an unexpected group of people.....

Main Idea: God Brings the Bottom of Society to the Top !

What does this mean?

Allow me to explain what I mean from the text.....

1. **The Angelic Announcement to an Unlikely Bunch (Verses 8-14)**

Luke 2:8 ESV

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

During the time of Jesus' birth, shepherds held a unique position in society. They were often seen as lowly and unimportant in the social hierarchy.

This perception was influenced by several factors:

Occupational Challenges: Shepherding was a tough and demanding job, requiring individuals to be away from society for long periods while tending to their flocks in remote areas. This lifestyle meant they were often isolated and viewed as outsiders.

Religious Implications: Shepherds' constant work with animals made it difficult for them to maintain the ceremonial cleanliness required by Jewish religious law. As a result, they were often seen as ritually impure.

Social Perception: There was a general mistrust towards shepherds, partly due to their nomadic lifestyle. They were sometimes suspected of thievery, especially when pasturing their flocks on others' land.

These shepherds were on the night shift, caring for the sheep they were responsible for.

Now, imagine a quiet and still - very dark night. City lights like we have were not a thing, so the darkness would have been deep.

Notice in the text that Luke says one angel showed up to them.

Again, this must have been a terrifying event. Put yourself there...

Notice also in verse 9 where the glory of the Lord shone...

Luke 2:9 ESV

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.

God's glory showed around the shepherds. The lowest of the low in society, God's glory manifested through the Angel, around them! These were not religious, pious people and yet God's glory was around them!

They were filled with great fear

- ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν - *pho-beth-e-san phoban meg-an*

But the angel's response was the same as the angel's to Mary. FEAR NOT!

Good advice! God is someone to be feared. Even so, He desires to have a relationship with His creation - with you.

By the way.....

FEAR NOT - appears some 365 times throughout the bible. One reminder for each day of the year!

If we have a proper view of God, we will fear Him. But, we will fear nothing else.

Proverbs 1:7 ESV

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Why should they not fear the Angel? Because he has some news that the Nation of Israel was waiting on for a very long time. The Messiah was actually on his way!

Luke 2:10 ESV

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 Angel is sharing the **"good news"** to the shepherds...

This message is first to the Jews ("to all the people"), but we know that the good news wasn't just for the Jews, it was for all tribes, tongues, and nations.

Romans 1:16 ESV

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.

Who is to be born?

Luke 2:11 ESV

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Why would the Jews need a Savior?

Where is the city of David?

Bethlehem - In [Micah 5:8](#) it was long ago prophesied that the Messiah would be from there.

Christ = "anointed one" "sent to redeem the world"

Lord = "I am" "Yahweh"

How would the Shepherds know?

Luke 2:12 ESV

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

Swaddling Cloths

Bands of cloth used to wrap an infant or to set a broken limb. After a cloth was folded around the infant, strips of cloth were wound around the child from the navel to the feet. The custom assumed that the restricted movement of the child's legs would strengthen them. In Luke 2:7, 12 Mary's swaddling of the infant Jesus is part of the sign that the angels provide the shepherds to identify Jesus as the Messiah. The cloths also signify that Jesus had received proper parental care. - Emily Cheney

When the angel finished saying these things, something spectacular happened...

Luke 2:13-14 ESV

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Wow! What a sight that must have been! Again, don't miss the point that this happened to shepherds of all people.

Not the dignitaries and important people of the world. And not to the religious elite of the day, either. To lowly shepherds.

Before we move on, notice where the angel's prayer for peace goes - *"peace among those with whom he is pleased."*

Do you understand this phrase?

Whom is God pleased with? His children.

Are all people God's children? No.

How does one become a child of God?

By repenting of one's sin and believing the "good news."

So, this time of year when we wish for peace on earth, what we are really hoping for is for all people to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Shepherds were an unlikely bunch, but this is not bad.....

Take notice of the visitors who came around his cradle. The shepherds came first of all. We never find that they lost their way. No, God guides the shepherds, and He did direct the wise men too, but they lost their way. It often happens that while shepherds find Christ, wise men miss Him. - Charles Spurgeon

We, too, are an unlikely bunch...

Review - God Brings the Bottom of Society to the Top!

- The Angelic Announcement to an Unlikely Bunch

2. The Shepherds' Respond in Faith (Verses 15-16)

Luke 2:15-16 ESV

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." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

Their immediate action? Go and see the newborn Messiah.

They didn't sit around and debate the visitation they received.

They didn't question if what they experienced was a mass hallucination.

They didn't simply dismiss the miraculous like the religious elite did later in Jesus' ministry.

No, they heard the Angel's message and immediately went to *"see this thing that has happened which the Lord made known."*

They heard the message and exercised faith.

In the angelic exchange with the shepherds, the major point is heaven's testimony to simple folk. The shepherds seem to represent humankind. After hearing angelic testimony of heaven's joy over the birth, they respond admirably and go to see the child... In Jesus, heaven and earth come together. (BECNT Darrell Bock)

Faith is a big deal in God's economy. He is our creator and thus, He expects us to believe what He says is true.

In fact, faith is the only way to please God.

Hebrews 11:6 ESV

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

I can imagine God beaming with delight as the shepherds head out with the goal of finding the baby Messiah! Heading out with hearts filled full of faith.

Faith - *"Jesus initiates His ministry by proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; **repent, and believe** in the good news" (Mark 1:15 NRSV). With this statement, Jesus calls for a serious commitment to His message and invites disciples to follow Him. The collocation of repentance and belief points to a radical reorientation of life for the Jews to whom Jesus preached." - The Lexham Bible Dictionary (The Synoptic Gospels)*

Hebrews 11:1 ESV

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Faith is only as valid as its object. You could have tremendous faith in very thin ice and drown.... You could have very little faith in very thick ice and be perfectly secure. —Stuart Briscoe

Have you responded in faith to Jesus Christ?

Review - God Brings the Bottom of Society to the Top!

- The Angelic Announcement to an Unlikely Bunch
- The Shepherds' Respond in Faith

3. The Shepherds' Share with Everyone (Verses 17-18)

Luke 2:17-18 ESV

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

Their faith became sight. They saw the amazing sight of God and became man. The baby, Jesus.

I've made the point throughout this series that the birth of the Christ was extraordinarily ordinary. Jesus came into this world just like you and I did.

He did not arrive on a gold chariot or a white horse. The incarnation meant that God became human through the normal birthing process.

But He, the baby, was anything but normal. He was the only unique Son of God. God very God in human flesh. The hypostatic union - 100% God, 100% man.

By the way, in order to be the Savior, He needed to be this unique blend of humanity and divinity.

Why?

Fulfillment of the Law: Jesus, as a human, lived a sinless life, fulfilling God's Law perfectly, qualifying Him to be the perfect sacrifice for humanity's sins.

Nature of Atonement: As **God**, Jesus' sacrifice held infinite value, able to atone for all human sins; as a **man**, He could genuinely die, making the atonement effective for humans.

Representative Obedience: Jesus, representing humanity, achieved perfect obedience, allowing His righteousness to be credited to humans for their salvation.

But here's the point: the shepherds witnessed what they had seen. They not only told Mary and Joseph, but they shared it with anyone who would hear.

Friends, the shepherds have shown us the better path. I highly doubt any of us here this morning has seen an angel or have had a group of angels praising God before us.

But we have had a resurrection miracle happen to us if we are saved and in Christ. We have been brought from death to life.

You will never die eternally. On the other hand, you will live with God forever and ever.

This is a greater miracle than a bunch of angels sharing the news of Christ's birth.

Every salvation is a miraculous resurrection from the dead!

Who are you telling that you have been made alive through Christ? Who has heard from you that Jesus Christ was not only born, but suffered, died, and rose again?

I don't think the shepherds "*made it known*" out of obligation or reluctance. I think their witness was from overflowing hearts of joy!

Do you have overflowing hearts of joy for what God has accomplished for you through His Son? Then, your witness for Him is inevitable.

Nothing shuts the mouth, seals the lips, ties the tongue, like the poverty of our own spiritual experience. We do not bear witness for the simple reason that we have no witness to bear. - John Stott

The shepherds reflect a vibrant faith, where the sequence is God's word, faith, and then testimony. When God's word comes to pass, testimony should follow (2:17). Luke 1:1–9:50 i. The Shepherds' Confirmation of the Angelic Word (2:15–17)

The Shepherds had a witness to bear. Do you?

Do you know how to improve your witness for Christ?

Fall in love with Him.

How do you fall in love with Him?

Get to know Him.

How do you get to know Him?

Spend time with Him.

Where can you spend time with Him?

In the Gospels and on your knees.

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- The Shepherds' Respond in Faith
- The Shepherds' Share with Everyone

4. The Shepherds' Praise to God (Verses 19-20)

Luke 2:19–20 ESV

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Talk about trying to take it all in! Mary has had a lot happen to her in a very short period of time. Luke records this as she ponders it in her heart.

In other words, she is thinking about all that has happened to and through her.

While the shepherds engaged in public witness regarding these events, Mary kept it all to herself and was trying to process all that was happening to her and her family.

Mary's response follows. In contrast (δέ) to those of 2:18, she engaged in deep reflection on what was taking place. Συνετήρει indicates an ongoing contemplation of these events (Danker

1988: 61; Klostermann 1929: 39; R. Brown 1977: 406). **Luke 1:1–9:50 ii. Astonishment, Remembrance, Praise (2:18–20)**

On the other hand, the shepherds didn't **ponder** but instead publicly **praised** God.

Please notice what they praised God for.

For all they had seen -

For all they had heard -

*The shepherds, having seen the sign, returned home. But they returned with their faith confirmed and deepened. All they had heard, they had also seen come to pass. This produced a sense of joy in them, as they honored God with glory and praise. The realization of the message led to praise, just as the angels offered praise in 2:13–14 (Fitzmyer 1981: 413). **Luke 1:1–9:50 ii. Astonishment, Remembrance, Praise (2:18–20)***

There are two responses going on in this text. Mary **PONDERS** and the Shepherds **PRAISE**. Two very powerful responses.

These are two necessary components of prayer.

Mary **PONDERED** or **MEDITATED** on God's plan.

*Meditation is something that you can not put into your news columns, it is too deep, it is not sufficiently spectacular. - **David Martyn Lloyd-Jones***

Shepherds **PRAISED** what God accomplished.

*To praise God without praying to Him would be impossible. To pray to God without praising Him would be ungrateful. - **Charles Spurgeon***

Ponder and Praise

As we face the New Year, I want you to consider how you can grow in your prayer life. As Christians, we should be constantly improving how we communicate with God.

The two ways we have learned from this passage is **PONDERING** (meditation) and **PRAISE**.

PONDERING - pick a verse a week to chew on. To ruminate over. To marinate in. Purpose to memorize it because when you do, you will automatically be pondering it.

But don't just memorize it. Think about it and consider all of its implications. When you **PONDER** on God's Word, it will renew your mind by the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is how you grow in Christlikeness.

PRAISE - We, as followers of Christ, should be excellent at praise. Often, we are excellent at complaining and being angry, but this ought not be the case for us. **We should be practitioners of praise.**

This is what Paul challenges the church of Philippi with.

Philippians 4:8 ESV

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

This is what we are to do with our mental energy.

But Pastor Mark, have you seen the world lately? There is not much worthy of praising about out there!

Really?

1. Is God providentially in control of all things? Yes!
2. Is God's character good, righteous, loving, and kind toward His Children? Yes!
3. Is God working for your good? Yes!

Then He can be trusted to do what [Philippians 1:6](#) says...

Philippians 1:6 ESV

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

God started spiritual life in you, and He will get you to where He wants you to be. The road may be profoundly challenging at times, but He will finish what He started in you! And when He is done, it will be really good!

So, it doesn't matter what is going on in the world. What matters is what is going on in **YOU**. And God promises to make you like Jesus.

So, is that a good enough reason to praise God?

I think so! Being more and more like Jesus is the point of the Christian life. God is in charge of this process and thus we can praise Him for it!

Ponder on God's Word

Praise Him for who He is and what He continues to do to make you more like Christ!

Discipline yourself to Ponder and Praise.

PSALM 146:1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

If you want to praise the Lord Jesus Christ, tell the people about him. Take of the things of Christ, and show them to the people, and you will glorify Christ. - Charles Spurgeon

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Conclusion

The prophet Isaiah said these words about our God many years ago...

Isaiah 55:8 ESV

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

God does not operate like we do. He does not think as we think. He is radically different than us.

This is no more evident than in the birth narrative of our Lord, especially with His announcement process.

God did not come to the powerful because, frankly, there is no one powerful compared to Him.

God instead came to the weak and the social misfits because they tended to understand their position well and were humbler as a result.

Can I encourage you to be humble like the shepherds? Be humble and not only receive in faith God's Word about His Son but share that Word with everyone you come into contact with. Don't be discouraged if they do not receive it like you did, but instead, praise God for who He is and what He has accomplished for your eternal salvation.

Connection Group Reflection Questions

1. In what ways are we an unlikely bunch? How should this affect our worship?
2. The Shepherds hear the Angels and immediately go to see the infant. How can we increase our faith so that when we hear God from His word, we obey right away? How can we help each other with this?
3. The Shepherds seemed compelled to share what they had seen and heard. What can we do to develop this kind of sharing with others?
4. Mary pondered, and the Shepherds' praised God. How can these two actions enhance our prayer lives?
5. Who are you praying for daily?
6. Who are you engaging with weekly?
7. Who are you sharing the gospel with monthly?