



# First Baptist Church Selmer

SONGS OF THE SEASON • THE SHEPHERDS • LUKE 2:8-20 • 12/31/2023

## MAIN POINT

Because God is with us, we always have a reason to be thankful and to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What experiences, images, and ideas come to mind when you think of the word “worship”?**

**What is the difference between personal and corporate worship? Why are both of these important in expressing our need for God and desire to be with Him?**

People are designed to worship, often choosing things to worship such as family, success, or even sports teams. However, there is only one thing we were created to worship—Almighty God—and doing so is one of the main ways we express our love to Him. From the example of the shepherds, we learn that giving ourselves fully in worship is the right response to God’s presence with us.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:8-12.

*8 "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 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. 10 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. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.'" (ESV)*

**Why do you think God chose to announce the birth of His Son to shepherds, some of the lowliest members of society?**

In the countryside near Bethlehem, shepherds worked. Their primary responsibility was to guard the sheep, which were used for temple sacrifices among other things. How appropriate that the first people to hear about Jesus' birth were those who guarded the sacrifices He would later replace, when His crucifixion and resurrection permanently atoned for sins. Socially, shepherds weren't Bethlehem's most popular men. Shepherding was a dirty job, usually performed by the lower class. Because of their work, they were considered unclean and weren't allowed to worship in the temple. By letting the shepherds know about the good news of Jesus' birth and sending them to meet Him, God made it clear that no one was outside His love.

**How has God spoken to you in the ordinary flow of life, as He did to the shepherds?**

**What three titles are given to Jesus in verse 11? What is significant about them?**

The angel heralded the Savior. In that culture, people usually thought of "saviors" as those who claimed to heal or rescue from danger. Jesus would infuse the title with a much deeper meaning. He had come to save people from their sins (see Matt. 1:21). Luke further identified Jesus as Messiah the Lord. The translation "Messiah (or Christ) the Lord" emphasizes Jesus' identity as both Messiah and Lord. The term "Messiah" meant "anointed one." God chose (anointed) Jesus and set Him aside for a special purpose. Moreover, Jesus Himself was divine (the Lord).

**How would you describe to someone that Jesus is fully divine and fully human?**

**Of the truths about Jesus in these verses, which moves you to worship, and why?**

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:13-15.

13 "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!' 15 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.'" (ESV)

**What do you think went through the shepherds' minds as the night sky suddenly lit up with the most brilliant display of angels? What do you think they saw? Heard? Felt?**

**What is the gospel message in verses 11-14?**

**What do we learn about God's love for us through the shepherds' encounter with the angels?**

Between the angel's announcement and the angelic song, we get an incredible picture of the gospel. The Messiah is here, He brings with Him our salvation and peace, and that deserves our praise and worship.

The shepherds had a sense of expectancy and urgency Verse 15 reports their first words as "Let's go straight to Bethlehem." Even though they had earthly responsibilities (keeping the flock of sheep), these men knew they were experiencing something divine. Seeing angels, hearing them speak of God's peace, and knowing that the Savior had arrived was something worth abandoning their daily routine over. We need to worship God with the same level of abandonment and expectancy.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:16-20.

16 "And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning the child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." (ESV)

**How can we be more intentional about worshiping God for the birth of Jesus with our family, Christian friends, and non-Christian friends?**

**How would you explain the significance of Christmas to someone who doesn't already understand it? Who in your life may need to hear this explanation?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What can you read or do this week that might lead you to a posture of worship that you are not accustomed to?**

**What are some ways to keep Jesus' sacrificial work—which began with His birth—central to your thinking as you go about your week?**

**What are some ways we can prepare ourselves daily and weekly to meet with God in worship?**

## PRAYER

For your closing prayer time, allow your group members to voice prayers of worship and praise to God for what Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection mean to them. Encourage them to use this as a time to worship God together through prayer.

## COMMENTARY

| LUKE 2:8-20

2:8. God chose a small group of humble shepherds to be the first to hear about Christ's nativity. That the earliest witnesses included shepherds was most appropriate for the birth of the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God. Too, these shepherds were faithfully carrying out their duties, keeping watch in the fields to protect their flock from predators of the night. God rewarded their faithfulness by sending His messenger to declare to them the birth of His Son.

2:9. The shepherds likely were going about their usual routines when the quiet night was shattered by the appearance of an angel of the Lord. The angel is not identified by name. The absence of a definite article (in Greek) separates the identification of this messenger from "the angel of the Lord" who is mentioned in the Old Testament and whom some scholars believe to have been the pre-incarnate Christ. (See Gen. 16:7-14; 22:11-18; Ex. 3:2; and Judg. 6:11-12.) The natural reaction of human beings to supernatural appearances is fear. These shepherds were terrified as they encountered the angelic messenger and were surrounded by the glory of the Lord, by which the darkness was turned into brilliant light. The phrase glory of the Lord refers to the unique manifestation of God's presence.

2:10. Quieting the shepherds' fears, the angel declared his purpose for being there. Far from doing them harm, the messenger had come with the good news of great joy. The single word translated as "I announce good news" is the verb form of the same word from which we get evangelism. The root word is angelion, message, or news, from which we also derive angel. The good messenger from heaven was bringing a good message! This news would produce unspeakable joy in the hearts of those who heard and received the One of whom the message spoke. Such wonderful news is not for a select group of people, but for all the people. Although the Jewish people believed the Messiah was uniquely promised to them, God intended His Son to be the Savior of the world. At the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus would command His followers to make disciples of all people groups, every nationality, in every part of the world (see Matt. 28:19-20).

2:11-12. The cause of celebration was the birth of the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Each phrase of this announcement is important. Noting that the birth occurred in Bethlehem, the city of David, this verse does more than identify a location. It refers to the fulfillment of prophetic promise. The three titles of Jesus are distinct, yet unified. He is the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah sent by God. He is Lord of all creation. He saves us when we acknowledge who He is and trust in Him as our Savior and God's Son. In case the shepherds had doubted the reality before them, the angel offered a way for them to recognize this particular baby. Their sign would be finding the child lying in a manger. Undoubtedly, not many newborns would be sleeping in stables that night, even in overcrowded Bethlehem.

2:13-14. These heavenly declarations brought praise to God and good news to the human race. No longer was the angel alone, but without warning a multitude of the heavenly host appeared. The natural function of the heavenly choir was to praise God. If believers are to become accustomed to the roles they will have in heaven, they should spend more time on earth praising God for the gracious gift of His Son. Demonstrating what should be the joyous expression of everyone who encounters the reality of Christ, the angels filled the sky with worship as they gave glory to God in the highest heaven. The term highest heaven describes the unique dwelling place of God, who at the same time is present in every part of the universe. The birth of the Savior not only glorified God but also made peace possible on earth to people whom God favors. Luke used what some have described as contrasting parallel expressions to demonstrate God's grace. God reached down to people. Heaven touched the earth through Jesus. The glory of God is the peace pact that He made in the sacrificial gift of His Son.

2:15. No one should be able to hear the good news about Jesus without wanting to meet Him personally. After the angels departed, the shepherds held counsel among themselves about what to do. They agreed they should go straight to Bethlehem. Nothing would delay or detour them. They had to see this thing that had occurred. The shepherds did not have any doubt about the validity of this news. That the Lord had made known the birth of the Christ was enough for them. For the shepherds the term Lord referred to God the Father. They would soon meet the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son.

2:16-18. The shepherd's reaction was one of haste. They did not wait; they hurried to see the Son of God. We are not told how the shepherds found the particular inn whose stable housed the baby. We are explicitly told that they found the family exactly where the angels had said. What did the shepherds do at the sight of Jesus? Luke's account gives no clue. Most likely, they knelt in awe and worshiped before Him. However, we do know exactly what they did afterward: They reported the message. The message included the angelic announcement and the miraculous reality they had witnessed. The phrase all who heard it perhaps included people from the inn. Those who heard the shepherds' witness were amazed at the witness of the shepherds. The Greek word for amazed describes "wonder" or "marvel." The word portrays a positive, happy reaction, not perplexity or doubt.

2:19-20. While everyone else continued to talk about the events, Mary treasured in her heart everything that had occurred. Each word of the witnesses was a precious treasure, and Mary gently placed each in the safekeeping of her heart. This verse does not mean Mary decided to keep the news of Jesus to herself but that she valued all her experiences related to Jesus. The mother of the Christ child pondered the meaning of all she had been told and had experienced. Meditating on them, she mulled the events over and over in her mind. Her reaction was not the intellectual analysis of an objective observer but rather the emotional response of a mother whose life was devoted to the Son she had just borne. Finally, the shepherds returned to caring for their flock. The spectacular happenings of the night did not exempt them from their responsibilities but gave new meaning to their work. As they went home, they were glorifying and praising God. The natural response of anyone who has met Jesus is to magnify the Lord. After seeing Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, the shepherds praised God and shared the message they received. The good news of the Savior is too important to keep to ourselves. Its joy is to be shared with others.