

WHAT IF THE SHEPHERDS HAD STAYED IN THE FIELDS?**Luke 2:1-7****(Read Luke 2:8-20)**

INTRO: Being a dad has sometimes meant being the last to know. Back in August of 2016 I was sitting in the Lazyboy in our living room and Emily came in and dropped a Onesy on my lap with the words “THE BOSS” printed on it. I was completely nonplussed. Now, I know that I’m rarely plussed, but I was really confused by this one. “A onesy? The boss? What did this mean?!” After all, I had a wife and two daughters, I already had three bosses. And technically, as pastor of a church of 80 to 100 people, I kinda have 80 – 100 bosses. “What did this mean?” As Emily and Evan and Kathy gathered around me watching my reaction, it slowly dawned on me, “I WAS FINALLY GETTING MY FIRST GRANDBABY!!!!!!” And she indeed would be, and remains THE BOSS!

But wait, “You all knew this?!” Yes, they had known it for the better part of a month, and Sheila too. I WAS THE LAST TO KNOW! I was happy to know it, but I was the last to know nevertheless.

The shepherds on that first Christmas night were the first to know. Not Augustus, the ruler of most of the known world, who thought he was god, and wanted everyone to think that. Not Quirinius, who was governor of Syria, or Herod, who was king of the province and thought he knew everything. Nope, the lowest class of society got the news, *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.* Luke 1:11. And they got the added job of proclaiming it to a waiting world. Commentator, Joel Green, points out the simple yet powerful truth that “Good news comes to peasants not rulers.” Shepherds were the spokesman of the God of the universe. But that’s not new, because God uses unusual mouthpieces.

But what if the angels had stayed in the fields? Our text says *they were terrified.* Luke 2:9b. And wouldn’t you be? Despite the angel’s words to not be afraid, they could have curled up in a fetal position and stayed just where they were. “Who would listen to a shepherd with a message like that?! Nosiree Bob, we’re staying right here. The mutton we had for dinner must have been a little rancid and we’re seeing things! We’ll stay right here, thank you very much!”

We’ve already established in our “What If” series that God’s plan would happen regardless. So if the shepherds had stayed with their sheep, God would have had someone else carry the message. This is because the truth is what humans do will never stifle God’s work. He had a plan and it was coming to fruition.

And God would have still used an unusual mouthpiece. God uses unusual vessels for his ministry. The Jewish people were looking for a king and a glorious king at that. The king they got was a baby in a manger. The world needed a Savior. They got one, the son of peasants. Who better to tell the world about it than a lowly shepherd?

Shepherds were important to the economy in Judean life. But, as I’ve pointed out over the years, they were also the lowest of the low. They weren’t exactly welcome in polite society. They smelled like sheep. Yuck!

But, they were important. They had a key place in society. It’s even possible that these shepherds, being so close to Jerusalem, after all, Bethlehem *IS* very close to Jerusalem, which is the holy city, where sacrifices take place, and sacrifices require perfect animals; it could be that the sheep they were shepherding were sheep that were for sacrifices. In other words these were very good animals. So these shepherds were not slouches. They were smart business people. But they were shepherds.

Yes, a lower class. And it’s interesting that they are depicted in paintings and in our imaginations as men who are in their 40s or 50s or 60s. They do not look young, at any rate. But some have pointed out that they very well could have been children. After all, David was the one who was looking after Jesse’s sheep when Samuel came looking to anoint the next king of Israel. Let me just remind you that David was the youngest of all the seven sons of Jesse. But he was made king, but only after Samuel, the prophet, made Jesse retrieve his youngest son, the least of all his sons, from the flock he was caring for.

Here’s another thing. Men, did little labor. Women did the housework and kids did the dirty work. Some have pointed out it is very possible that these were young people caring for the sheep, maybe even teenagers. It’s also possible that they were not just male. Shepherding in modern Israel is often done by girls. That mean there could have been female shepherds. So these were the least of these. Shepherds were the least of society. Children are the youngest and least of society. And, sadly, even more so, women were the least of society. The shepherds who got the message of the Baby Messiah, could have had some women in their midst. Just sayin .

. . Tracy Robbins, in a devotional I came across points out, very accurately, *“Jesus always included the marginalized and overlooked, those deemed by the current culture as less important or less worthy. This is good news for us today too...men AND WOMEN alike!”*

G. Campbell Morgan talks about that message to the terrified shepherds, whoever they were, boys, girls, men, or all of the above, The message is the same. *“Be not afraid immediately followed by the declaration I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. Hear that message of the angel in the world as it was, a world lacking joy, that had heard no good tidings for generations, that was afraid in its heart of the tyranny of oppression. The world bludgeoned into submission, was filled with sadness and loathing and despair. Then an angel from the presence of God came to the shepherds and he said be not afraid; I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people.*

Then the tidings were told, “There is born to you this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord.””

And then Morgan, writing in a time when the world was descending into the madness of World War 2, reminds us of the truth we deal with in the madness of our world over 80 years later. Listen, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace among men and whom he is well pleased.” Mark well the connection. That baby became the man in whom God was well pleased. Peace will come to the earth when men are like him. That is the way of peace, and there is no other way. No discussion concerning disarmament will ever bring peace. . . We are a mad crowd. Peace will never come that way.”* Peace will only come through Jesus Christ, and he proclaims his message through messengers like a lowly shepherd or a lowly ABCer.

Joseph Parker puts the message this way, *“Unto you is born this day... a Savior. The world did not want an advisor. The world had advised itself almost into hell. The world did not ask for a spectator. Everything that man could do had been done and men sat in the darkness of their own wisdom. The world did not want a reformer, a man who could change his outward and transient relations, an engineer that would continually devote his time (for appropriate remuneration) to the readjustment of the wheels and the pulleys and the various mechanical forces of society. The world wanted a Savior. “Savior” is a pathetic name. It is not an official title; it is not an image you could robe in scarlet, and bow down before on account of its majesty and haughtiness; “Savior” is an angel with tears in his eyes; arms mighty as the lightnings of God, but a heart all tenderness. “Savior” is a complex word. It has in it all human nature, all divine nature, all the past of history, all the possibility of prophecy, all the mystery of apocalypse; the tenderness outvying the love of women, the majesty humbling the haughtiness of kings.”*

This is a perfect message for shepherds to bring. They didn’t stay in the fields because they had a mission to carry out and there were no “what ifs? about it.

Conclusion: So here’s the truth of it all, in the words of commentator Stacy Hoppman, *“The shepherds teach us that no story is unimportant. No life is not worthy enough. The Savior came for everyone, not just the wealthy or the educated or the strong. The Savior’s birth was to bring joy to all the people. And the shepherds were the first to tell about it. . .*

What if the shepherds hadn’t told everyone else about what they’d seen? What if they thought, “I do not matter. No one cares about me.?” The people of Bethlehem would have missed out on an amazing opportunity to learn of Emmanuel, God’s Son, sent to earth to be with His people. By keeping your story to yourself, you just might be depriving the people around you of the chance to rejoice in God’s amazing work in the lives of God’s people.”

Wow! What good words! By being silent, by staying in our own fields, as it were, we are cheating the world out of GOOD NEWS! Hey, the shepherds didn’t refuse to tell the Good News, so don’t you either! The message will get out. Jesus said if the crowds were silent in praising him, the stones would cry out. So even had the shepherds stayed in the fields, the birth of Jesus would have been proclaimed. But get in on the joy, *a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.* Luke 2:11b. Is still, and always be the best news ever. Amen.