

Why Shepherds?

I love the Christmas season and I love celebrating Jesus' birthday. Don't let anyone tell you Christmas is a pagan holiday, and that it shouldn't be recognized or celebrated. The angels celebrated Jesus' birthday in Shepherds Field (Luke 2:8-20). We celebrate the incarnation of God Himself, Jesus is God's gift.

2 Cor. 9:15, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Before we read Luke 2:8-20, Jesus was born (6 B.C.) at a time the Roman Empire was a superpower and controlled the Mediterranean provinces with an iron fist and Israel and Judea was under that control. Jesus did not come to free Israel from Roman rule, but He came on a rescue mission to save individuals from their sin.

Luke 2:8-20,

8. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. God chose the shepherds as the first witnesses. They worked 24/7 throughout the year and were looked upon as the least of society. It must also be noted the animals in the Bethlehem fields were used for Temple (The Second Temple or Herod's Temple) sacrifices.

9. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. Imagine on that beautiful starry night, the supernatural steps in.

10. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. This was a must needed message for that time in history. Keep in mind, from Malachi's ministry in the Old Testament to the birth of Christ in the New Testament there is 400 years of God's silence in between, no messages from God. But that silence will be broken by a baby's cry in a small town called Bethlehem.

11. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah (anointed One), the Lord (Yahweh or God).

12. This will be a sign to you: "You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." The Creator of the universe is lying in a manger.

13. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests."

15. When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." [Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me One who will be Ruler over Israel, Whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."] This prophecy by Micah was written seven hundred years before Christ's birth to His birthplace of Bethlehem.

16. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. Nearly all the mangers found on archaeological digs were carved from a single piece of limestone or basalt.

17. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

18. and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

19. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

20. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. I love this comment by Dr. David Jeremiah, "At the world's first evangelistic service, the shepherds were the congregation, the herald angels were the preachers, the announcement was the gospel in all its beauty, and the invitation was responded to by everyone who heard it. The shepherds carried out the angels instructions and then became preachers themselves, returning, glorifying and praising God."

"If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent 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. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior." Max Lucado

Heavenly Father, the Christmas story is simply beautiful. God sent His son to be the Savior of mankind. He knew we couldn't save ourselves, so He sent His Son to be born in a manger, to die on a cross, to rise again, and to come back again to for His church. Because of Bethlehem, we can find a lifetime of peace and hope through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A new day is coming! Maranatha and Amen!

This Christmas message was given by Dick Hess in Bethlehem, Israel. (June 2022)