



Message Discussion Guide Week of December 17, 2023

Message: Christmas: The Real Story, Part 3: The Weird World of Sheep

Key Scriptures: [Luke 2:8-12](#)

Preachers: Pastor Tom Parkinson

Message Highlights:

If Discovery Channel producers were around in the first century, they likely would have made a reality show about shepherds.

- Sheep were essential to the Israelite economy, so shepherds played a necessary role.
- A shepherd's work was dangerous. They protected sheep from predators, robbers, and the elements. They rarely spent a night indoors, sleeping on the cold desert floor.
- Despite their important role, shepherds were despised. They were rough around the edges and deemed "unclean."
- Shepherds were not allowed to enter the temple courts and participate in public worship.

God has an affinity for shepherds and chooses a group of shepherds to be the first to come and worship the newborn Jesus.

The message the angel speaks to the shepherds is that the Savior has been born "for you."

- The shepherds had no doubt heard about the coming messiah, but likely never felt that the messiah was for them.
- Jesus is savior even of the outsiders.

The angel tells the shepherds that the good news is for "today."

- The promise of salvation is not just the promise of an afterlife. It is the promise of a transformed life in the here and now.
- It is true that the shepherd's circumstances did not change (they returned to the fields), but they were given the gift of hope and that changed everything for them.

Christmas means hope for all.

Discussion Questions:

- 1.) What gives you hope? How does hope inspire and energize you, even when things are difficult?
- 2.) What was it like to be a shepherd in the days of Jesus? Why do you think shepherds were so despised? Are there people in our world today who get treated like the shepherds did back then?
- 3.) [Read Luke 2:8-12](#)
 - a. Why does God choose shepherds as the first to hear the news about Jesus' birth?
 - b. The shepherds were accustomed to battling wolves and bandits. They were courageous people. Why do you think they were terrified by the angel's appearance?
 - c. Make note of all the titles the angel uses to describe the newborn Jesus. What do each of these titles mean? What do they tell us about who Jesus is?
 - d. The angel says that the good news will cause joy "for all the people." Why is Christmas good news for all people?
 - e. What do you think the shepherds thought when the angel announced that the sign was a baby in a manger?
- 4.) The shepherds were told that the good news is for "today?" Why do you think the Christian message is often associated primarily with what happens after we die? How does the gospel save us "today?" How is your life different today because Jesus was born?
- 5.) What is your primary takeaway from this message?

Abundant Life Tip: Salvation in Jesus means the promise of life after death, but it also means more than that. Salvation means we can begin to experience the joy of eternity today – in the here and now. When we place our trust in Jesus, our circumstances may not change, but we have eternal hope; and hope changes everything.