

12/18/16

**BUCYRUS UMC - 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**“CHRISTmas CALLS US TO NEW LIFE”**

**Pastor Mike Corwin**

**Text: Luke 2:8-20    God’s Word: Luke 4:16-21**

**I - SHEPHERDS:**

We've talked about a priest named Zechariah who the angel called to believe in the mighty power and miracles of God. We've talked about a teenage Jewish peasant girl who the angel called to be the mother of God's one and only Son so he could tell us that Jesus came for everyone. We've talked about a man named Joseph who was engaged to that young girl and was called by the angel to believe and have faith in God and just do as he was asked to do to protect that girl and her newborn son. This morning, on this 4th and last Sunday of Advent we are going to talk about the shepherds who were in the fields around Bethlehem as Jesus was born in the stable that first Christmas. More importantly we're going to look at the message the angels brought to them that night and so to us today.

One would ask how the shepherds even got into the story. When Jesus was born in the Middle East in that day, they were not looked upon with favor. The writings of Jewish Scholars portray them as less than desirable people. Words like "dishonest," "untrustworthy," and "low reputation" are used to describe them. Their work was not taken by normal people. They had few social interactions except with smelly-wooly animals and each other. And their hygiene left a lot to be desired. They were in the fields for long periods of time and began to look and smell like the sheep and goats they cared for.

And yet God chose them to play a prominent part in the birth story of his Son, our Lord and Savior. While the good people that first Christmas were snuggled in their beds with visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads, the angels were singing a birth announcement to these lowly ones.

**II - TEXT:**

Let's look again at this next part of the birth narrative of Jesus...

**Luke 2:8-20 (NLT)**

*<sup>8</sup>That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, <sup>10</sup>but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. <sup>11</sup>The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! <sup>12</sup>And you will*

*recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”* <sup>13</sup>*Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,* <sup>14</sup>*“Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”* <sup>15</sup>*When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”* <sup>16</sup>*They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.* <sup>17</sup>*After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.* <sup>18</sup>*All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished,* <sup>19</sup>*but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.* <sup>20</sup>*The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.*

It is appropriate that the social outcasts of the day were the first to get the message of the birth of Jesus. After all, his ministry was to all the social outcasts...all those who were cast aside by the rest of society. But I think there's something else going on here too. The Jewish writers might have profiled them as undesirable but the Bible paints a different picture in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The greatest king of Israel was David. He had been called from the life of a shepherd by God to be that king. The familiar scripture known as the 23rd Psalm says "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" Jesus refers to himself as our Good Shepherd and talks about his lost sheep and his flock and tells Peter after his resurrection to be a shepherd too and feed, care for, and love his sheep. Pastors refer to their congregations as their flock. Shepherds are more than the Jewish rabbinical snobs portray them to be.

On this night these men are in the fields doing their jobs when suddenly a single angel appears to them and the sky lit up with a light greater than any of them had even seen. It was God's glory that lit the sky and surrounded them. I picture it like this week's bulletin cover. When I first saw Lilia's artwork I discounted it as too dark as my eyes were drawn to the black coloring all around it, so I set it aside. But while I looked over the others I was drawn back to it because I took note that it was out of the black darkness that God's glory shone through with the angels. The dark sky was ripped open by the presence of these angels. How glorious it must have been!

And like most of our other angel stories, we see that they were afraid. Not only afraid...THEY WERE TERRIFIED! And as usual the angel told them not to be afraid. And then he made the single most important pronouncement God had even sent. He told them that he brought Good News, news that would benefit all of humanity and bring joy to the entire broken and sinful creation. This very night, in the city of David, the long awaited Messiah, the Savior and Lord, was born. He was making a bold proclamation at the very hour of Jesus' birth. He told them they could find this baby, wrapped in snuggling clothes, so that he was warm and cared for by his mother, in a manger.

And if they had been scared before, imagine how they felt when the veil between heaven and earth opened up and the armies of heaven, the angelic host, began singing and praising God. They sang out of God's great work and said "*Glory to God in the highest heaven.*" Proclaiming that there would be peace on earth to all who believed and lived in this new light sent to the world.

I read that passage and I can't help but see God in heaven full of the same joy he was sending us. Joy over the fact that it was his Son who was born this night. The Prince of Heaven come to earth as a small baby. And even more than that I see him full of joy because he knew he had just set in motion his grand plan to save all of his creation from their sin and from death. A plan that would see all of us reborn as his sons and daughters. So full of joy that he opened the heavens and released the armies of heaven to proclaim that birth and that plan!

This news was so great that the shepherds didn't wait until their shift was over but ran to the town of Bethlehem. They were excited...they couldn't wait...they hurried down and found Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus just as the angels proclaimed. After seeing him, they went and told everyone who would listen and became the first evangelists of the new Christian Era. And it says all those they told heard the Good News and were amazed by it. When they made it back to their flocks they began singing the same song as the angels of heaven, glorifying and praising God.

### **III - THEIR LIVES CHANGED:**

The birth of this baby changed their lives! They were not the people they were before this event...before this birth and pronouncement. Their lives were changed and changed forever.

- They no longer just listened to baaing of the sheep and the wolves barking on the hills...
- God's glorious light had broken on them. God's glory was all around them
- Good News was shared with them by angelic messengers.
- Great Joy overcame them as first they heard about the birth of this Savior and Messiah, and later as they saw him with their own eyes.
- The most precious gift that was ever given to the world by God was shared with them first - the nobodies of the day.
- They worshipped like they had never worshipped before.
- They felt love like no one had ever given them before.

The fact that they ran to the stable, they found the baby, they told everyone else about that baby, and they praised God for that baby tells me that their lives were changed.

### **IV-LUKE 4:**

Those shepherds embraced that night what the rest of the world got some 30 years later. That baby grew up and began a ministry. He was baptized by John, that baby Born to the priest Zechariah and Elizabeth. He spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted. He then came back to mankind, went to his childhood home, and went to church as was his custom. As it was time to read the sacred scroll of Isaiah, he stood up and read the words which declared the beginning of his ministry to humankind:

<sup>18</sup> *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,  
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,  
that the blind will see,  
that the oppressed will be set free,  
<sup>19</sup>and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.”*

It says that then he gave the scroll back to them and pronounced:

*“The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”*

There were no choir of angels this day. There was no stable, no Mary and Joseph. No shepherds or wise men. But the message was the same as that proclaimed to the shepherds that night in the field. There was only the baby Jesus, now grown into a man, but the message was the same. He came to change our lives. He came to tell everyone how much God loved them. He came to release us from all oppression in whatever form it takes like racism, prejudice, or addiction to name a few. He came to open our eyes and hearts to a new way of life filled with hope, peace, faith, love, and joy instead of the heartache and sorrow of this world. He came to set us free from the curse and oppression of sin and death. He came so that God could shower us with his love and his grace for all of eternity.

He came to be our Lord and our Savior!

#### **V - CHRISTmas CALLS US TO NEW LIFE:**

The angels proclaimed to the shepherds that day "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." That word "Lord" means master or captain or ruler or a host of other words that give us the definition. The short definition is that it means He's in charge.

If you call Jesus your Lord it means that you seek to follow him and his will instead of your own. It means that your life changes. You have a new life not only in the fact you are saved and have eternal life, but also in the fact that you'll live that new life now...not wait until you get to heaven.

But the Good News is that when you do that you truly find the meaning of joy that floods your soul as the hymn says. So ask yourself how you can be a more faithful disciple/follower of Jesus Christ now - this very day - and then...

**LISTEN TO THE ANGELS! AND RUN - DON'T WALK TO THAT MANGER AND FIND THAT BABY.**

AMEN