

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Shepherd’s Holy Searching”**  
**Luke 2**  
**December 23, 2018**

It’s almost here.

Rather than parents dragging kids out of bed for a normal Tuesday routine of getting ready for school... things will get turned on their heads. Little kids will be doing the wake-up calls. Parents will be rubbing their eyes... to the sound of **“Come on. Come on! Get up! It’s Christmas!”**

**For some of you, it’s been a long time since you had little ones at home waking you up... some of you never have... so you’re going to have to reach way back to your own childhood self... to those memories of what Christmas morning was like.**

**Do you remember?**

**Do you remember how you just couldn’t wait? The waiting was killing you.**

**And can you remember how excited you were going to bed the night before that you didn’t think you could sleep?**

**And do you remember what it was like to wake up before the sun was up... and to wake up your brothers or sisters or parents because “It’s Christmas?”**

When I was a kid, my parents had this rule that you couldn’t go out into the living room where the tree was until everyone was up... so you bet we’d start knocking on the doors and got everyone up as fast as we could, as early as we could!

And we’d start shouting, “Come on! Come on! Let’s go!”

You may not have had the same rule, but I bet you can remember what it’s ***like to be that excited to see what’s waiting for you on Christmas morning!***

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Apparently, it’s the oldest Christmas tradition in the book... but it didn’t start with little kids. It got started with the shepherds. Of course, the scriptures put it a bit more refined than all that. “Let us go now to Bethlehem to see this thing which has taken place...” Luke writes.

That sounds pretty and all, but I’m pretty sure that after they just encountered a heavenly host of angels singing... the shepherds weren’t all that refined and proper.

It was probably more like, “Hey Moe... did you see that, or have I had too much eggnog?”

“I saw it too, Larry.”

And Curly jumps in, “Me too!”

I imagine after being stunned... a smile cracks on their faces... and one by one... they each start laughing because it’s both so ridiculous and so exciting all at the same time. And before you know it, the shepherds are the ones saying “Come on! Come on, everybody! Let’s go!”

And just like little children running out on Christmas morning, the shepherds run down the hill, and into town and they start knocking on doors and waking people up trying to find the child that is waiting for them on that first Christmas morning.

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Only, these shepherds weren't nearly as endearing as kids... and probably didn't receive the same kind smile when they went running into town.

You see, in that time, shepherds were not exactly the kind of people you wanted to invite over for Christmas dinner. They could be a rough bunch...

not nearly as endearing as Linus... with his blanket over his head, staff in hand, quoting the Christmas story.

Nope.

Not at all.

Shepherds were dirty. They stunk. And they were kind of looked down on.

I mean, shepherds were never on the list of things that kids wanted to become when they grew up. Besides being smelly and all, it was boring... out there day after day... watching the sheep eat and poop... and poop and eat.

Not exactly stimulating, is it?

I was trying to think of a parallel in our time.... and without meaning any disrespect, the best I could come up with is maybe being a garbage collector today. It's an important job, but not the kind of thing anyone hopes to do. In fact, it's probably boring... a bit monotonous, and dirty...

and I don't know about you, but if I had a bunch of smelly garbage collectors running through my neighborhood, knocking on the doors, asking if anyone in our house had just had a baby... I'd be more likely to call the cops than welcome them in.

Of course, shepherding the sheep... has become a cherished metaphor in Christianity... but the honest truth is, shepherding was not a cherished station in life. It was the kind of thing that people did who couldn't get their foot in the door anywhere else.

Shepherds were the rough kind of people you tried to not have to mess with because they just made you feel a bit uncomfortable being around them.

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And yet, it's to these rough, bored, stenchy folks, that the angels show up...

and first announce that the Messiah that **everyone** has been waiting for... was just born... and the whole order of things is about to be turned on its heads.

**And not only that, this messiah isn't born in some rich man's house... pristine and dignified. Nope. The Messiah was wrapped up in a cloth just like the shepherds would wrap up their little ones... and the baby was placed in a stinking manger, just like they would place their own.**

"Let it be a sign to you," the angelssaid. And Larry, Moe, Curly, and the rest of the shepherds all get it. They understand the sign. ***This Messiah has come as one of them. He's on their side...*** And he's going to turn the whole order of things upside down!

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So, once the music from the angels fades, they start laughing and slapping each other on the back...

and rather than keeping this news at a skeptical arm's length...

or trying to look refined themselves...

they go running into Bethlehem with all the joy and excitement of Christmas morning... looking to find what has been told them.

**And who knows, maybe that's exactly why the angels showed up to them and not the town leaders. Maybe their willingness to drop everything and go looking is exactly why the shepherds were the first ones invited to the hospital to celebrate this new little one.**

After all, the business leaders and religious leaders... the politicians and the merchants... they might have been too busy or preoccupied. They probably had too many things to do that night, and certainly, too much dignity to go running through town, and too much self-respect to go knocking on doors, turning over mangers... looking for a baby.

**But not the shepherds. No, they weren't held back by all that...**

**They weren't consumed with responsibilities keeping their focus so narrow.**

**They weren't worried about a reputation that kept them from being foolish.**

**Nope. They just heard, and went, and saw, and "left rejoicing at all they had seen," Luke says.**

I have a hunch that's why the angels came to them... and why Jesus seems to always be present to the likes of shepherds. ***They're the ones who are open and ready... for God to do something amazing.***

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And, this Christmas, I wonder... what might it take for us to be that open and ready, too?

I know, you've probably got a lot on your mind this time of year, don't you?

Maybe things with your family aren't easy right now... and this Christmas isn't something you're looking forward to. I don't know.

Or maybe you still have a lot to take care of at work... The pressures aren't letting up.

Or maybe you're worried about the credit card bill that's coming your way...

Or maybe... maybe you're just so caught up in the news cycle that every week you find something else to worry about...

Truth is, I think a lot of us are just ***so used to being busy*** and preoccupied that we've completely forgotten what it's like to be that open and receptive like we were as a child...

and we can hardly remember the last time we were excited enough to drop everything... and with all the innocence of our childhood self... go looking for the holy gift that's coming into our life.

I wonder what it might take for us to hear this good news of Christmas enough... to get up...

***and go running after God*** in our lives

with the same innocent hope and joy of the shepherds.

Remember, the announced gift probably wasn't that easy for the shepherds to find. It might not be easy for us either. I know... you and I... most of us... would prefer to have God served up on a platter at a time of our own choosing.... you know, when it's convenient for us.

But that's often not how it works.

There is a gift for you... but you've got to want it enough to go looking for it.

You might have to keep turning over every rock  
and knocking on every door,

and looking through every ***stinking manger*** of your life... but... eventually you can find the holy presence of God... that has come into the world...  
because the holy presence of God has come into your life.

So, don't give up too easily. The angels are singing ... And they are giving you a sign that says: God is one of us. And God is on your side.

Whether you're down in the dumps,  
or bored with life,

or your career just hasn't turned out the way you imagined it would, ***God has come to you... The holy beautiful Presence... has come to be with you.***

**Right there in the stuff of your life...**

**in the stuff of babies crying and children wrestling...**

**in the stuff of co-workers and projects,**

**in the stuff of family and neighbors...**

**God has come right in the mess of it all and made it holy. The holy is there.**

The only question is whether or not you will drop your shepherd's staff long enough to go looking for and running after what is waiting for you...

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**And if you're not sure how to go looking, then maybe try letting your childhood-self take over... and to lead you.**

**Maybe it will feel a little silly...but let yourself be excited again...**

**and keep your eyes open for the gifts that are yours.**

**Go looking for God in all the innocence and openness that your child-self can muster.**

And if you can't find your childhood self, then try asking God to help you find it again... to help you discover the ***innocent wonder*** again....

John O'Donohue says that "When our *eyes are graced with wonder*, the world reveals its wonders to us..." <sup>1</sup>

So, if you're having a hard time this year... make it your prayer every day, *that your eyes might be graced with wonder.*

Pray it today, and again tomorrow... and again the next day... "O God, grace my eyes with wonder..."

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<sup>1</sup> John O'Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 145.

Pray it until you hear the angels singing...

Because your childhood self, who is hidden deep in your heart, can hear them--- And your childhood self is knocking on that hidden door of your heart...

Saying, "Come on. Open your eyes.

Get up. It's time to go and find the One who is waiting for us today."

Amen.

Silent Reflection:

*Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;  
now ye hear of endless bliss; Jesus Christ was born for this;  
he has opened heaven's door, and we are blest forevermore.  
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!*