

IN THOSE DAYS
(4) THERE WERE SHEPHERDS

Luke 2:8, 15-20
Jeffrey S. Carlson
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SCRIPTURE

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. . .

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:8, 15-20 NRSV).

MESSAGE

The Christmas story recorded in Luke's Gospel is well known, and for that reason we must take care to not overlook the meaning of the story.

Think about the shepherds if you would. They were second-class citizens, at least, in the eyes of most of the people in Judea. They were considered socially and religiously unacceptable. They were even prohibited from giving testimony in a court of law. But God choose these people to be his witnesses!

There were shepherds tending sheep. The lambs they were herding were probably the lambs that would be offered as temple sacrifices. Ironic, isn't it? The shepherds were not welcome in Jerusalem but the animals they cared for were.

But then one night, in Bethlehem, not far from where they were stationed, the Lamb of God was born. The announcement must have startled them, both for its content and for the fact that it was addressed to them:

"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:10).

God had come to earth. Amazing! God is God and God came to earth. The eternal, timeless One entered days and weeks and years. Why? To reward us for being good? Hardly. The Bible is clear that "we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners and shown that we are incapable of living the glorious lives God wants for us" (from Rom 3:23 MSG).

The shepherds must have known. Their consciences must have convicted them, because we are told "they were terrified" (Lk 2:9). But for the shepherds, and for us, the Good News is that God entered the world with a gift – the gift of his Son – to clean us up. To scrub the floors and ceilings of our hearts and souls that we might be made into something fresh and new.

Though the shepherds returned to their watching and caring for the flocks, they returned with different hearts and souls! They had been changed by the Savior of the world, just as we can be changed. They were no longer terrified; they were joyful in knowing a Savior had been born for them, a Savior who had come to redeem them.

As he came to give the shepherds of old a gift, so he steps into our lives to give us the gift of salvation. He steps into our lives to forgive us for the many times we have failed to demonstrate Christmas love through our time, affirmation, acts of service, compassionate touches, and gift giving. He steps into our lives to restore us and make us what we cannot make of ourselves! This is why we gather to celebrate that gift.

During Christmas, our gift giving is a grateful response for the gift of Jesus. It is also an exchange of visible signs of love for one another. Jesus came in the "flesh." He became visible to demonstrate God's great love for us and to do what in the flesh we could not do for ourselves – reconcile us to God.

There is a humorous story of a woman who was in a rush to get her Christmas cards mailed. She hurriedly purchased 50 cards without looking at the message inside. She signed and addressed all but one, and then dropped them in the mailbox. She never bothered to look at the greeting inside, until one day when she glanced at the one remaining card and read, "This card is just to say a little gift is on the way." Imagine her surprise!

There are many ways to share Christmas love, including gift giving. Whatever ways we use – time, affirmation, service, touch or gifts – the most important thing is that we share God's love so that in ways large and small, others might get glimpses of what God is like. Christmas is a profound reminder to us that God is love (1 Jn 4:16).