

Journey of Humility
Luke 2:8-20

It was a night just like any other night. Toward the west the sun began to sink lower and lower over the Mediterranean Sea until all that was left was a gold bar across the horizon. In a moment the sky turned to ashen gray and with that came night. To the east the mountains of Moab cast shadows like colossal giants in the moonlight. In Bethlehem the bustling of the town swollen with guests due to the census begins to quiet. Slowly the lights in the houses go out. In the fields the sheep lie down while the shepherds sit around their fire. For them, it's business and life as usual, just another ordinary night.

Who are these shepherds? The Bible does not tell us their names. However, the reputation of a shepherd is another matter. O, certainly we are told of the great leader of Israel, Moses, who spent one third of his life as a shepherd before leading the people out of Egypt and of the great King David who began as a shepherd boy. The Prophets also promised that God would someday raise up a new David to shepherd His people.

But to understand the shepherds' social standing, one line in Genesis can tell us all we need to know. Joseph, an Israelite who rose to a seat of power in Egypt, advised his brothers how to acquire the best land to sustain their livelihood during the drought. *“When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, ‘What is your occupation?’ you should answer, ‘Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.’ Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians”* (Gn.46:33-34). For a people who began as shepherds, 1st century shepherds were held equally in low prestige. It was one of those occupations that everyone needed and no one desired. Shepherds' activities even kept them from participation in the religious activities of their communities.

It is to these humble and often despised servants that a special message by special messengers would come. **(Read Text)** Just think - shepherds are the first ones told about the birth of the Messiah. This high honor was reserved for the lowliest of the low, the least educated of men, ranch hands who were despised by those with any “class.” To men whose skin glistened with sweat, whose clothes reeked with the stench of the field, who lacked the most basic of manners, who used language unfit for children’s ears, who earned the lowest of wages, who were unlikely to be admitted to any respectable establishment of the time – on this night they were favored by heaven.

To be sure, the message would also go out to others, magi – educated, having “class” dignitaries, perhaps even royal – wise men, not ignorant; for Jesus was and is the Messiah and Lord of all. As Pastor David Jeremiah wrote, *“He invited simple men to take the low road and wise men to take the high road, because from that moment, all roads would lead to the manger and the Child”* (*Why the Nativity?* p81).

Yet, as if to set a tone for the entire life and message of his Son, God sent word to shepherds to be the first to journey to Bethlehem to see, to worship, to celebrate. Jesus would enter the homes of despised tax collectors and known sinners. He would reach out and touch lepers with his hands and his love. He would teach that anyone who served the “least of these” would actually be serving him. The child of the manger would become the man who would rebuke his disciples for dismissing children. *“Let them come to me,”* he would say just as his Father had once said, *“Let these shepherds come.”*

Imagine the wonder for those humble field hands on that ordinary night. One moment the skies were dark and their station in life perhaps darker. The next moment angels lit up the sky and shared amazing news. Surely the shepherds asked, “Why us?” And yet, these simple men

followed the instructions given them. They made their way to Bethlehem and experienced what countless generations of Christians have envied. Their lives would never be the same again; the sky would never be quite so dark.

The shepherds' story pales in comparison to the wonder of the birth of Jesus. In 12 short verses we read their story and then they are gone. But the shepherds leave us an example and, in the example, instruction for our Christmas journey and beyond.

1. *Don't be something or someone you aren't.* Strive to be all that God wants you to be right where you are now for his glory. God will meet you there. The shepherds were "*out in the field keeping watch over their flocks*" being who they were to the best of their ability.

2. *Listen.* Are you too caught up in work, schedule, family, or leisure that you're not hearing what God wants to say to you? It's time to slow down so you can listen. God has something important to tell you: "*A Savior has been born to you.*"

3. *Know what to look for.* Too often we are looking for some fantastic sign from God before we will act. God typically speaks through less flashy means: mangers in stables, babies, the lives of the poor and needy, the mundane tasks of life. Don't overlook Jesus.

4. *Make Jesus the Master of your life.* Jesus is "*Christ the Lord.*" Do you allow him to rule your life or are you ruled by what others think of you or what you think others think of you? Is Jesus in control or is your work, your family, your desire to impress, or the almighty dollar?

5. *Believe what you hear.* The shepherds believed what they had heard and acted on it. God has so much for you to know. Read the Bible and believe the promises God has for you. Then act on them. Go. "*Let's go and see what the Lord has told us about.*" Move toward Christ in your understanding and love.

6. *Believe what you see.* When the shepherds saw Jesus, their belief was confirmed and they left the stable changed men. Have you let your life be changed by Jesus? Have you stopped to look at how your life has been changed?
7. *Let your Joy Show.* The shepherds could not keep quiet: “*Then the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished*” not by their eloquence or delivery, but by the truth. Can others tell you are a joyful believer? Let your actions and words testify to what you believe.

Who would have thought that God might favor a shepherd? But then, who would have thought that God might favor you? He does, you know. The second verse of an old Polish carol tells the story well: *Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping vigil till the morning new saw the glory, heard the story, tidings of a gospel true. Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow, praises voicing, greet the morrow: Christ the babe was born for you.*

No matter how little others may think of you, no matter how little you think of yourself, no matter what your social standing is or isn't, “*God so loved YOU that he sent his one and only Son that when YOU believe in him YOU will not perish but have eternal life*” (Jn.3:16). God's invitation is that you, in humbleness of heart, regardless of your station in life, “*Go ... see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.*” God invites you to Jesus so that he might be your Savior and Lord. If you take this journey your lives will never be the same again; the sky will never be quite so dark.

So, how about it? Let's rise up and follow the shepherds' to Bethlehem.