

Christmas Day, 2022
Shepherds Getting Christmas Right

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Dear Friends in Christ,

While on a road trip an elderly couple stopped at a roadside restaurant for lunch. The next day was Christmas Eve, and they were on their way to visit children and grandchildren. After finishing their meal, they left the restaurant, and resumed their trip. When leaving, the elderly woman unknowingly left her glasses on the table. She didn't miss them until they had been driving for about 40 minutes. By then, to add to the aggravation, they had to travel quite a distance before they could find a place to turn around, in order to retrieve her glasses.

All the way back, the husband became the grumpy old man. He fussed and complained. He scolded his wife relentlessly during the entire return drive. Then he chided her, the more agitated he became. He did not let up for a single minute. To her relief, they finally arrived at the restaurant. As the woman got out of the car to retrieve her glasses, the crabby old man yelled out, "While you're in there, you might as well get my hat and the credit card."

Safe to say, the gentleman didn't quite have the Christmas spirit just yet.

In recent sermons, we have been exploring the theme, "Getting Christmas Right." Last night's message was "Mary and Joseph Getting Christmas Right." The previous four Sundays' themes were "Magnifying Jesus," "Rejoicing Always," "Repenting Sincerely," and "Staying Awake."

Today, we learn from the shepherds how to get Christmas right. That is to say, how to rhythm of Christianity. A rhythm which God initiates by giving and

continues as we receive and then respond to His gifts with distinctively Christian joy.

Three clues we would learn today from the shepherds about getting Christmas right - *1) listening well 2) responding quickly, and 3) sharing joyfully the Good News of great joy, which is for all the people.*

•Listening Well

I saw a meme recently where an elderly man said to his friend, “I have my brand new hearing aids in, they work well, they cost over \$5000. His friend asked, “What kind is it?” To which the man with the expensive hearing aids responded, “5:30.”

Or perhaps you have heard the one about a wife who had been talking for some time. She stopped and asked, “You’re not even listening, are you?” The man thought to himself. “That’s an odd way to start a conversation.”

Scriptures are full of references to Christ being the Good Shepherd and those who listen to His voice as the sheep. One wonders why He didn’t compare us very often to dogs, known for being cute and cuddly and loyal. Or to cats, known for being independent, sassy, and quick. Rather, as sheep, known for being not that bright, known for being needy, defenseless, prone to wander.

It’s also interesting that the first to hear the good news of great joy were not the Pharisees nor the priests nor the Levites, but lowly shepherds. The first to hear the song of the angels proclaiming the birth of a Savior were not the synagogue leaders or the members of the Church Council, but ordinary and looked down upon keepers of the sheep.

Last night, the entire Christmas Eve sermon focused on Mary and Joseph getting Christmas right by listening well, and then responding correctly. They listened to the angels, they listened to the voices of the prophets they had heard from their mothers’ knees, they listened to the Emperor telling them to go to the town of their ancestry to be registered.

So also, the first thing the shepherds did right was to listen well. They heard that they ought not be afraid. They heard not just a bit of routine or ok news, but breaking news, world changing news, good news of great joy. They heard that not just a normal baby had been born healthy, but that the Promised Messiah had been

born nearby. They heard not just a basic birth announcement, but a heavenly host giving them specific signs that would help them find their way to the manger.

Getting Christmas right begins by listening early and often to the familiar Christmas stories. Again and again in Scripture, we are urged, invited, beseeched that if we have ears to hear, we should do so.

- *Psalm 81 - Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you; O Israel, if you would listen to me.*
- *Psalm 143 - Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you.*
- *Isaiah 55 - Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live*
- *Paul in Acts 13 - Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen.*
- *Jesus in Luke 10 - Whoever listens to you listens to me;*
- *Jesus in John 10 - I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me...And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers determined to pay close attention to God's Word in these 12 days of Christmas. They know that blessed are their marriages, blessed are their families, blessed are the homes and blessed are the sanctuaries where the dearly loved people of God hear the Word of God and hold onto and cherish and appreciate the written Scriptures. Blessed are the people of all ages who listen well to the voice of their Good Shepherd and will not be distracted.

Responding Quickly

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

They went with haste. They did not take time to hold a committee meeting. They did not form a Task Force to formulate a recommendation. They went with haste. They interpreted the surprising interruption by the angels to be a glorious invitation to go and see for themselves the Savior that had been born. Luke records

that they spoke repeatedly and continually to each other, “Let us go over then as far as Bethlehem, and let us see this thing that has happened.”

First God speaks and offers his gifts in the Christ Child, then the shepherds respond in faith by proclaiming what God has first spoken to them. First they come and find Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. Then they return to their flocks glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen just as it had been told to them.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who get Christmas right as often as they spend time receiving, enjoying, and responding to God’s gifts of grace. The old familiar stories of Christmas never get old. They sing the same carols and hymns their parents and grandparents sang. They pray fervently that the baton of the Christian faith will be passed on successfully to the next generations.

• *Sharing Joyfully*

17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

It has been said that the worst crime you could commit in the desert is to know where there is water and not tell others about it. Or as we say in the Midwest, in a blizzard the worst thing you could do is to have a nice warm house and not be willing to share it with stranded travelers. In medicine the worst crime would be to know how to make someone better but not be willing to do it. And for us in this sanctuary this morning, to have the peace and the joy that only Christ can give and to keep it to ourselves. The shepherds will never be accused of keeping Good News to themselves. They went on their way glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

Three reactions we find to the birth of Christ in Luke’s account.

1. The shepherds receive confirmation with their eyes of the sign that was made known to them.
2. Those who heard the story of the shepherds respond in amazement.
3. Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart.

All three responses are responses of faith. The ultimate response to the Christmas Gospel is that God is glorified and praised.

This morning, we gather at the manger to see again what we have seen before. We see a Child shivering in the cold, but now wrapped up warm in swaddling clothes. We see a teenage mom and her carpenter husband doing what the angels told them to do. We see God so loving the world that He sent His only begotten Son. We see the Son of God giving up heavenly riches for the purpose of experiencing earthly poverty. We see the Creator of life born into the humblest of surroundings.

(Story of Ed Cutler on Vicarage in Sioux City.) He and his wife Till adopted all vicars and families into their homes. (Their daughter Cathy and husband Bill worshiped here recently) Ed's great passion was to share the Gospel. We would visit folks in their homes / story of how Ed would talk about how he loved the Bible, and one of his favorite verses would be John 3:16 / would tell them that he had trouble reading the small print / would have them reading out of his Bible / Ed found joy in going out, listening, sharing Good News /Eventually he went to Concordia College in St. Paul at age 60 or so, became trained in evangelism and moved down to Tampa, where he served for 10 or 15 years or so.)

Ed's faith had a contagious quality to it. It was hard not to have the joy of the Lord when you spent time with him, whether it was meal time or Pabst Blue Ribbon time or watching football time or Monday night evangelism time.

As Luke describes the shepherds listening well, then going in haste to see the Christ child, then returning home glorifying and praising God in a contagious sort of way, we get the impression that the shepherds got it right.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who are determined to be like a city of lights set on a hill difficult to ignore. They understand that it's not so much that the church has a mission, but rather that God's mission has a church. On their bad days, the worries and disappointments get the best of them, and the Christmas cheer is hard to find. On their decent days, they rejoice that Jesus Christ is their Good Shepherd following them around with goodness and mercy. And on their really good days, they live in such a way that broken and hurting people are attracted to Christ, to His promises, and to His Church. In Jesus' Name. Amen.