

Shepherded by a Sheep

Introduction

The Text

“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’” (Luk 2:8–12).

No Private Birth for a Public Savior

- A. Those of you that have had children, you know giving birth to your child is most certainly an event to be celebrated. You want to send out cards with your little one’s picture on it, you want to post it all over Facebook, you want all your family and friends to come by and rejoice with you.
 - 1. But you want all of this stuff to happen next week sometime. You don’t want them crowding in on your hospital room. Let me be with my husband, my mom, and my dad for a little while. Let me get rest, get a shower, get settled, and then let’s do this!
- B. But Mary and Joseph were not afforded such privacy. Mary had just given birth to her Son in the little village of Bethlehem. And before the night was through, perhaps only an hour or two later, strangers are filing in to see the child.
 - 1. Such unusual events remind us of the unusual nature of this child. This child would not just be for Joseph and Mary’s joy, He would be for the joy of “all the people” (v. 11).
- C. They would have to give Him away before they even really had a chance to draw Him near. This child had been given to them to be given away.
 - 1. And this is only the beginning: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son...” (Joh 3:16a).

The Outline

- A. We’ll walk through these verses bit by bit, and I’ll put my thoughts under 3 headings: (1) The Shepherd-Guests (vv. 8-9); (2) The Shepherd-King (vv. 10-11); and (3) The Shepherd-Sheep (v. 12).

(1) The Shepherd-Guests (vv. 8-9)

Not Kings but Shepherds

- A. One would hope that if there must be intrusions into the birth of their child that at least God would invite the upper class, the people of character and clout. This child is the Son of God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords after all. Surely it is people of lofty stature that God would put on the guest list for the celebration.
 - 1. But He doesn't invite the king, or the prince, or the religious leader, or the wealthy, or the educated. He invites the shepherds.
 - a. A group who, if not despised at this point in Jewish opinion (as they would be in later rabbinic tradition), certainly was of the lower class. Lived in the fields, working with the animals, at all hours of the day—not exactly a coveted profession.
- B. But why? Why start with the shepherds?
 - 1. It is not that the kings, religious leaders, rich, powerful are not invited ([Luk 14:15-24](#)). It's that they love their lives too much to accept the disruption that the Christ would bring. "Things are going good here. I don't need God coming in and messing it up."
 - a. That's why the first thing kings and religious leaders do in the gospels when they're told of who He is, is try to kill Him ([Mat 2](#), [Luk 4](#)).
 - 2. But the shepherds here, and those like them (low, broken, empty, poor), don't have as much to hold onto. They often see more clearly their need. Often it is the poor in flesh who consequently have learned to be poor in spirit.
- C. We do well to consider our own hearts at this point, as the invitation has reached us here in Silicon Valley.
 - 1. Are we so rich in the bank that we think we're rich in the spirit? We don't need a Savior coming and disrupting what we have going.
 - 2. Or, regardless of the status of our bank accounts, are we poor in spirit before God...ready to receive God's invitation to celebrate the birth of our Savior?!

Great Fear

- A. If I could say a word about this "great fear" that the shepherds are filled with upon seeing the angel and the glory of the Lord ([v. 9](#)).
 - 1. In one sense, I don't think they are wrong to be afraid. In fact, it very well might be an indication of something wrong if they weren't. The glory of the Lord ought to shake a man to His soul.

- B. So when the angel speaks in the next verse “Fear not...” I don’t think he is rebuking them for their fear so much as filling it out, setting it on the right course.
 - 1. God is fearsome, but, in Christ’s first coming, He has come with all His glory and strength, not to judge and destroy us, but to comfort and save.
 - a. Perfect love casts out the fear of punishment (1 Joh 4:18), but leaves intact the fear of the Lord.
 - i. Consequently we are not casual about grace, we’re in awe of it! He is altogether set apart, mighty, holy, sovereign...and He is for me!
- C. Our God “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16). And yet it’s as if we hear a voice calling out from that blinding light: “The door is open, come on in!”
 - 1. “⁹...the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.¹⁰ And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not...’” (v. 9-10).

(2) The Shepherd-King (vv. 10-11)

Good News of Great Joy

- A. The angel calls the shepherds to not fear “for behold I bring you good news” (v. 10). The Greek verb behind this is euaggelizo (where we get “evangelism”). It means: “to proclaim good news.”
 - 1. It first shows up in 1:19, and becomes the standard word used for preaching the gospel as Luke-Acts continues.
- B. Many scholars have noted the connection between the good news brought to us in the NT and its roots in the OT. The most significant connection, it seems to me, is that with the book of Isaiah.
 - 1. In the flow of the book of Isaiah, there’s this dramatic shift when we come to ch. 40. Here it is supposed that Isaiah is now prophetically addressing those that will soon be languishing in exile in Babylon because of their sin (cf. 39:6).
 - 2. It begins: “¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isa 40:1–2).
 - 3. And it continues in vv. 3-8 with words that we’ll later see are applied by Luke in 3:4-6 to John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus, the ultimate Redeemer from exile and sin.

4. And then we read in v. 9: “Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”
 - a. There’s our connection with the “good news” of Luk 2:10. We are to understand, then, that the end-time proclamation of good news concerning release from exile, freedom from sin, has arrived in Jesus!
5. But continue reading to see just how Isaiah fleshes out the substance of this good news: “¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (vv. 10–11).
 - a. I love how the ESV Study Bible puts it: “The glorious Lord comes to His people as a conquering King, a generous Benefactor, and a gentle Shepherd.”
 - i. To put a point on it: The same arm with which He rules in might, is the arm into which He gathers His lambs in gentleness—this mighty King is also a gentle Shepherd!

(1) The great end-time period of redemption is described as God reclaiming His flock and tending to them once again!

- C. But significant for our text in Luke is this: the pastoral, shepherd context of vv. 8-9 is multilayered.
 1. It not only points to the type of people God has come to associate with and save—lowly and humble; it also points to the type of ministry this Messiah would have—He is as a shepherd and He’s come for His lost sheep.
- D. Such a conclusion continues to be born out when we consider other contextual elements.
 1. I pulled us up short last week when I read from Mic 5 concerning the birth of this child in Bethlehem: “² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace” (vv. 2–5a).
 - a. This “ruler in Israel” (v. 2) “shall stand and shepherd his flock” (v. 4).
 2. Beyond this, we must not forget the Davidic context that stands behind all of this. For the Messiah is in the line of David, born in “the city of David” (vv. 4, 11), and

David himself was doing what when Samuel came to anoint a son of Jesse as king of Israel? Shepherding his father's sheep: "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep" (1 Sam 16:11).

- a. The anointed king of Israel, was also a shepherd of his Father's flock.
- E. All of this points us towards the conclusion that this Messiah, the subject of this good news, has come from God, even as God, to be our Shepherd-King.
1. This is why in [Luk 15](#) He describes His ministry along the lines of a Shepherd: " ⁴ 'What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?' ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing'" (vv. 4–5). This is what Jesus has come to do—to find His wandering, stray, lost sheep!
- F. How does this hit you, O Christian? What does it mean for you that you have a Shepherd in Jesus?
1. Gleaning from all the verses we just read, it means: (1) He tends to your needs; (2) He gathers you in His arms; (3) He carries you close to His chest; (4) He gently leads you through hard times; (5) He will make sure you dwell secure; (6) He will be your peace; (7) He will pursue you until every last wandering affection of your heart is His alone; (8) He will rejoice over you with loud singing!
 - a. No wonder [Psa 23](#) has meant so much to so many people through the years: "The Lord is my shepherd!"
- G. This is the good news of great joy that will be for all the people—even you, even me!

Savior, Christ, Lord

- A. The angel then connects this good news explicitly with the birth of Jesus: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (v. 11).
- B. Now we have climbed up to the glorious pinnacle of this angelic announcement, and the view is breathtaking. Nowhere in Scripture, perhaps, is there given a more potent cluster of titles given to Jesus.
1. "Savior" brings into view the fact that this child will deliver us from our enemies and lead us into freedom. It accents His activity—He will save.
 2. "Christ" brings into view the fact that this child is the promised King from the line of David that all Israel had been waiting for. It accents His office—He is the Christ.
 3. "Lord" brings into view something even higher, albeit a bit veiled. For, although the word can be used to refer to earthly authorities, it is the word used throughout the LXX to translate the Hebrew YHWH. Such a title accents His being—Jesus is Lord, YHWH, God in the flesh!

- C. And He is all of these things “unto you.” “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” This recalls the note I made in the introduction. This child is not merely born unto Mary and Joseph. He is born unto these shepherds, and even unto all the people.

(3) The Shepherd-Sheep (v. 12)

What Sign Is This?

- A. At this point the angel is speaking of things fit only for an angel’s tongue. This child is the Shepherd-King—the fulfillment of the Davidic and Isaianic hope. He is Savior, Christ, and Lord. Indeed He is even the LORD Himself in the flesh.
1. But then it’s as if this announcement is just shot down out of the air and it comes falling from the heavenlies, landing suddenly in a mess of animal’s slop.
 - a. After announcing such glorious news, the angel gives the shepherds a sign to look for. This is how you’ll know you’ve found the right baby: “You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (v. 12).
 - i. This exalted figure of v. 11 is wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a animal’s feeding trough?! Such news surely startled the shepherds. Where’s the palace? Where’s the pomp? What kind of king is this? Or, even more, what kind of shepherd?

(1) He’s not even lord over the animals, He’s lying with them?!
- B. This child would be the Good Shepherd. He would live His life in pursuit of His wandering and lost sheep. But in the end, to truly bring us back into the fold of His Father, to save us from our wandering, the Good Shepherd would Himself have to be made a Sacrificial Sheep.
1. The good news of *Isa 40:11*, reappears again in *Isa 52:7*, and ultimately gives way to *Isa 53*, where we see just how He is going to shepherd us: He’s going to be made a sheep: “⁵ He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (*Is 53:5–6*). He will be “...like a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (v. 7).
 - a. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (*John 10:11*).
- C. This is why He was born unto us. This is what we needed more than anything in all the word: an offering for our sin; an unblemished lamb; a perfect substitute that would suffer the wrath of God in our place and make a way for a lowly, broken, rebellious people to come back into the fold of a holy God.

1. If you want Jesus as your Good Shepherd you must receive Jesus as your Sacrificial Sheep. This paradox is eternalized for us in the new heavens and earth. You and I are going to be shepherded forever by a Lamb: “The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water...” (Rev 7:17a).

Conclusion

A. Let me close with two exhortations:

1. Receive the invitation!—It’s for you. Don’t hesitate because you feel like you’re used goods, broken, weak, dirty, guilty, ashamed. He calls the shepherds not because they have anything to offer Him, but because they know they have nothing to offer Him. It is not your offering to Him but Christ’s for you that matters.
 - a. O see the great lengths that your Shepherd would go to get you back, and receive it. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).
2. Publicize the invitation!—Now, let us go with this same invitation to the highways and the byways. To the white and the blue collar. To the upper class and the lower class. To the rich and the poor. To the palace and the back alley. To the young and the old. To the educated and the simple. To the healthy and the lame. To the beautiful and the plain.
 - a. “Behold your God!” (Isa 40:9). The invitation is for all without partiality. Let us go to them!