

THE SIMPLE STORY OF CHRISTMAS

The Middle

TEXT: Lk. 2:8-12

INTRODUCTION: Have I told you recently how much I love Christmas and the simple Christmas story?

And I love the characters of Christmas, so much so that I pick one every Christmas Eve and become that person for a night. By the way, I am doing a character this Christmas Eve you have never seen me do, so I hope you will bring your family to the Candlelight Service at 6 p.m. Christmas Eve. You will be out by 7 and will have enjoyed a delightful time of worship. Some of our families have started bringing their children in their pajamas, and that is a fun tradition. Whatever. I'd rather you not come in your pajamas, but the kids are OK.

So, because I love all the characters that make up the Christmas story, I cannot say I have a favorite. But I want you to notice that there is a special group of people in the Christmas story that God singles out for special attention, some people other than Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. See if you can pick them out.

Lk. 2:1-12 ¹ And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

The group of which I speak are of course the shepherds, living out in the fields surrounding Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flocks.

Imagine their shock!

The Angel of the Lord stood before them.

The glory of the Lord shone around them.

- This was the same glory that cause the bush to burn when God called Moses.

- This was the same glory that was in the pillar of fire that led Israel through the wilderness.
- This was the same glory that descended into the tabernacle and later the temple and hovered above the Holy of Holies as God met with the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement.
- This was the same glory Ezekiel saw depart from the temple and leave Jerusalem and rise off of the earth and go back to heaven.
- And this glory of the Lord, the revealed Presence of God, had not been seen anywhere upon the earth over all the years since that time.

Now the shepherds are out doing what shepherds do at night, maybe stirring the fire with a stick, telling a story, longing for home when

The glory of the Lord shone round about them!

First, the Angel of the Lord
Then the glory of the Lord
Followed by a multitude of the Heavenly Host singing in full voice the praises of Almighty God!

And these were shepherds!

Not rabbis, not priests, not prophets, not even regular attendees at the synagogue!

Shepherds!

- Poor
- Filthy
- Stinky
- Shepherds

The most common of common men.

And my friend, that is the point.

I. THE GOOD NEWS IS FOR EACH OF US.

It is for us all.

Poor and rich
Simple and brilliant
Short and tall
Thick and thin
Beautiful and not so much
Lonely and popular

No one is so good they do not need it.
No one is so bad they cannot receive it.

Through what we celebrate at Christmas, God has good news for us all.
Jesus, God's perfect Son, came to this earth to take our sins upon Himself.

He bore those sins on the cross, and there He died to pay the penalty for them.
 He rose from the dead and ascended back to the right hand of the Father to intercede on behalf of those who trust Him as Lord and Savior.
 Those who trust in Jesus receive the gift of eternal life and become a part of His forever family to live with Him eternally.

These are good tidings of great joy and it is for all people!
 The good news is for us all.

II. EACH OF US IS TO CARRY THE GOOD NEWS TO OTHERS.

The very first evangelists to be sent out were the shepherds!
 This was no doubt intentional on God's part, because as the good news was for everybody, everybody who received it was to help take it to others who had not heard.

And so the shepherds did.

Lk. 2:17 Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.

Every believer is given the great commission to go and make other disciples.
 Everyone who is saved is a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So now, let me become very practical with you for a few minutes.

III. HOW DO WE CARRY THE GOOD NEWS TO OTHER PEOPLE?

A. Personally, Individually

1. That's what our SABC cards are about.
2. That is why we offer special event cards like the one for the Christmas Musical.
3. Invitation is enhanced by caring and relationship.
4. Ultimately we should be ready to share our testimony.
5. We should be ready to share **the gospel**.

a. Christ died for our sins.

b. He rose from the dead.

c. He offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all who trust Him as Savior and Lord.

B. As a church

We are an Acts 1:8 church!

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

1. We pray!

- a. Commissionings

- b. Prayer a Day – Susan Stimson, Patty Rummage (up to 10 days before her death) – praying for God to raise up another
- c. Prayer First

2. We give!

- a. **11% off the top of every undesignated gift is sent to mission causes.**
- b. **Another 2 to 3 % of every undesignated gift pays for mission work infrastructure like helping with the infrastructure costs of our Center of Hope facilities.**
- c. In addition to our undesignated fund, we have a separate **Global Outreach Budget** of around **\$350,000**
- d. Every penny given to this fund goes to mission causes.
 - **26% of this fund is for our Jerusalem Missions through the Center of Hope.**
 - **24% of this fund is given to our Mission Offerings like Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong**
 - **25% of this fund supports our SABC Ends of the Earth Missions**
 - **25% - everything else – some more Jerusalem, Judea, & Samaria, but all missions**
- e. **Bottom line, between our General Fund and Global Fund, 25% of all of our receipts is channeled into mission work.**

3. We go!

(Look at the mission trip listing in your worship folder)

- a. **Baltimore**
- b. **Portland**
- c. **Mexico**
- d. **Peru**
- e. **Brazil**
- f. **Ghana**
- g. **Nigeria**
- h. **Benin**
- i. **India**

Folks, I share this with you not to brag on us.

First, we are not doing anything except what the Lord Jesus has empowered us and led us to do. He is the vine. We are only the branches; and apart from Him, we can do nothing.

Secondly, we are not doing any more than what God intends and commands every believer and every church to do. I hope that at the Judgment Seat of Christ we might hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But folks, God is not going to pat any of us on the back and tell us we did more than we should have.

No, I lay this out before us because you need to see the big picture of what God is doing in your church. And you need to see that so that you can seek His leadership of just where you fit in and what parts God wants you to have.

None of us can do it all. I would love to, but I cannot. We do not have a single mission trip that departs that I would not love to go on. But I know I have to seek the Lord and go specifically on the trips God has for me.

None of us can do it all, but all of us should have 3 parts:

We should be a part of praying.

We should be a part of giving.

We should be a part of going.

This idea that some pray, some give, and some go is not Biblical.

We all should pray.

We all should give.

We all should go ... somewhere, sometime. You may only be able to go to the Center of Hope. Fine, you go.

CONCLUSION: The Holy Spirit gave Luke his account of the Simple Story of Christmas. But He gave it not just for our entertainment nor merely to enhance our knowledge. He gave it to spur us to action.

For you who have not yet responded to this good news, for you to say yes to God today. Put your faith in Jesus who came to die for you and pay the price for your sins, Who rose from the dead, and trust Him as your Lord and Savior.

If you would trust Him this morning, come to Mark or me as we sing the invitation song and we will help you put your trust in Christ.

For those who have already received the gift of eternal life, do you have your three parts as a believer? Are you regularly praying? Are you giving as the Lord desires? Are you being a witness to the people God has put around you who need the Lord? Are you going? Where are you going in 2015? It's time to seek the Lord and decide where among all the choices God is making available you will go and be a witness for Him.

Know the Lord, but need a church? Come to me or Mark and let us help you become part of this church family.