

finding....c H r I s t M a s
(Week 2)
Luke 2:8-20
“Who Invited *THEM*?”

Introduction

When I was a kid, we used to sing this Christmas Carol called “The First Noel”. Remember that one? We sang it every Christmas, but to be completely honest with you, I had no earthly idea what a “Noel” was! I always thought it was “Leon” spelled backwards, but come to think of it, that didn’t make any sense either! *Noel* is actually a French word that has come to mean “Christmas”. But, it was originally derived from a word meaning *new birth*. In the context of the old hymn, it means the very first announcement of the “new birth” of the Christ Child was given to some poor and lowly shepherds, who were keeping their flocks in the fields that were adjoining the tiny city of Bethlehem. Have you ever really stopped to think that God, in His infinite wisdom, chose some poor and lowly shepherds to be the first to know that The King of Kings and Lord of Lords had just made his entrance into this weary world? It wasn’t the “rich or famous”, nor the “movers and shakers” that received “that first Noel”, but rather God wanted a group of “social outcasts” to be told first that a Savior had come.

You see, shepherds were considered the lowest of the low. They were poor men, hired to do a thankless job. Because they had to deal with Gentiles in the selling of sheep, they were quite often shunned by respectable Jews. Shepherds were deemed unreliable in those days. So much so, that a shepherd could not even testify in a court of law due to their low reputation of unreliability! No one, and I mean NO ONE, would have thought to call in a bunch of shepherds when a king was born! God, however, chooses **the foolish things of this world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27)**. You see, God sent a birth invitation to the “lowest of the low”, because THOSE are the kind of people that need saving! Jesus came to this world to reach sinners, like me and like you. We too, are the lowest of the lowly. Apart from His redeeming grace, we were hopelessly lost in our sins. To be saved, one must first realize that they NEED saving. This is why The Bible teaches us that **“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)**.

Last week, in our series on “finding... Him”, we looked at the journey of Mary and Joseph. I asked you this question, “How far would you go to see the face of Jesus?” Well, the shepherds didn’t have to travel very far to meet Him that night. However, they had to risk everything to meet Him. Shepherds were charged with keeping watch over their employers’ sheep. The shepherds didn’t OWN that flock, they were merely hired to watch over it. The owner was no doubt somewhere in his bed that night, fast asleep. To leave the flock unattended would mean to risk being fired, and being lowly shepherds, it wasn’t as if they had too many good employment options other than watching someone else’s flock. And who would be willing to hire them, knowing that they had once before abandoned their flocks in the middle of the night watch, when thieves and predators would be freely roaming the countryside? You see, to accept the Angel’s invitation that night was to risk losing everything in order to see the face of Jesus. With that in mind, this week I would like to ask you THIS question, “What would you be willing to leave behind to see the face of Jesus?”

The shepherds were so very convinced that this newborn king was worth any risk, that they would leave behind everything they knew, just to see His face. That, my friends, is the kind of devotion and loyalty that Christ expects from each of His followers. No one comes to Jesus, UNLESS The Father draws them (**John 6:44**). God had sent a special invitation to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem to come and see the newborn Savior of the world, but they had to decide if He was worth the risk. God called them to make a journey of faith, just as He has called us to a journey of faith as well. We too, like those lowly men in the fields near Bethlehem, must decide for ourselves if this King of Kings is truly “worth the risk” of finding. Those poor shepherds knew without a shadow of a doubt that this Baby King was worth losing everything for, because they had received a Divine INVITATION, a Divine ILLUMINATION, and A Divine IMPERATIVE. They left their flocks and made their way into the tiny town of Bethlehem. Or as they so wonderfully said, **“Let us go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that has happened, which The LORD has told us about.” (vs.15)**. God was calling them on a journey to find... HIM!

The Invitation

Sometimes, I think the because we have listened to far too many Christmas Carols, we actually get some romanticized notions about the Christmas story that have no basis in scripture. For instance, I have always pictured a bunch of half-asleep shepherds lying in an open field when suddenly, this massive angel, with huge wings, lights up the night sky above them and makes the announcement of Jesus' birth! When in fact, if you carefully read the text, the Angel actually just appeared, standing there in there midst out of nowhere. Now THAT would get your attention wouldn't it? I mean, you're out there in the middle of the night, on lookout for predators and "sheep rustlers", and all of a sudden some angel taps you in the shoulder! Now I have a small flock of sheep at my place. If that ever happened to me, while I was out in the field in the dark, then trust me, you would be reading about it in the paper in the obituary section, because I'm quite certain that I would have a heart attack! Is it any wonder the text says that the shepherds were "*megas phobeo*" in the Greek, which literally means greatly terrified?!

The Angel (who was more than likely Gabriel) actually had to calm them down before that he could speak. He assured them that he was there to bring a message of "**good news that would bring great joy**" (*vs. 10*). Somehow, I kind of doubt that those shepherds calmed down right away. I'm betting that it took a rather long moment or two, while Gabriel waited patiently for them to gather their wits! Aren't you glad that our God is patient with us? How often do we overreact to some situation, responding in fear and dread, rather than faith and trust, only to have His Holy Spirit reassure us that everything will be ok? I am reminded here of the great storm that so terrified the disciples that they woke Jesus from His sleep, only to see Him whisper "**Peace, be still.**", to the storm as it instantly obeyed His command. He turned to them and asked, "**Why were you so afraid?**" (*Mark 4:36-40*). You see, "**God knows the plans that He has for us. Plans to prosper and not harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future.**" (*Jeremiah 29:11*). The sight of His majesty should indeed always bring us to our knees in reverent fear and awe, but His great love will always lift us to our feet, with the reassurance of "good tidings". God is GOOD! And He has invited us to go on a journey with Him to find out just how good He truly is!

As we have previously stated, shepherds were considered the lowest class of humanity, and yet, here was God sending His Archangel to give these poor men the very first news of His Son's birth. No one else in all of Israel would have ever thought them worthy of an invitation. But God did. I am reminded here of another young "shepherd boy" that no one cared to invite to a King's anointing in Bethlehem. You see, David, the greatest king Israel ever had, the man after God's own heart, was once himself a lowly shepherd, watching his father's sheep out in the fields surrounding Bethlehem. When the prophet Samuel came to anoint the next king over all of Israel, no one thought to call David. He wasn't deemed "worthy" of an invitation even by his own family, but God sent for Him and had Samuel to anoint him over all his brothers. I wonder if those shepherds, on the night when Christ was born, were in the exact same field that David was in some thousand years earlier, when God sent him his "special invitation"?! Makes you think, doesn't it? Never look down on a person, because when you see someone as ordinary or undesirable, God may see a king!

For centuries, people had been awaiting the promised Messiah, this descendant of King David himself, who would come into the world. The Angel called him Savior, and that is exactly what He came to be. A Savior to the lowly and forgotten. The Bible says that when David was hiding in the caves of the wilderness running from Saul, "**all those who were in distress, or in debt, or discontented gathered around him...**" (*1 Samuel 22:2*). Now here, hundreds of years later, God was calling those same types of people to meet The "Son of David" lying in a manger in a cave/stable in Bethlehem. He was inviting them on a journey to find... Him. Is God calling you today to find Christ? What would You be willing to leave behind to see the face of Jesus. Is there something that you are clinging to that needs to be discarded so that you too can go on a journey of faith and truly find Him? Some prideful sin perhaps? Something that will only leave you discontented and in distress? Do you have a debt of sin that you cannot pay this morning? Bring it to Jesus. He has already paid for everything that you have ever done. He settled your account on the cross! Won't you come to Him and find your good tidings of great joy? The shepherds were willing to leave it all behind, just for a chance to see His face. What is holding you back this morning?

The Illumination

Luke also tells us in his narrative, that not only was The Archangel there, but that the “Glory of God” shown brightly around the shepherds in the field that night. This was also a confirmation of a divine message from God. The Glory of God, known to the Jews as The Shekinah, was the brilliant illuminating light that lit up the Holy of Holies in the ancient Temple. It was the “Pillar of Fire” that led them through the wilderness. It was the manifestation of God’s Holy presence among his people. When the children of Israel had fallen into grievous sin, Ezekiel had witnessed The Shekinah Glory depart from the Temple prior to its destruction by the Babylonians and the Jewish exile into Babylon (**Ezekiel 10**). God had forsaken His people and handed them over to the Babylonians for seventy years of punishment. But God had also promised that He would one day return to Israel to redeem her. No one in the land of Israel had seen The Shekinah since that fateful day when Ezekiel had watched it go, until the night that it came to illuminate the field where the shepherds were watching their flocks in Bethlehem. It was a symbolic gesture that proclaimed to them that the presence of God had indeed returned to the land of Israel, in the form of The God-Man Christ Jesus. The Messiah had been born! And, because of this great miracle, **those on whom God’s favor would rest (vs. 14)**, those who would believe in Him, would have The Shekinah Glory of God come and live within them, bringing them a peace that passes all understanding (**Philippians 4:7**). No longer would The Shekinah be out of reach, hidden behind the temple veil, but rather, it would indwell those who would believe in Christ, causing them to become The Temple of The Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 6:19**).

After the Archangel made his announcement, he was joined by a **“great company of angels”** who offered up loud praises to God (**vs. 13-14**). Another misconception of the Christmas story is that those angels proclaimed that Jesus came to bring **“peace on the earth”**. This is a faulty translation of the text. We need only to look around our world today to realize that there is absolutely NO peace on the earth! You see, when the host of angels appeared in that field proclaiming praise to God and The Shekinah shone all around, the angels weren’t saying that Jesus was bringing peace to this wretched earth, they proclaimed, rather, that He was bringing peace to those with whom God has found favor. And just who are those? God has found favor with those who believe in Christ, that’s who. He has given them grace and has called them to a journey of faith to find... Him! One day the whole earth will indeed have “peace” through Christ, but that day will only come when He returns to cleanse this fallen world from the filth and wickedness that is at present being given time to run its wretched course. The devil has had a field day, but it will not last forever! But for now, we (The Church), who have been called to seek the face of Jesus, will be content with the peace that He has given within this chaos that is all around us. God will make things right, but for now, we must trust Him to keep us safe in a world gone wrong.

Just as The Shekinah ILLUMINATED that field for the shepherds that night, The Holy Spirit of God illuminates the truth of God’s Word to us. When the shepherds saw the Shekinah, they knew that that this was a legitimate message from God; just as we, when we hear The Word of God “illuminated” by The Spirit, believe in it’s truth, then we are saved, by grace through faith. Our “faith” comes by hearing the message... (**Romans 10:17**), and it is The Holy Spirit that gives us the “ears to hear” it! There is no possible way that we would ever find Him, if He Himself had not illuminated the way for us. Again, **“No one comes to Christ, unless The Father draws him” (John 6:44)**. Do you believe in Jesus? Then thank God, that He sent his Spirit to “light the way for you”!

The Imperative

Did you notice that the angel didn’t ask the shepherds if they “wanted” to go and see the new born Messiah? He just announced His birth and told them where to find Him. You see, God doesn’t do “suggestions”, He gives commandments. I think that people have forgotten this fact in our world today. They think that if they don’t like a particular part of The Bible, then they can just “ignore it and it’ll go away”! God really doesn’t work like that. The Bible is clear that if we want to find salvation, then we must do it “His way”. No matter what the false teachers out there are saying, Jesus is still the only way to God. I recently read about a pastor in Oregon, who actually put that on his church’s sign out front, and he was given all kinds of grief about his so called “intolerance” for other faiths. Guess what? It doesn’t make the

statement any less true. **“There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).**

Notice that God didn't ask the shepherds if His plan for them was acceptable or not, He just commanded them to go. It wasn't a suggestion. It was an Imperative. They were obedient, and the scriptures tell us that they “hurried off to find”... Him. And when they did, they were forever changed as a result! They couldn't wait to tell everyone they met about the encounter that they had just had with The Son of God (**vs 17**). Do you know how you can tell when someone has really met Jesus? They can't stop talking about it, that's how! The Bible doesn't tell us how many others went to the stable that week because of the shepherd's testimony, but I'd say that there were more than few. You see, God expects us to tell others when we have found... Him. It's called being a “witness”. The shepherds took the command of God seriously, and as a result, not only did they find Him, but they directed others to His as well. Come to think of it, isn't that the purpose of The Church, to make disciples?

There is another aspect of this story that I really love. The angel NEVER told the shepherds the baby's name. Oh they told them a few of His titles; Messiah, Savior, and LORD, but not His name. They said, **“You will know you have found Him when you see a child dressed in rags and lying in manger” (vs. 12).** Now if this was indeed Gabriel, the Archangel, then He knew full well the Baby's name, for He is the one who had given the name to Mary. So why on earth did he not just tell the shepherds? I believe that there is a spiritual truth found in this. In the Bible, a persons “name” reveals their character and nature. God has many names throughout the scriptures: God Almighty (El Shaddai); God Most High (El Elyon); The Everlasting God (El Olam); as well as, God Provider (JHWH Jireh); and The LORD Who heals (JHWH Rapha). Jesus is also known by many names in scripture: King of Kings, Prince of Peace, Savior, Redeemer, Shepherd, and Provider. How do we discover those names for ourselves? By getting close to Him. The longer that we “walk” with Christ, the more of His “Names” we learn for ourselves. When we are broken and come to Him, He becomes our Healer and our Comforter. When we are alone and abandoned, He becomes the Friend that is closer than a brother. When we call out to him for our daily bread, He becomes our Provider. When we need Him to guide us, He becomes our Shepherd. And most importantly when we are convicted of our sin and cry out to Him for forgiveness, He is Savior and LORD.

Why did Gabriel not tell the shepherds His name? Because God wants us to discover that for ourselves, as we are drawn into this journey to find... HIM! No one else can reveal His many “Names” to you better than He can. You see, Jesus doesn't just want to be someone that you have heard about in church. He wants you to come and know Him personally; to “see” Him for yourself; to learn first hand of His many “Names”! The shepherds left everything that they held dear that night to go and find... Him. God is calling you to do the same this morning. Last week, I asked you this question: “How far would you be willing to go to see the face of Jesus?” And this week, I am asking, “What would you be willing to leave behind?” Is there anything that you have in your life that is standing between you and the **“good news that will cause great joy for YOU?” (vs. 10).** If the answer is yes, then cast it aside. Jesus is calling, He wants you to set aside all that is a hindrance to keep you from finding... Him. Leave it all behind and discover that He is worth it! Without holiness, no one will see The LORD (**Hebrews 12:14**). There is nothing in this world that can compare with knowing Jesus... by NAME.

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!