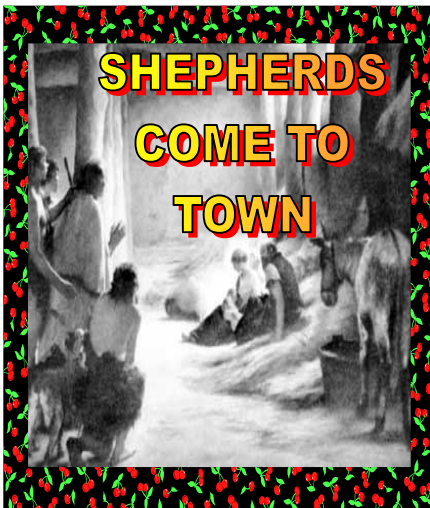


SET FREE!

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Luke 2:8-20

Luke 2:8 *Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

There were basically two main occupations in the Middle East at the time of this event. One was either a farmer or a shepherd.

The farmers didn't live on the same land that they were growing crops. In fact most people lived in villages, primarily for protection from wild animals and thieves.

The farms were located in the fertile valleys. The shepherds on the other hand moved about on the hillsides constantly looking for better vegetation and water. At the end of the day many of the shepherds would come back to a central location and bring their flocks together into a single fold. By doing so they could watch in shifts in so that that others could sleep. This provided mutual protection from the elements and the wild animals.

The events, in this narration likely took place during the early spring, as the shepherds wouldn't be out on the hills in the midst of winter.

The proximity of the fields where this took place gives speculation that the sheep being raised here were for the sacrifices in the temple in near by Jerusalem. Perhaps these were even used for the Passover.

Upon such a scene of quiet domestic duty came this most astounding outpouring of God's glory.

Verse 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.*

"The glory of the Lord." This is God's radiance. It is powerful and majestic!

In the Book of the Revelation, it tells us that the New Jerusalem will have no sun or moon, because the glory of the Lord will be bright enough to light the whole city. Is it any wonder that the shepherds were greatly afraid?

Verse 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.*

"Don't be afraid." In the King James translation the term, "fear not" is used over eighty times. It is not God's intention to ever bring us fear, only love.

"I bring you good tidings of great joy".

Such a short sentence but the implications of what was said will have us all in wonder for the rest of eternity.

What better news could mankind, lost in sin, hell bound and smothered in darkness, hear? The good news of freedom!

Forever to be set free from sin and guilt!

"which will be to all people"

The good news has come to all people! **Titus 2:11** "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" This is not something that is just for some select people, this grace is for everyone!

That includes you!

Verse 11 *For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

"born to you" That might have seem odd to these shepherds at first. After all weren't husbands and wives usually the parents? So one would say that the child was born to them. But the message was clear that Jesus was born to us!

Jesus was born to you and me.

The angel said that the baby was "Christ the Lord." The word "Christ" is the Greek term that in Hebrew means *Messiah* or in English, the

Anointed One. The One Deliverer that every Hebrew was looking forward to his coming. The Anointed One would free everyone from bondage, that's what the anointing does.

To the shepherds the anointing wasn't just some religious term it was the burden destroying freedom-granting power of God. No wonder they became excited that night. They were filled with "great joy."

The Messiah was here and the Jubilee had come!

Verse 12 "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

The word "swaddling" does not appear in the Greek. The sentence literally says: "you will find a babe having been wrapped." It was quite normal to wrap a baby with its arms at its side in cotton clothes. They must have looked a bit like mummies, because their eyelashes were also painted with dark eyeliner.

Likely Mary would have brought these along with her. Jesus wasn't wrapped in "rags" and his parents were not poor. That impression of poverty that has come down through history is not accurate.

Verse 13 "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying..."

The Amplified translation says: "an army of the troops of heaven – a heavenly knighthood."

If you've ever looked up in the sky on a clear night at the stars and seen how many there are, then just imagine this – if suddenly everyone of

those stars was an angel, and they were hovering a few feet above you. It staggers the imagination. What a sight!

Now here is what they were saying.

Verse 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

I have looked this verse up in about 10 translations. Some have said: "men in whom God is well pleased..." The only problem with that is that one could get the impression that peace is only available to the "few" men that God might select as being ones that He is well pleased with.

Others have given the idea that it's peace on earth "among men" or "between men." If we go to the Greek it reads: "on earth peace, in men, goodwill."

The angels were announcing peace between God and man.

The rebellion that had separated man and God was now about to be dealt with. The war that sin had created was now going to be settled once and for all. The Prince of Peace was now in the earth, and a man could now come to God and receive right standing with Him. The means to have us set free from sin forever was now here! The Messiah, the Christ was born!

Verses 15-16 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

These shepherds would be considered unlikely missionaries in our time. Today you have to have a Masters degree and several years of training before anyone will send you out to another country to spread the gospel. But God chose these fellows!

Shepherds in that society were generally a rough bunch. Very unsophisticated and not the sort of person you would invite over for a dinner party. The city folk have accused them of being thieves and low life. As a result they kept pretty much to themselves and didn't mix with the town folks very much.

The sudden revelation that the Messiah was now here, the One that would set us all free, was enough to cause them to forget about all social boundaries. They were even willing to leave their valuable sheep behind and run with "haste" to town.

Can you just imagine this bewildered bunch of smelly, shabbily dressed, unshaven, shepherders wondering into town in the late hours of the night?

How do you think you would have felt if you were Mary and Joseph that night? They would have had a most exhausting day.

They had arrived after having traveled for some 120 miles over mountainous roads, most of which is up hill from Nazareth. The trip was no short jaunt. They most likely walked the whole way. It's only legend about the donkey. It was a dangerous, tiring trek with a lot of sweat, discomfort, dirty clothes and matted hair. No air-conditioned motels with hot tubs along the way.

Here is Mary about to give birth and they came to the family home only to find that their relatives had taken up every room. Now here they are in the lower part of the house with the cattle.

In the midst of all of this the baby is born!

If that wasn't enough, in wanders this wild bunch of glassy eyed shepherds. What a scene! Next thing Mary and Joseph knew the shepherds were bowing down and worshipping the baby.

Verses 17-20 *Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.*

These fellows were not known for their social graces and they went thundering through the village telling everyone what they had heard and seen.

This news was such good news that the shepherds couldn't keep it quiet. They "*made widely known*" what the angels had told them. They were so fired up that they went all the way back to the fields "*glorifying and praising God*".

Isn't it something that God choose the people that their society looked down on the most to have the highest honour of being the first people on earth to spread the news of the Gospel?

I'm sure those shepherds were never the same again!

Once we have heard that "good news", those "*tidings of great joy*" we are never the same again. We become new creations in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (New American Standard)
17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

The Messiah, the Christ has come! We are now made new! This is the "glad tidings of great joy."

It's the Year of Jubilee and we are set free!

Goodbye To Humbug!

There is a movie that we all watch at this time each year in fact it's almost a ritual at our house. The movie is that classic "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. Now it can't be just any old version of that movie, it has to be that scary black and white one starring Alistair Sims and a cast of wonderful character actors.

We all know the story and yet we watch it over and over again. Have you ever wondered why? Is it the characters, the amazing plot, the superb writing of Dickens, or the redemption message that causes us to see even the worst of men become a good man?

It could be all of those reasons and more.

We remember the term "humbug" because probably we remember Mr. Scrooge more for the nasty man he was than for the atoned man we are told he became.

People like to remember the worst about someone than they do the good. Sad.

The amazing plot takes Mr. Scrooge and riddles him with guilt for his past, shows him a dyer present and a terrifying future. All of this causes him to improve his attitude and behaviour.

The narrator then ends the film by saying: "Scrooge was better than his word. He became as good a friend and as good as a master and as good a man as the good old city or any other town or burrow the good old world ever knew."

His behaviour and attitude changed because of the frightful night. That is not the way of Jesus. Jesus came with love to cleanse us of our past, present and future. He didn't come to frightening us into changing. The babe of Bethlehem came to make us new people, new creations "in Christ Jesus" not just good friends, masters or men. When we become "new creations" our attitude and behaviour will change. Goodbye to humbug!

Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol is a good story, but it isn't the salvation story. The real Christmas Carol is: "for unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord", "peace on earth good will toward man" and "joy to the world the Lord is come."

Because of that Carol of God's love we can say hello to Jesus and goodbye to humbug!

SET FREE
Is a complimentary ministry,
prepared for you, by
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