

Always Christmas:
Always Proclaim
Luke 2:8-20

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December 11, 2016

Introduction to Christmas: Always Christmas! That's the theme we want to take you through this Christmas season. Last week our theme was "Always prepare." We noted how Simeon and Anna's expectation for the coming of Messiah the first time parallels our preparing for the second coming of Christ. Today, we find our parallel in the scene of the shepherds out in the field. They teach us to "Always Proclaim."

Text: In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹Today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. ¹²This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a feeding trough."

¹³Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

¹⁴Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people He favors!

¹⁵When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

¹⁶They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the feeding trough. ¹⁷After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, just as they had been told.

Introduction: Perhaps your opinion of the shepherds is like that of the little boy who asked his pastor, "Why is it that the shepherds never get any of the good speaking parts in the Christmas play?"

But the Shepherds play an important role on that night that Jesus was born. In fact, what I want you to think about with me this morning is how the Shepherds serve as an example to us regarding proclaiming the Christmas story. And not just the story, understand, but the reason for the story—the reason for the birth of Jesus.

There are two important principles that we can learn from the shepherds.

The message proclaimed about the Savior is to all.

Who is the all?

The message of Christmas is a message for all people. Perhaps this is the reason that the angels first came to the shepherds. I don't know what to make of these shepherds. We don't know much about them. Opinions of shepherds in the first century world are rather mixed. We do know that shepherds were nomadic people. They travelled about. We do know that as a whole they had a reputation for being thieves. We have other historical information that indicates that they could not participate in any of the ceremonial tasks of the Jewish religion because of the uncleanness of their occupation. We have at least one historical reference (in the Talmud) to shepherds not being allowed to give testimony in the courts because they could not be trusted.

On the positive side, Jesus is called the Good Shepherd. It was a necessary profession.

Regardless, what we can say is being a shepherd was a rather humbling profession. And what we know with certainty is that this particular group of shepherds was the specific group whom God chose to deliver a special message. Could it be that this group of shepherds represent the "all" of the Gospel?

Jews in Jesus' day would have thought that Messiah was only for them. Jesus came announcing that His salvation was for all who would believe regardless of race or nationality.

The "all" represents those who have committed any sin. Jesus told a great parable to emphasize this point. The parable of the Prodigal Son communicates with passion that no matter what you have done and no matter how far away from the father you have roamed, you can still come home.

Know too, that it is never too late to believe. In Matthew 20, we read about the Parable of the Vineyard workers. A vineyard owner went to hire daily workers. He hired some at 9, some at noon, some at 3, and some at 5. When the end of the day came, all got paid the same. "Deathbed converts and lifelong saints enter heaven by the same gate." (Max Lucado, 3:16—*The Numbers of Hope*, 70.)

What is the message?

The message of Christmas is a message that all people need. Just think about these words: peace and joy. Think about this personal promise: "God with us." Who doesn't need this? Think about the words that Isaiah the Prophet spoke: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal (or Everlasting) Father, and Prince of Peace. All of this is the message of Christmas.

In sum, the message of Christmas is life-changing.

But more importantly, the message of Christmas is eternity changing.

Joy is good. Peace is good. But true joy and peace can only be realized when eternity in Heaven is set. This is the real meaning of His coming.

What did He come to do? We have specific evidence in Scripture.

- (1) In John, Jesus came to testify to the truth.
- (2) In Mark, Jesus came to give His life as a ransom for many.

- (3) In 1 Timothy, Jesus came to save sinners.
- (4) In 1 John, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

This message is for all, so this message should be proclaimed to all. That leads us to the second principle.

The mandate from the Savior to proclaim Him is for all.

The shepherds give us an example of proclaiming Jesus. Now, understand, they were not specifically told to go and proclaim what they heard from the Angels. They were just told what they would find. But, I think it is important to note that they felt the urgency to proclaim.

The shepherds proclaimed Him in the spirit of 1 John 1.

- 1 John 1.

What was from the beginning,
what we have heard,
what we have seen with our eyes,
what we have observed
and have touched with our hands,
concerning the Word of life—
² that life was revealed,
and we have seen it
and we testify and declare to you
the eternal life that was with the Father
and was revealed to us—
³ what we have seen and heard
we also declare to you,
so that you may have fellowship along with us;
and indeed our fellowship is with the Father
and with His Son Jesus Christ.
⁴ We are writing these things
so that our joy may be complete.

So, the shepherds sensed the need to proclaim Jesus. But, later we get the mandate to proclaim Him. From the beginning to the end of Jesus' ministry, He is declaring that His disciples proclaim Him.

- Matthew 4:19, "Follow Me," He told them, "and I will make you fish for people."
- Matthew 28:18-20, "Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

We call this the Great Commission, but we could also call it the "All Commission." All disciples are called. All authority is given to Jesus. We are to go to all people. New disciples of Jesus are to be taught all things. And we are to remember Jesus is going to be with us to do this all the time

I think that one of the reasons most often used for not proclaiming Him is that we might not know enough. Well, first of all, that is an ongoing reason to continue to study God's Word so that we might be more equipped to give a defense for the hope that is within us. But, someone could always ask us a question that we can't answer. So, the next time you feel that way, I want you to think about these shepherds. What did they know? They knew what they had seen with their eyes, what they had observed, what had been revealed to them. They could not pass a first grade Sunday School class, but they had a testimony. If the shepherds can proclaim Him, so can you!

"They didn't get any good speaking parts," the little boy said. Oh, no, they got the best speaking part. They got to proclaim the message of the angel.

So What?

This passage today helps us to reiterate our theme as a church.

Know Him and Make Him Known!

Who do you know that most needs the message of Christmas?

Go, Tell It On The Mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, Tell It On The Mountain
That Jesus Christ is born.

—"It is impossible not to speak when we have the words of eternal life." Lottie Moon