

# Christmas Day 2005

12-25-05

## “The Christmas Gospel!”

### 1. Intro:

- 1.1. It’s been an **interesting** Christmas season this year in our world.
  - 1.1.1. With upside down Christmas trees; A Nativity w/o the Holy Family; Stores which won’t let employees say, “**Merry Christmas**”.
  - 1.1.2. To avoid offending anybody, the school dropped religion altogether and started singing about the **weather**. At my son’s school, they now hold the **winter program** in February and sing increasingly non-memorable songs such as “Winter Wonderland,” “Frosty the Snowman” and “Suzy Snowflake,” all of which is pretty funny because we live in **Miami**. A visitor from another planet would assume that the children belonged to the **Church of Meteorology**.
  - 1.1.3. But I always ask, “Why are we surprised when darkness is dark?”
- 1.2. I remember a teacher when I was small telling us to “put on your thinking caps”!
  - 1.2.1. This morning can we put on our “wonder & mystery caps”?
  - 1.2.2. **Q:** Has the Christmas story become “**same ol, same ol**” to your ears?
  - 1.2.3. Allow yourself to be enraptured again in holy awe & wonder!
- 1.3. **Prayer:** Hear the glad tidings of the Christmas message.
  - 1.3.1. And **Hear** it clearly. **Feel** it sensitively. And **Ponder** it deeply.
- 1.4. Scientist *J. Robert Oppenheimer* said, “The best way to send an **idea** is to wrap it up in a **person!**”
  - 1.4.1. And so we have “**The Christmas Gospel!**”
- 1.5. So we have **Royalty** clothed in **rags**;  
**Majesty** emerging in the midst of the **mundane**;  
**Eternity** stepping into **time**;  
**And** the **most prominent event** of all human history being noticed by no one but...**a handful of outcasts**.
- 1.6. **Q:** Who do you think were...
  - 1.6.1. **The 1<sup>st</sup> Hearers** of the Christmas Gospel!
  - 1.6.2. **The 1<sup>st</sup> Believers** of the Christmas Gospel!
  - 1.6.3. **The 1<sup>st</sup> Preachers** of the Christmas Gospel!
  - 1.6.4. **The *Shepherds!!!***

## 2. HEAVEN TOUCHES EARTH! (8-20)

- 2.1. **THE 1<sup>ST</sup> HEARERS OF THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL!** (8-14)
- 2.2. **The Shepherds Reputation!** (8)
- 2.2.1. **Bible Almanac** – “Shepherds were **distrusted** in Jesus’ day, as being a wild bunch.”
- 2.2.2. **James Boice** – “This **rural nomadic** folk were a **despised class** in the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. Also, they were considered **unreliable** & therefore were **not even allowed to give testimony** in the law courts.”
- 2.2.3. **The Egyptians** – “Every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.” (Gen.46:34) [Joseph wouldn’t even eat w/his brothers]
- 2.2.4. **Others** described them as, “a **meditative** class of men, accustomed to the **sweet silence** of nature, apart from the bustle & stir of cities, invited to quiet communion w/their own hearts.”<sup>1</sup>
- 2.3. Shepherds were the 1<sup>st</sup> profession mentioned in the bible, “**Abel was a keeper of sheep.**” (Gen.4:2)
- 2.3.1. Interesting this 1<sup>st</sup> shepherd was the 1<sup>st</sup> **blood sacrifice!**
- 2.4. Christ, later called the Good Shepherd, who leaves the 99 to find the 1
- 2.4.1. **Here**, we have **these shepherds** leaving their sheep to locate this **One Lamb!** (i.e. of God)
- 2.4.2. **Q:** Is there any other profession that would be more excited about a **Lamb** being born?
- 2.5. And so, the 1<sup>st</sup> *Tidings of Great Joy* was brought to “**Shaggy Shepherds!**”
- 2.6. **The Shepherds Reverence!** (9)
- 2.6.1. It was a momentary fear!
- 2.6.2. They were gravely aware of the great gulf between **God & man**.
- 2.7. **Signs** indicate divine intervention into history.
- 2.7.1. But **none is more dramatic** than the angels’ announcement to the shepherds of Jesus’ birth.
- 2.8. **The Shepherds Real Good News!** (10-12)
- 2.9. (10) Long before **PBS**(*Public Broadcasting Services*) we have the 1<sup>st</sup> **Public announcement** of the good news of Jesus’ birth.
- 2.9.1. And it’s keynote? - **JOY!**
- 2.10. **To ALL people** – even shepherds!!!
- 2.10.1. There’s good news for **all** of us this morning!

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<sup>1</sup> Pulpit Commentary

- 2.11. (11) Triple Titles:
- 2.11.1. **Savior** – he will **save** people from their sins.
  - 2.11.2. **Christ** – the **anointed 1** to rule as king (fulfilling God’s promise to David).
  - 2.11.3. **Lord** – speaks of the **divine nature** of the One who was born.
    - 2.11.3.1. *“I think **Savior** is the brightest jewel in the crown, of our Christmas message!”*
  - 2.11.4. **So**, He is our **Healing One**, our **Forgiving One**, our **Saving One!**
- 2.12. (12) **You will find a babe** – **Not**, *“wait till you meet Mary or Joseph, or see the cute little barn animals.”*
- 2.12.1. The focus is on **the babe**...& Him only!
  - 2.12.2. Martin Luther - The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He **sunk Himself** into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.
    - 2.12.2.1. He called the **Incarnation** - *“en-flesh-ment”*
- 2.13. God is willing to make any **accommodations** to have fellowship with us. *Like, becoming human.*
- 2.13.1. **Illustration:** A hospital patient was in an accident and is left with **the sense of smell only**. Her mother wanted to communicate her presence, so used **a perfume** the girl would remember as her **mom’s**. Now the perfume is not the mother’s essential nature, but is an extension of her real self to communicate on the girl’s level.
    - 2.13.1.1. God also is not essentially a body, but he became human. He extended Himself to communicate on our level so we could respond.
- 2.14. **The Shepherds Revelation of Peace!** (13,14)
- 2.15. (13) And the sky became **their church!**
- 2.15.1. This must have been just spectacular!
  - 2.15.2. **Q:** How many do you picture? Saying it or Singing it? What did they look like? What did it sound like? Was it a million part harmony? *How many angels could fit on the tip of a pin?* (just kidding)
  - 2.15.3. This just had to have been “stunning, impressive, extravagant, brilliant, & dramatic.”
- 2.16. (14) Here we have the Latin *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (Glory in the Highest, God)
- 2.16.1. **Glory** – The Shekinah, absent for years!
- 2.17. **On earth Peace**...for whom?
- 2.17.1. **Christmas does not bring peace to all.**
  - 2.17.2. (NIV) *“on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests”*.
  - 2.17.3. \* The **key** that unlocks the **treasure chest** of **God’s peace** is *“faith in the promises of God.”*
    - 2.17.3.1. Rom.15:13 (ESV) *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”* (read again!)

- 2.18. **THE 1<sup>ST</sup> BELIEVERS OF THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL!** (15,16)
- 2.19. **The Shepherds Receive!** (15,16)
- 2.20. **Let us now go!** – how simple a faith!
- 2.20.1. Phillips Brooks notes, The **Angels** leave, & the **Shepherds** seem to just stand there looking at each other.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.20.2. They **don't** sing a song like Mary. They **don't** need a star. They **don't** go & try to find Herod. They **don't** go shopping for gifts. They just say to each other "**let us now go!**"
- 2.20.3. **They do go, & they do find** – Finding Jesus is that easy! 😊
- 2.21. (16) **They came with haste & found** them –
- 2.21.1. Isn't it funny that the **wise men** were directed by God, **but then got lost**, & had to **stop & ask for directions** in Jerusalem (Mt.2:1,2)
- 2.21.2. **But, the Shepherds never lost their way!!!**
- 2.21.2.1. It often happens while **shepherds** find Christ, **wise men** often miss him!<sup>3</sup>
- 2.21.3. So, **Faith** led their steps to Bethlehem, to the stable, to the manger!
- 2.22. **THE 1<sup>ST</sup> PREACHERS OF THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL!** (17-20)
- 2.23. **The Shepherds Recounted!** (17,18)
- 2.24. (17,18) The Shepherds weren't only the 1<sup>st</sup> to **hear**, but the 1<sup>st</sup> to **tell!**
- 2.24.1. I guess they were told to... "**Go, tell it on the mountain - over the hills & well, everywhere!** – Go, tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is Born!"
- 2.24.2. Acts 4:20 "**we cannot but speak the things which we have seen & heard!**"
- 2.25. (19) We learn a lot from what **Mary** did on the 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas:
- 2.25.1. She engaged her **Memory** – she, **kept all these things.**
- 2.25.2. She engaged her **Intellect** – she, **pondered them.**
- 2.25.3. She engaged her **Affections** – she, **pondered them in her heart.**
- 2.25.4. And we would do well in doing the same this Christmas!
- 2.26. **The Shepherds Rejoiced!** (20)
- 2.27. Reverent Worship! – **Glorifying & Praising** (They weren't schooled in this!)
- 2.28. (20) **for all they heard & seen** –
- 2.28.1. A little girl once remarked, "**some people couldn't hear God's **inside whisper**, & so He sent Jesus to tell them **out loud!**"**
- 2.28.2. Well, these guys sure heard it & even saw it!
- 2.29. **The Shepherds Returned!** (20)
- 2.30. They returned to daily life – ***The glory of the common place!***

<sup>2</sup> Phillips Brooks; wrote "Oh Little Town of Beth." 3 yrs after visiting it in 1864.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Spurgeon At His Best #1810.

- 2.30.1. Q: What was it like going to back to work after that?
- 2.30.2. Q: I wonder if any shepherds quit the week before, because they were **bored** with their career?
- 2.30.3. Q: Did they learn that heaven is always near the **dutiful**?
- 2.30.4. Q: What was it like going to back to work? (But don't miss it, that's where God met them...at work! *"keeping watch over their flock at night!"*)
- 2.30.5. **Poem:** He was a humble workman, w/the tools w/which he wrought,  
And he built a common stable, or so it was he thought!  
And he fashioned there a manger, Where the cattle could be fed,  
Never thinking that the Savior, Would pillow there His head.  
He had only built a stable, With a manger in the stall,  
Yet it cradled there the Christ-child, Who is King & Lord of all!  
So although our task be **humble**, Let us **work** each day **w/care**;  
For we may not know **God's purpose**, Or **why** He places us there.  
For the manger that formed the cradle, Of our Lord & Savior here,  
was built by a humble workman, in Bethlehem of Judea(r)(Henry B Knox)
- 2.30.6. **Read** – The Work of Christmas. [Topic: Christ; Subtopic: Incarnation of Index: 720]
- 2.31. Q: Are we like the shepherds, who **Heard**, **Believed**, & **Preached** the Christmas Gospel? [Or, which stage are you in?]
- 2.32. In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "**flying machine**" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "**We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas.**" Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas!" **He totally missed the big news—man had flown!** Don't miss the Big News!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Our Daily Bread, 12–23-91