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 **1st Hearers** of the Christmas Gospel!
   1.6.2. The **1st Believers** of the Christmas Gospel!
   1.6.3. The **1st Preachers** of the Christmas Gospel!
   1.6.4. The **Shepherds**!!!
2. HEAVEN TOUCHES EARTH! (8-20)

2.1. THE 1ST 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 1st 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.”

2.3. Shepherds were the 1st profession mentioned in the bible, “Abel was a keeper of sheep.” (Gen.4:2)

2.3.1. Interesting this 1st shepherd was the 1st 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 1st 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 1st 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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1 Pulpit Commentary
2.11. **(11) Triple Titles:**

2.11.1. **Savior** – he will **save** people from their sins.

2.11.2. **Christ** – the **anointed** 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 1ST 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.*

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!

2.21.3. So, *Faith* led their steps to **Bethlehem**, to the **stable**, to the **manger**!

2.22. **THE 1ST PREACHERS OF THE CHRISTMAS GOSPEL!** (17-20)

2.23. The Shepherds Recounted! (17,18)

2.24. (17,18) The Shepherds weren’t only the *1st to hear*, but the *1st 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 *1st* 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*!

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2 Phillips Brooks; wrote “Oh Little Town of Beth.” 3 yrs after visiting it in 1864.

3 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)


2.31. 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!*

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* Our Daily Bread, 12–23-91