

GraceCity Advent Study

Good News, Great Joy, All People



Week #4

December 16-December 22, 2019

“The Shepherds” (Luke 2:1-20)

Jewish religious leaders and scholars had been studying the Holy Scriptures for centuries about how the Messiah would eventually come to earth. Yet those were not the people who were given the honor to first hear the good news of Jesus’ birth. In this week’s passage, Luke brings us inside the miracle of the incarnation, the human and divine Jesus, and all the unlikely people present for His birth. We are invited into the first announcement of Christ’s birth - and quite an announcement it was!

Preparation:

How do you react to good news? What do you do when you get excited about something? Does Christmas still have the power to move us?

Read: Luke 2:1-20

Notes/Definitions:

Caesar Augustus – Known also as Octavian, he was the ruler of the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus’s birth. Installed Herod the Great as king in Judea. He ruled from 31 BC to 14 AD.

From Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea – A distance of about 80 miles

Census – The census established control for taxes and conscription.

Shepherds – Likely social outcasts, certainly of low economic situation in society. To do their job, they needed to be strong, devoted and selfless. King David was also a shepherd (1 Kings 16:19), and Jesus is called the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 1 Peter 2:25).

Messiah – Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word Christos, meaning “anointed.” It’s the official title of the central figure of expectation in the Old Testament.

Heavenly host – This is a LOT of angels. An army of heavenly host was first mentioned in 1 Kings 22:19 to give authority to a message delivered. Heavenly host was part of God’s court and on either side of His throne.

Incarnation – Jesus Christ, God’s Son and Holy Divine, took on human form.

Questions:

1. Summarize the passage. What happened? What was surprising, terrifying, unlikely? Who was involved? What title would you give vv. 8-20?
2. Why do you think the angels appeared to shepherds? What qualified them to be the receivers of this important message?
3. What is the essence of the angel’s message? How is it both personal to the shepherds and open to all people?
4. What is your definition of peace? What/who do we look to for peace (or the solutions to problems, big or small)? Where do we find peace?

This study has been developed for personal reflection and group discussion. To participate in the conversation, join a GraceCity small group. For more information on times and locations, email smallgroups@gracecitybaltimore.org.

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5. The angels' message refers to good news (v.10), a Savior (v.11), and peace (v.14). The shepherds would recognize these words as promises hailed on the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus; now they are being applied to Jesus. Why would the angels' have used this type of language? How is this a challenge to their worldview? How is this a challenge to our worldview?

Caesar Augustus, the brutal emperor at that time, used propaganda to maintain power and control, and those words in v. 10, 11, and 14 were used to (falsely) describe Him. The use of the same language for both an emperor who secluded himself to a large palace and only important people and a baby born in a manger surrounded by a lowly class would not have been missed by shepherds.

6. Does the Incarnation represent "Good News of Great Joy" to you? Why or why not?
7. How does Jesus' coming affect the shepherds' lives both in the immediate and into the future?
8. What do the shepherds teach us about our priorities?
9. *Good News, Great Joy, All People* – Jesus' birth was surrounded by so many people, both likely and less-likely to have that honor. Why is Jesus' birth good news to all people? How might some not receive Jesus' birth as good news? How do we sometimes restrict this good news?

Closing Prayer:

Praise God for coming down to us. Praise God for the Good News that brings Great Joy for All People here in this Advent season. Reflect on what this means to you. Ask God to reveal where we place our hope and move towards Him. Pray to experience the joy of Jesus' birth anew.