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Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – December 26, 2020

The Lord be with you.

Merry Christmas everyone! I'm guessing that the gifts have probably all been opened by now, that there's nothing left under the tree, and most of the turkey or ham is gone and well, I just hope you had a medical Christmas celebration of our savior's birth. And I know that on day after Christmas, that some people do talk about the post-Christmas, let down the post-Christmas Blues, but you know what happens the day after Christmas is perhaps more important than anything that happened on the days before Christmas as The Gospel of Luke tells us what Mary, the mother of Jesus, what she did after Christmas. That on top of changing diapers and everything else that goes into caring for a newborn, it tells us that Mary quote that she treasured all these words the shepherds told and pondered them in her heart. And so let's you and me, let's take some time on this day after to also to treasure and to ponder the words of the shepherds.

Now, it seems for me that the more familiar I am with a Bible story like Christmas, that the more difficult it can be for me to see it with fresh eyes, so let's see if we can't climb back over 2000 years to see the Shepherds with new eyes. Now, I'm talking about shepherds. I have a friend who was raised on a sheep farm in Colorado, and my friend tells me that when he was in high school, that all the other kids at school that they didn't wanna be around him, and that was because carry8ing for sheep is dirty, smelly business. And that helps me as I think about the story of the shepherds at that first Christmas, and that people in first century Judea... Well, they didn't wanna be around shepherds either. So let's forget, let's forget how we often see shepherds portrayed in our church pageants, because the reality is it shepherds were despised by other people, shepherds who are at the lowest end of the social scale, they were at the lowest end of life's pecking order, so that according to Jewish law of the day, shepherds were not allowed to enter a synagogue, to enter the temple, to offer sacrifices. As it was a culture that was fanatical about keeping a boundary between that which was clean and unclean, that which was morally, ceremonially clean and unclean, and so shepherds were looked down on by everyone else as unclean.

In fact, shepherds were so despised that the testimony of a shepherd was not allowed in a court of law. In fact, people even warned, never buy anything from a shepherd because you would just have to assume that it had been stolen, and so shepherds, they were technically identified in this class, it was called sinners. They were a part of that class of people that, well, good people were to avoid... And I think all of this figures into why on the day after Christmas, the Mary, she is treasuring, and she is pondering what the shepherds have told her. That on that night of Christmas, the shepherds, when they were out in open fields, keeping watch over their sheep and it says that the glory of the Lord shown round about the shepherds. It has been literally hundreds of years since the glory of the Lord has appeared on earth, and now the glory of the Lord appears to shepherds. I mean, not to the high priest of the temple, not to King Herod or Emperor Caesar, but to despised outcast shepherds. And the angel tells the shepherds, he says, don't be afraid. And the angel even invites them, invites



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them to visit the newborn king of Kings, saying, this will be a sign for you. You will find the Messiah wrapped in bands of cloth lying in a manger that is a feeding trough for animals. So that was a sign that they were to look for, they would identify the King of Kings, the lord of lords, they would not find him in a palace or a mansion, but they would find the Messiah king lying in a manger and that he would be wrapped. The text says that He would be wrapped in bands of cloth. And Bible scholars tell us that poor peasants of that day, poor peasants like shepherds, that they wept their new born in bands of cloth. And so the angel invites shepherds. Invites them to go and visit the Christ child. Don't be afraid. Shepherds who could not enter the temple, who could not enter a synagogue, they are welcomed at the birth of the Son of God. As God's Son comes for the lowly, the rejected, the poor, the outcast. Yes, he also comes from the rich and who will later appear in the story, bringing gold and frankincense and myrrh. But the shepherds, outcasts are welcome at the manger, they are the unclean whom God looks at as clean, they are the outcast that God welcomes as his guests. And these Shepherds actually become the first preachers of the good news of Christmas, as it says, that they made known what they had been told about this child, that is they told others, and then the text says that the shepherds returned...

Well, that means that they went back to work, I mean, what you and I are gonna be doing now that Christmas is over, the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, as it had been told them. The despised, the unclean, the outcast, they were welcomed by the Son of God. As you and I are welcomed today by Christ, just as we are.

And so, on this day after Christmas, won't you hear the words of angel, Do not be afraid. For see I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. For to you is born... Yes, to you. Poor and lowly and outcast. To you was born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord. And you know that really is something for us on this day after to treasure and to ponder and to praise and glorify God for including you and me.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thanks for listening until next time.



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