



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – December 25, 2021

The Lord be with you.

Merry Christmas!

I hope you're having a joyful, blessed day. Celebrating the good news that is Christmas.

Did you ever wonder what Mary did on Christmas Day?

Well, the Gospel of Luke leaves unsaid that she was changing diapers nursing the baby, but the Gospel of Luke does say that Mary treasured all the words of the shepherds about the angels and their glad tidings, that Mary treasured and pondered them in her heart. And I think that would be a good thing for us to do in the midst of a lot of activity. To take a few moments to ponder and to treasure the glad tidings of great joy proclaim to the shepherds by the angels. Now, it seems for me that the more familiar I am with a Bible story like Christmas, but the more difficult it can be for me to see it with fresh... So let's see if we can't climb back over 2000 years to see the Shepherds with new eyes.

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 did not want to be around him, and that was because caring for sheep is dirty, smelly business. And that can help us, I think, to understand the story of the shepherds at that first Christmas, that people in first century Judea, they did not want to be around shepherds either.

So let's forget about how we often see shepherds portrayed in our church pageants, because the reality is that shepherds were despised, they were looked down on, shepherds were at the lowest rung of the social scale, they were at the lowest end of life's pecking orders, such that according to Jewish law of that 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, keeping a boundary between that which was morally ceremonially unclean and that which was clean. And so shepherds, well, they were looked down on by everyone else as unclean, in fact, shepherds were so despised in that day that the testimony of a shepherd would not be allowed in a court of law. I mean, people even warn, never buy anything from a shepherd because you would just have to assume that it had been stolen, and so shepherds were technically identified with a social class of that day that was called Sinners. They were a part of that class of people that your mother would have warned you to avoid and think that all of this figures into why at Christmas Mary is treasuring and she is pondering the shepherds, and what the shepherds had



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told her.

That the shepherds that night had been out in open fields, keeping watch over their sheep, and it says that the glory of the Lord shown round about the shepherds. Keep in mind that it has been literally hundreds of years since the glory of the Lord has appeared on earth, and now the glory of the Lord makes its first appearance to shepherds, not to the high priest of the temple, not to King Herod or impress, but to despise outcast, shepherds, the glory of God is revealed. And the angel that appears with that glory, the angel tells his shepherds, he says, don't be afraid, don't be afraid, and the angel even invites the shepherds, invites them to visit the newborn king of kings, saying that this will be assigned for them that they will find the Christ wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manger that is a feeding trough for animals.

So that was to be assigned to the shepherds. It's what they were to look for. That they could 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 Christ the King lying and feeding trough, and that he would be wrapped... The text says that He would be wrapped in bands of cloth, and Bible scholars tell us the poor peasants of that day, poor peasants like the shepherds, they kept their newborn babies in bands of cloth, and so we see the angel advice, shepherds invites them to go and visit the Christ child. He says, Don't be afraid. I mean, shepherds who could not enter the temple, who could not enter a synagogue, that 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, and yes, he also comes for the rich. Who would later appear in the story, the wise men from the East bringing gold and frankincense and myrrh. But it's the shepherds. Outcast, so were the first ones invited and welcomed at the manger, they are the unclean when God looks at as clean, they are the outcast who God welcomes as his guest, and these Shepherds actually become the first preachers of the good news, as it says, that they may know what they had been told about this child, that is, he told others, and in the text says that the shepherds returned, it means they went back to work as you and I will soon be going back to work, and the shepherds returned to work, glorifying and praising God, for all that they had seen and heard, as it had been told to them.

That the despise, the unclean, the outcast, they are welcomed by the son of God, and you and I are welcomed today by Christ. Whatever is passed... Whatever we have done, Jesus says, Don't be afraid. Come to me. And so on this Christmas day, hear the words of the angel do not be afraid for see, I'm bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. For to you is born... Yes, to you. Poor, lonely, outcast. To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And you know that is something for us today to treasure and to ponder and to praise and glorify God for including you and me, and so that's why I say today, Merry Christmas! Rejoice, celebrate.

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