

The Christmas Shepherds

The shepherds have much to teach us about how we can find Jesus as Savior and God. The Christmas shepherds, as we can call them because of their intersection with Jesus, went from the complete obscurity to front page headlines, simply because they heard about, and then met Jesus the baby at the manger of Bethlehem.

There are many things they can teach us as we travel to the manger today. Between now and Christmas, let's walk in the footprints of the shepherds who kept watch over the flocks at night.

First, they were terrified. Don't know how many times this has happened to you, but "terrified" is a great place to hear from God. Especially terrified when God speaks to us in a once in a lifetime way via angels.

The next time you are terrified, frightened, or just don't know how to respond to a message from God, remember that this moment could be the best one you have ever had. They listened, obeyed, and met Jesus personally. Probably the first ones other than his parents to receive that honor. And they were changed. God gave them a message that the world needed to hear. They had met the savior and people could see the difference. From outsiders who heard about Jesus to people who know Jesus is a big change for them, and can be for us.

Second, they listened. How many times has God spoken to you, and you either did not hear what he said, or didn't listen to what you heard. From the kings of Israel of the Old Testament to the Jewish leadership of first century Palestine, there was no listening to God. They missed the birth of Jesus. They did not hear the good news of great joy. They did not listen, so they could not respond to God's divine initiative.

This Christmas, we must listen to the message of the angels. We must pause from our important work to see Jesus. We must set our family issues, our worries, our concerns about self preservation aside, and listen to the most important message ever delivered.

Jesus is born. Your savior is here.

Third, they followed up. I'm sure they left a few guys in charge of the flock, but the main group left the sheep in the middle of the night and went to see Jesus. The scriptures don't say much about how the encounter at the stable. We don't know if they knelt, if they talked to Mary and Joseph. We don't know what they said, if anything. What we do know is that they knew something big had happened.

That follow-up for us is just as important. If we are prompted by God, if there is a message that makes us seek Jesus, we must do nothing less than respond. We pray. We seek. We go to church, where Jesus is celebrated, served, and adored.

Particularly at Christmas, we can hear messages from God that are amplified more than much of the rest of the year. There is magic in the air. Do the animals kneel on Christmas eve? We don't know, but it is possible. It is a night of celebration, a night of new birth, a night when we must do nothing else than worship the newborn king. We know it whether we do it or not. And if we come to the manger at Christmas, God will bless that response.

Finally, they spread the word. They simply told other people about the savior Jesus. A greater Christmas present never given! God's Christmas gift of salvation for all who trust in Jesus as savior.

The second greatest gift is to give the greatest gift. To follow the lead of the Christmas shepherds as they left that place and told everyone they met about Jesus. That's one of the biggest thing God asks for us at Christmas. Not just to celebrate Jesus' birth, but to tell others about him.

And, you never know, people can be amazed as what we say. Amazement is so needed in today's world. The amazement at what God can do. The amazement at what God has done. The amazement about Christmas. The amazement which lifts us from everyday activity to partnership with God in divine action.

Perhaps part of the amazement was that these shepherds, who smelled funny and looked different and always kept to themselves, were now going around and telling people that Jesus the savior was born. Much we have to learn from this.

Let us be so changed by the fact that we have met Jesus that people are amazed by just that.

And the amazement about the message of the angels and the confirmation at the manger simply rises from God's people.