



Week 3

Tell of His Coming: The Shepherds and Angels

-Personal Study-

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

LUKE 2:8-20

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

ROMANS 10:14-15

Who is the first person you tell when you hear or experience something good?





Tell of His Coming

We love hearing good news, especially when we're the first to know. There's a big difference between getting a phone call from your best friend about their pregnancy, engagement or new job and finding out about it on Facebook. We cherish being invited to participate in the lives of the people we love instead of simply being spectators.

Today, the ability to share exciting news with others is quick and easy. With one tweet, post, hashtag or group text, we can communicate with the masses. But things were obviously very different in the time Jesus was born. When something important happened, such as the birth of a child, heralds often spread that news. Families welcoming new babies, if they had the means to do so, would hire someone to go throughout the community and announce their happy news.

Mary and Joseph, of humble means, did not have the ability to do this. But God Himself provided a company of heavenly heralds to proclaim the birth of His one and only Son.

Imagine the scene: shepherds on the midnight watch, ears and eyes open for signs of danger, sheep bleating in the background. And then, out of nowhere, an angel of the Lord bursts onto the scene with the news of the Savior's birth. It is amazing that God chose this group of men as the first to hear the good news. In the time of Jesus' birth, people regarded shepherds as liars and thieves. Because they were nomadic, moving from place to place to graze their flocks, people didn't readily trust them. Yet it was to men such as this that God announced the Messiah's coming. He told them first! Not royalty, not the religious leaders of the day, but shepherds—lowly and insignificant. He invited them into His story and then mobilized them as the very first evangelists.

As soon as they heard news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds felt compelled to act. They went with haste, leaving their flocks behind, to find Mary, Joseph and the Savior Child lying in a manger. And once they beheld the One through whom salvation would come, they spread the word of all that had taken place.

We are like these men—unlikely recipients of an unbelievable reality. Just as God called the shepherds to witness and testify to Christ's birth, so we are called to herald the saving work of His death and resurrection. As believers, we have been invited into His story, sent out as heralds of both Jesus' first coming and His second. As we consider the shepherds, let us respond as they did to this good news of great joy—with amazement, belief and action.





Reflection

How did you first hear the gospel? Who told you, and how did you respond?

God does not need messengers to communicate His gospel. Why do you think He charged the shepherds with sharing the good news of Jesus' birth? Why do you think He charges us with sharing the good news of salvation?

Did sharing the news of Jesus' birth feel like a burden or a joy to the shepherds? Why? How do you feel about sharing the gospel? What might help you consistently view it as a joyful calling?

What fears keep you from sharing the news that Jesus has come to save sinners? Look up Colossians 1:3-6. How might the assurance in this passage increase your boldness?

Through the proclamation of the angels, God showed His greatness and worth to the shepherds. When do you remember first sensing the beauty of God's glory?

God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

Response

Write a letter or email to someone who was instrumental in your coming to faith. Whether or not you can actually send them that letter, communicate how the Lord used them to change your heart and life.

In prayer, praise God for loving the weak, despised and lowly and showing them His glory. Thank Him for the person or means He used to share the gospel with you, and ask Him for the boldness and faith to do the same.

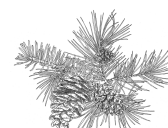
Songs of the Season

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Angels We Have Heard on High

While Shepherds Kept Their Watch by Night

Come Ye Lofty, Come Ye Lowly





-Family Discipleship Time-

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about how God showed His glory to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light the candles from the first two weeks and a third candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

LUKE 2:8-12

Behind the angel they saw a strange glowing cloud—except it wasn't a cloud, it was angels... troops and troops of angels, armed with light! And they were singing a beautiful song: "Glory to God! To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays!"

THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

LUKE 2:15-17





Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

As Mary and Joseph held their newborn Son during those late hours of the night, God began spreading the wonderful news of Jesus' birth. And He began with an unusual group of people.

Ask: Whom would you expect God to tell first that the promised Rescuer had come?

Kings, queens and religious leaders were not the first people to hear about the birth of Jesus. Instead, God told the most unimportant of people His good news first. Back in those days, people looked down on shepherds and even hated them. Most people considered them criminals, thieves and liars. Yet these were the first people to hear that the Rescuer had come. And the way they heard that good news was nothing short of amazing.

While the shepherds watched their sheep in a field outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared. The Bible tells us that the shepherds were filled with great fear. This angel that appeared to them was no baby with wings and a harp sitting on a cloud, like some stories might describe. No, this angel was a warrior of the Lord. And he shone with the glory of God. The bright radiance of heaven itself interrupted the deep darkness of the night. It was as if God peeled back the curtain of heaven and gave the shepherds a small glimpse of Himself.

Ask: How do you think the shepherds reacted when they saw the angel of the Lord?

The angel told the shepherds not to be afraid. God did what He had promised—He sent Jesus to rescue God's people from their sins. God was making peace between Himself and sinners through Jesus.

Upon telling the shepherds the good news of Jesus' birth and how to find Him, the angel was joined by thousands of other angels who began singing about the greatness of God. That dark, quiet night sky was filled with a beautiful, blinding light and roaring song that left the shepherds forever changed. Once they had heard the news, the shepherds were desperate to go and find Jesus and see the marvelous thing that God had done.

Ask: What is the greatest news someone has ever shared with you? What did you want to do in response?

So, the shepherds abandoned their sheep and raced to Bethlehem. Once they saw baby Jesus there in the manger, they left the stable and began telling everyone they saw the good news that the Savior had come. God used this group of men—men everyone despised—to tell the world that Jesus had come. As Jesus would do throughout His life, God was coming to sinners to show them the way to salvation.

Ask: How can we be like the shepherds? As a family, whom can we tell that Jesus came to save sinners?





God shows us many things about what's He's like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is glorious—that He shows His greatness and worth—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

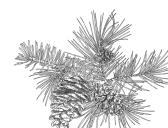
Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending angels to share the good news of Jesus' birth to sinners just like us.

Song

As a family, sing or listen to "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

*Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!" Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled. Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies; With angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem." Hark!
the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"
Christ, by highest heav'n adored: Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the favored one.
Veil'd in flesh, the Godhead see; Hail, th'incarnate Deity:
Pleased, as man, with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"
Hail! the heav'n born Prince of Peace! Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die: Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second
birth. Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*





Family Activity

One night this week, go out caroling as a family. As you visit homes of neighbors, friends and family, sing songs of praise about the birth and salvation of Jesus. It might be easiest to start at the home of someone you know who loves Jesus as you do. Sing praises to God and invite them to join you at the next house. Also, consider going to a nursing home to sing for them!

Make sure you visit at least one home of people who do not love and trust Jesus. Just like God showed grace and love to the lowliest of sinners, share the good news of Jesus' birth with someone who does not know God. Maybe that person will hear the good news and will believe in Jesus.

Additional Activities

Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the shepherds and angel pieces and add them to the set.

Spend time imagining what the "glory of the Lord" shining down on the shepherds was like. Draw what you think it looked like. Or turn off the lights and recreate it with flashlights, candles, props and loud singing.

Draw or paint what you think the night sky might have looked like when the angels appeared to the shepherds.

