

Luke 2:8-20

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth 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 heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Merry Christmas!

Last night we talked about Caesar Augustus and his decree. This morning I'd like to talk about some people who are better role models.

Shepherds, in Hebrew society at this time, were not really socially acceptable. They were dirty, they were unkempt, and they smelled like sheep. They were so far outside respectable society that they were not even allowed to testify in court!

Maybe the closest thing to a shepherd that we Americans understand is a cowboy. Not like Tom Mix or John Wayne or any of the other western movie cowboys – a real cowboy. Too unsympathetic to be the hero in a movie. Scruffy-lookin', grubby, smelly, on occasion violent. Brave and hard-working, maybe, but certainly never respectable.

The shepherds are far enough down the social totem pole that it's the middle of the night, and they are not home in bed. They are in the fields with the sheep, keeping watch and taking care of them. Somebody, somebody had to, you see, and they were the people who had to do the job that no one else wanted.

That's when the angel, or messenger, of the Lord shows up, and terrifies them. The angel tells them that the Messiah has come, and where to find him. They immediately go and find him to see for themselves. When Joseph and Mary ask why they are there, they tell the story of the angel and what the angel said.

Then, after spending some time with the young family, the shepherds go back to their fields and their flocks, glorifying God for all that they have heard and seen.

The shepherds have heard and seen amazing things, and they tell people. They tell people what they know, and they praise God.

Here in the Church, we have heard and seen some amazing things.

We have heard of God coming to Earth to more perfectly love flawed human beings like us.

We have seen God's amazing grace in a baptism.

We have heard of Jesus loving human beings so much that he forgave even his executioners.

We have felt God walking with us, even when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death.

I think that sometimes we get too used to all this. We start to take our amazing God for granted. So, let me lay it out for you:

God did not have to come down here and share our life. No one and nothing has the power to make God do anything.

God does not have to extend God's grace and forgiveness to us, to people who constantly run off to get the meaning in our lives from, it seems, anything else.

God does not have to love us, even when we find it difficult to love ourselves.

God does not have to walk with us when times are hard.

But God did and God does. Jesus did come down here and live a human life, and we human beings killed him.

God does extend amazing grace and forgiveness to us, not just the first time we mess up and come back, but again and again.

God does love us, even when it seems that no one else does and even when we can't quite find it in us to love ourselves. It breaks God's heart to see us like that, but yes, God loves us.

God does walk with us through tough times, up to and including the valley of the shadow of death. I do not say that lightly.

We have an amazing God.

The shepherds were not respectable. They knew that most people would not immediately listen to them. But they praised God, and they told people, anyway, of the amazing things they had heard and seen.

We, too, can tell people of the amazing things we have heard and seen. We can tell them with our words, but it is more effective to show them with our lives.

You can tell people about God's grace, but it's more powerful if you show them, by showing them grace.

You can tell people about God's love, but it's more powerful if you show them, by showing them love.

You can tell people about God's peace, but it's more powerful if you show them, by being at peace and by helping them to be at peace.

So, in this post-Christmas world, ...

Praise God!

Tell people what you have seen and heard!

Show people the kind of grace and love and peace that God has shown you.

Show them every day.

AMEN.