

Theme: Nothing But the Truth – Truths of Christmas

Title: Good News, Great Joy, for All the People – Luke 2:8-20

Aim: Express the good news of Christmas.

Intro: These (picture) are some of the fields on the outskirts of Bethlehem, thought to be the very fields where the angel announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds watching their flocks at night. Overlooking those fields, up on an opposite hill, there is this statue (picture) marking the significance of those fields. We were also able to go into a cave cut into the side of that opposite hill, where shepherds might have gone to get in out of the weather or cold. Now, I know that statue wasn't there when Jesus was born, & we don't know whether or not that cave had been cut out at that time, but fields don't move. Keep those fields in mind as we consider this truth of Christmas today: Good news of great joy for all the people. Our text is that familiar Christmas text in Luke 2:8-20 [READ]. The previous verses detail Joseph & Mary's trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, which was at least 60 miles over rough terrain. They went, even tho Mary was very pregnant, because of the tax registration ordered by Caesar Augustus. You know that when they arrived in Bethlehem (Joseph's town of lineage) they could find no place for lodging, because everything was full. They finally found a place in what may have been a barnyard or what I think may have been a special sheepfold or perhaps one of those caves the shepherds used. There Jesus was born & wrapped in swaddling cloths & laid in a manger. Then Luke turned his attention to the shepherds out in the field (that/those field[s] - picture). I) **These were no ordinary shepherds.** I'm convinced (tho I can't prove it) that they were special shepherds appointed by the high priest in Jerusalem to raise & deliver Passover lambs for sacrifice. They had to grade the lambs & select each one to be used for the Passover. They would be used by the priests or purchased by the pilgrims who came that way on their way to

Jerusalem for the Passover. The other lambs would be sold in the marketplace. We can certainly understand these shepherds being “filled w/great fear.” An angel appearing out of nowhere would be unnerving enough, but “the glory of the Lord shone around them.” That had to light up the sky over all that field – from darkness to light, just that quickly. But their fear turned to awe when they heard the angel’s message: II) **“Good news of great joy...for all the people.”** That news was “the birth of a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” “Christ the Lord” was the Messiah they had long awaited. Good news – that’s what the word gospel means. Of great joy – there was no greater joy to be had than the joyful announcement that Messiah had come! And the good news was for “all the people.” Now, I believe that to those shepherds “all the people” meant all the Jews – not just priests & kings or higher society, but all the people, including shepherds & carpenters & the downtrodden. But to them it didn’t necessarily mean those who weren’t Israelites. We’ll see next week that it did/does mean for all people everywhere who believe. But the Israelites were the ones looking/longing for the Messiah. They were the ones who had waited throughout those many years. They were the ones to whom the Messiah belonged, weren’t they? The angel told the shepherds where to find the baby. He would be wrapped in swaddling cloths & lying in a manger – just as a selected Passover lamb would be, for protection. At the completion of the wonderful good news, the angel was joined by an angelic choir, proclaiming III) **“Glory to God in the highest”** – “In excelsis Deo!” – “Glory be given to God in the highest degree!” The announced good news was from God, the gift of the Messiah was from God. He deserves all the glory. The angels couldn’t help but worship & exalt God for this most anticipated event. How they must have wondered about what God was doing. How they must have marveled at what He did. The Living Word became flesh & dwelt among man. The Creator

became as one of the created. The angels understood what God told them to say – the Lord Jesus was to be Savior. But I’m not sure if they understood how it would happen. 1 Peter 1:12 speaks of “things into which angels long to look.” And then these words: IV) “**On earth peace among those w/whom He is pleased.**” That’s certainly a better translation than “Peace on earth, good will toward men.” This phrase aligns with the rest of Scripture. Hebrews 11:6 – “***And w/out faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists & that He rewards those who seek Him.***” Romans 5:1 – “***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace w/God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***” The thing that separates us from God is sin – sin is unbelief. Jesus came to reconcile us to God by His death in payment for our sin & resurrection as Overcomer in our place. We must believe that Jesus is the Messiah who provided our salvation & He is Lord who reigns over all. That faith, to be living faith, must be accompanied by surrender of our lives to Him. Those who come to faith in Christ can be assured that God is pleased w/us because He sees us thru Christ, His righteousness imputed to us & being imparted to us by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. After the angels left, returning to heaven, the shepherds quickly & unanimously decided to V) “**Go See** this thing that has happened.” “***They went in haste & found Mary & Joseph, & the baby lying in a manger.***” Manger most likely a water trough cut out of stone, looking something like this (picture). I believe these shepherds knew just where to look. They were familiar w/the swaddling cloths & manger. How excited they were to find the baby & His parents just where the angel said they would. They couldn’t contain themselves & “***made known that saying that had been told them concerning this child.***” Obviously they told Mary & Joseph & evidently others who had gathered as well that the angel said this child was the Savior/Messiah.

They surely told them about the angel & the angel choir & their song. We're told that "all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them." Perhaps some of them believed & some doubted, but "**Mary treasured up all these things in her heart.**" We're not told that the angel who appeared to the shepherds was Gabriel, but perhaps it was. I have the feeling it was. Nonetheless, Mary had experienced an angel appearance w/almost unbelievable news. She knew the excitement that broke into worship. I wonder if she wanted to tell them what she had heard/experienced, but kept quiet, smiling w/agreement & glee. I wonder if Joseph, to whom the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream, might have also been nodding in agreement – perhaps even amazement of all that God had done, the last vestiges of doubt swept away by the shepherds' visit. I also wonder how long the shepherds continued worshipping – "**glorifying & praising God for all they had heard & seen, as it had been told them.**" Was it days, weeks or longer? I'm sure it was something they kept in their hearts & shared w/others for the rest of their lives. I'm sure that the Passover lambs they graded & selected after that always put them in mind of Jesus, their Passover Lamb who would make the sacrifices obsolete by His own sacrifice of Himself. One thing I don't wonder about is what we should do with the message of Christmas today. We need to "go see" as the shepherds did. Check Jesus out. Read the gospel accounts, not only of His birth but of His life & death & resurrection. Read the prophecies foretelling His birth & atoning work. Read the epistles concerning our need for a Savior & all that Christ has done for us. Then embrace Him by faith. Surrender your life to His control. The purpose of your life is to follow Him. Then, as the Shepherds did, VI) **Go tell what you have seen & heard.** The gospel is still good news. Jesus is still Savior. God is still pleased w/those who believe. God still saves whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord. He still forgives sin & mends broken lives. Jesus

still calls for those “who are weary & heavy laden” to “Come to Me...& I will give you rest” (Matt.11:28). Celebrate God’s wondrous Christmas gift & give it away to others. The truth of Christmas is “Good news of great joy...for all the people.” That’s nothing but the truth.