

They were attracted to the gospel message about Jesus. Are you attracted to it? When you know something of your sin problem and your hopeless condition and eternal condemnation on account of it, left to ourselves, and then you hear the amazing gospel message how in and with Jesus is complete salvation from all sin and how that with Him we find a Saviour from the womb to the tomb, then true faith shows itself in being attracted to this Savior. You just want to know Him and trust Him and worship Him and serve Him. Are you attracted to the Savior, Jesus, and attached to Him in the way of true faith and repentance and love, even as these shepherds showed?

This Christmas Day, 2005, do you need the Savior? Do you reach out to Him? Do you love Him? Do you believe in Him? Do you trust and obey Him? Do you hear His voice and follow Him? Is Jesus your hope and trust, your refuge and comfort, your Saviour and Lord? He was for these shepherds, isn't it true, indeed, obviously so? Is it obviously so with you too? Or does the tidings of Jesus' birth leave you cold and unmoved...like with so many also when Jesus was born? They realized not that the only Saviour from sin had come, and worse, many cared not that He had come. Do you care? How sad if you too have no care for the only gospel of Jesus Christ.

For notice next how the shepherds were so affirmed in the way of the gospel when they came to Bethlehem. Verse 16 states, *"And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger."* They had to look for them, but after careful searching found them just as the angel had said....and were they disappointed? No, everything in the story says they went in faith, and seeking they found, and finding they began telling of what all was told them about this Christ-child. When you go to Jesus in faith, trusting Him and looking to Him to be also your Saviour and Lord, never will you be put to shame. We know too they could not keep quiet about Him after having seen baby Jesus, but as Luke 2:20 states, *"the shepherds returned [to their sheepfold] glorifying and praising God, for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told to them."*

It all brings out, you see, what a true and most reliable and gracious and glorious Saviour Jesus Christ is, and how endlessly wonderful His coming to this earth sinners to save! Thank God for Jesus' first coming, born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, and for the story of the shepherds with Jesus' birth for it adds so much to the good news of Jesus' birth and testifies of His endless worth! Amen.

**Hans Overduin, Radio Pastor**  
**December 23, 2005**

Publication No.238

**BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST**

*Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America*

*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)*



### JESUS' BIRTH AND THE SHEPHERDS

On this Christmas Day, 2005, let us focus on the tidings of Jesus' birth, thinking especially of the shepherds as told to us in Luke 2:8-20. Could you imagine the Christmas tidings of Jesus' birth without the whole part about the shepherds? How much wonder and beauty the whole story of the shepherds adds to the story of Jesus coming as a baby, born of the Virgin Mary, in Bethlehem! And to realize it is not a fairy tale, also the part about the shepherds, but it is all true historical facts! How the shepherds' story adds so much to the good news of Jesus' birth. For sure the Holy Spirit has also included it in the Christmas story for this main reason, not just that you love the story, but that you see and adore God's love in the sending of His Son to be Saviour of sinners.

From the shepherds' story, we can learn about the whole gospel of salvation. We can learn from God's attention to these shepherds. In those days shepherds did not have a very good reputation for most of them were a rough and tough bunch of men. Generally, they were a despised group, largely because of their own often bad and rude behaviour in society. These shepherds around Bethlehem were most likely in charge of sheep and lambs for animal sacrifices for the temple. Everything about them mentioned in Luke 2 strongly suggest they were godly men, devout Israelites....waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises.....but the point now is, they were part of a class of people hardly recognized and, in the backwoods of Judea, thought little of, and even despised, by many.

But what can we now learn, dear friends, from God's attention to them? These lowly simple shepherds became, by God's choice, the first hearers of the good news of Jesus' birth! To those shepherds watching their sheep at night, the angel came and said, *"Fear not, for I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord!"* Can we not learn something from this, namely, that God is pleased to reach out to the lowly, the simple, and even the despised! Indeed, God is out sinners to save! Oh, the true story of Jesus' birth is so beautiful not just in the fact that Jesus was born, but how when He was born, the lowly shepherds were the first to know! Do you see with me how this drips with gospel just by itself?

Let us go on and learn from the story of the shepherds what it means rightly to respond to the message of Jesus' birth, and what it is really to have saving faith in the Christ-child. We need more than simply to like or to enjoy the moving story of Jesus' birth. We need to believe in the Christ-child come to be Saviour of sinners. Everything told to us about them brings out they were truly converted men, living in humble reliance upon the promised Saviour and rejoicing so much with His coming, and delighting in His birth in Bethlehem, that "*Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger*"! Consider with me the following about their walk of faith shown with the tidings of Jesus' birth.

What was the shepherds' response when the angel came to them? They were afraid – "*greatly afraid*", we read in Luke 2:9. Their fear here was not just the surprise of sudden light around them, and that of an angel appearing before them, but this angel represented the glory of God...and before the glory of God and the pure holy light of heaven, as represented in this angel, these men saw and felt their sins and sinfulness. Luke says when the angel came, "*then the glory of the Lord shone round about them*"! These men realized something of their impurity before the all seeing, all knowing, glorious God...and having this representative from God before them filled them with fear. True love and appreciation for Jesus the Saviour is always accompanied with conviction of our sins and sinfulness before God Almighty. These shepherds knew they couldn't in themselves see God and live, but would only be consumed, left to themselves as sinners. Do you know this too? Do you confess your sin and guilt before the Lord? Do you too know about being afraid before God as you are in and of yourself, a guilty sinner before His holiness, a defiled person before His glory? Do you have sorrow for sin before God? On the first Christmas, these shepherds were afraid before the glory of God!

But notice next, they became amazed with the message of God and so attracted to it! How much gospel tidings these fearful shepherds were given to hear from the angel. The words "Fear not" are the gospel words of the angel and how often you find these words in the Bible as God makes known His gospel for a sinful people. The shepherds need not fear, not because God would just overlook their sin and sinfulness, but God, as He promised the very day Adam and Eve fell into sin would provide a Savior. That Saviour is Jesus Christ the Lord. Jesus came to this earth to save sinners and He would do so by suffering for sin not His own and pay all the punishment for sin in the sinner's place, and at the same living the perfect holy life in the place of sinners. Fear not! For God in Christ with His first coming did not come to condemn the world "*but that the world through Him might be saved*" [John 3:17]!

This is the good news. "Fear not!" *FOR unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour Who is Christ the Lord!*" Praise God, the Lord is

merciful and gracious and full of compassion and He sent His Son to be Saviour of sinners. In and with Jesus' birth in the city of David, the Messiah has come, mighty to save and gracious and faithful in all His works and ways! "*Fear not! For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people*". This is what the shepherds get to hear....and that they are amazed with it all, we can be sure of, especially also considering the amazing way the Lord made known the gospel news of Jesus' birth to them....and then I'm thinking of how He did it not just with one angel coming to tell the good news, but as we are told, "*Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and telling further: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."*"

As one commentator mentioned, "How wonderful that God did not first send the heavenly host of angels to the shepherds. That would have literally perhaps shocked and frightened them to death! But God first sent one angel, and after breaking the good news, and getting them used to the heavenly light and glory around them, then God came forth with a whole host of shining angels telling further the good news of the gospel!" Do you see God's gentleness even in the order of His presentation of the gospel tidings of Jesus' birth?

We shouldn't omit noticing either the special fitting sign the angel gave about Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. He could be found in the city wrapped in swaddling clothes not only, which would have been more common, but He could be found so, lying in a manger, that is in a feeding trough for animals. Certainly, for these shepherds that sign meant this baby Jesus would be quite accessible and approachable even for them, humble country folk, common labourers as they were. Everything told to them, and the way it was told to them, gave reasons for these shepherds to be so amazed with the gospel message about Jesus. This is what all true Christians discover and keep discovering - the gospel of Jesus Christ is so amazing, full of amazing grace and divine glory in countless ways. Do you find the gospel about Jesus the Saviour, even in His birth story something so amazing too?

Verse 15 proves these shepherds were not just so amazed about what they all heard and saw but they were so attracted to it too. Notice verse 15 states, "*as the angels were gone away from them*" - so while they were disappearing and returning back into heaven, then the shepherds said to one another, "*let us now go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.*" You get the sense they were so attracted to the gospel message given to them and so excited about it, they could hardly wait to go to Bethlehem. The angels never said they should go there, but just gave a hint about going there, and no more was needed for the shepherds had no hesitation about going to Bethlehem. They wanted to go and see the Christ-child by all means, and verse 16 says then also, "*and they came with haste!*"