

The Glory of Christmas 2nd Sunday of Advent: Shepherds

This advent series is called, **The Glory of Christmas**. Let me back up. If you haven't grown up in church or even if you have, you might not be familiar with the word Advent. **Advent means, "arrival of a notable person or event"**. The four **Sundays** before Christmas are called Advent because they celebrate the arrival of God on earth in the form of Jesus. **In a sense, we are preparing** for Christmas, his arrival. This is the first advent. **The second** is when time is no more and judgment day is upon us. He arrived as a baby in human flesh. The second time he arrives as a **conquering King**.

There's a **big difference between the two** advents, but they are connected. **This one allows us to know God and his love, the other is when those who followed him realize their positions as heirs to the king of kings.**

This event is glorious because God took on the form of a humble servant in order to allow his beloved creation to truly know him. The glory of Christmas is Jesus.

In this series we are looking at **the different characters and how those characters reflect** the amazing glory of Jesus. Last week, we looked at Joseph as an example of how **God has set a precedent** all through scripture of using under qualified, unlikely, wrong people to bring about his purposes.

Today we have some more of those people, **shepherds**. In this culture, they were the **"average Joe."** They were a **part of the scenery** looking over the countryside like migrant pickers, **way down the totem pole.**

Let's read about how these lowly shepherds were a part of the Glory of the first Christmas. ⁸ **That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.** ⁹ **Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them.** They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ **The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!** ¹² **And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."**

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ¹⁴ **“Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”** ¹⁵ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, **“Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”** Luke 2:8-15

Upon seeing, **“the radiance of God’s glory”** our shepherds were terrified. For a moment, the Glory of Christmas was interpreted by them this way, **“No one sees God or his angel armies and survives, especially a bunch of nobodies like us.”** Because we are mortal, created out of dust; we cannot handle God’s glory at full strength.

For these shepherds to survive this angel choir, the glory of God needed to be packaged, or wrapped in something that would allow them to be able to handle it. The Glory of Christmas was wrapped in the story of a Messiah that was to come. The angels came to deliver the glory of God in a message that they could handle.

The glory of Christmas begins as a message.

It must be spoken, announced, proclaimed...Where God says, **“This is what I am up to at the moment. No need to be afraid, I am on a mission of love and I know you well enough to make it something that you can handle.”**

This was a message that many in Israel had been waiting for. They have been waiting for God to move in a way that made sense with all of the promises he made to them. He promised that the Kingdom of David would have no end.

All that they knew was that the only kingdom that mattered in their lives was the kingdom of Rome. They were under the boot of Rome, which was not exactly what the prophets promised.

Look closely at the message and see if anything might seem strange to these Hebrew shepherds. **“I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.”** ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born

today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." Luke 2:10b-12

First, the idea of a baby might not have been what they were expecting, after all a baby can't save anyone, even himself. The baby must be a grown man king.

But there's another phrase that if this message had been **given to the religious leaders** in Israel they might have taken issue with. I'm talking about that little phrase, **"to all people."**

The glory of Christmas is about a message. And here's what is different about this message. **It's all-inclusive.**

I've never been to an all-inclusive resort. These are magical places where you **don't ever have to leave** if you don't want to. You can sleep there, eat there and, at your disposal, there is every type of entertainment possible. **Sometimes they are all inclusive because they have to be. It's a boat** out in the ocean so you can't go anywhere until the next port. Or because **the surrounding area is so dangerous** for foreigners and the resort has heavy security.

The message is to all people. This was the **Jewish Messiah**, so the **assumption** would be that he has come for the nation of Israel. He has come in order to **bring back the glory of the Israel**, God's chosen people.

The message is not only for all people, but it has everything you could need. It isn't missing anything. **If they accept this message at face value** it will lead them to where they need to go.

Here's how this first glorious message continued on as it was originally stated, "to all people.

The apostle Paul to his protégé Timothy...**I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them.** ² Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. ³ This is

good and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who **wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.** ⁵ For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and **humanity**—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for **everyone.** This is the message God gave **to the world** at just the right time. 1 Timothy 2:1-6

Where do you see the signs of this glorious message being all-inclusive?

- Pray for all people
- Wants everyone to be saved and understand the truth
- There is one God and one mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—
- Purchase freedom for everyone
- This is the message God gave to the world

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want **anyone to be destroyed,** but wants **everyone to repent.** 2 Peter 3:9

He doesn't want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. Again it is all-inclusive.

¹⁶ "For this is how **God loved the world:** He gave his one and only Son, so that **everyone who believes** (puts their trust in) in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to **save the world** through him. ¹⁸ "There is **no judgment against anyone who believes** in him. But **anyone who does not believe** in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. John 3:16-18

This message demonstrates his love for everyone, no matter their background or pedigree, even shepherds. **The judgment that his holiness and righteousness demands** will not fail on those who put their trust in him.

The glory of Christmas begins with a message, a message that is all-inclusive and... **It's from me on its way to someone else.**

The way in which the message was given meant that they were going to pass it on. Who would experience this and not want to tell someone. But

the question is, "passed on to whom?" The message holds the key, "to everyone."

It's very important to see that it is not simply for me. It didn't come to me in order to stay. The Glory of Christmas wasn't designed that way. It's not stagnant, it's dynamic.

Clearly, not everyone is going to believe these shepherds. Not everyone is going to believe or even be interested in what you have experienced about this Jesus for whom the message concerns. The point is that there should be no dead ends. It must be passed on.

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

What happens if they don't go to see the baby and don't pass on what they heard from the angels? It's a story that is told around the campfire harkening back to this amazing thing that happened, but it's an inside joke.

This message needs to remain fresh. That means if I keep it as if it's my own, then it will get stale. If I don't pass it on, this glorious message will turn into something personal and private like a self-help program that gives me some comfort in feeling special and a ticket into the sweet by and by.

The sweetest things can turn rancid if held onto too long.

It is simply impossible for the Glorious message of Christmas to be viewed as just for me. Everything about this message and this king says the opposite. It's a pronouncement about a king, not a new restaurant opening in town.

This glorious message that is all-inclusive, that is to me, but on the way to someone else, is so glorious that it transforms those who receive it and pass it on. Here's how... It is intended to transform messengers into ambassadors.

I've been in eating establishments when an uber eats, or Grub hub person comes up to the counter and says, "Pick up for _____" in the name of the food delivery service.

I've been in Burger King when these delivery people have come in. In order for us to really experience what I am trying to say, I need to set the scene a little bit. My friend, Stephanie, is at the counter when this person comes in. There is a brief conversation like described earlier and an order number is referenced and the person grabs the bag and leaves. It is all business.

This person doesn't have any real connection to Burger King. This man or woman is not loyal to "The King of the Burgers." He's not sitting in his car seeing opportunities to deliver popping up on his phone each time saying, "Nope, I'm only working for the King."

This driver isn't pulling out his bag of food and then a trumpet to announce a royal decree to eat this burger because it is good! This delivery lady is not a Burger Duchess, Queen, Princess. This delivery person would deliver for ISIS if they had a restaurant chain. There is no loyalty because there is no connection.

An ambassador is different from a message delivery service. The ambassador is a part of the message, not just a conduit for it to spread. The message is a part of who you are, not just a task or a job you have been commissioned to accomplish.

An ambassador is a citizen of the nation for which she represents. She loves her country and wants to represent its leaders fairly and accurately. This ambassador loves her king and the kingdom that he rules and wants others to be blessed by knowing him.

Ambassadors have privileges that a simple messenger doesn't have. A simple message carrier isn't going to be invited to come in, sit down, and have

something to drink. **The message career is a faceless conduit for receiving someone sent to me. You don't know his name or spend enough time to learn his name. It might be a person jumping in and out of a car in the no park zone. It might be a gen xer chaining up his bike before running into a building with his helmet still on.**

You are meant for so much more than a messenger who has to get it just right. You are the message, you, as a person being changed, made new becoming new. The glory of Christmas, the glory of the King and his Kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven, is you being transformed into your King's likeness.

The temptation is to make these Christmas advent messages into sappy, sentimental words that make us feel good for a moment and then we look for something else to feel good about. No, it's about hearing God's voice and obeying or aligning your life to what you have heard. Following the Shepherds.

View yourself as an honored ambassador.

The shepherds could have said, **"Who are we to bring this message or go into the presence of the messiah. We aren't worthy, we'll just stay here. The angels are probably going to make other more important stops tonight. We were like their dress rehearsal before going to tell the kings and generals. Nothing depends on people like us."**

Take the initiative.

Instead of waiting in an office for the people to come see him, this ambassador goes out in order to rub shoulders with the people he was sent to speak to.

What you are about to receive is **cutting edge strategy for spreading the message of Christmas.** Please take notes, because if you miss one subtle part of this, you will not be able to pass on the message as intended. **I repeat, please listen closely.** Its two questions but they are so tricky.

- "How can I pray for you?"

I know no one has ever thought of this before me today. It just came to me. Miraculous isn't it. **Ok, Sterling Gatling** probably asked this question a thousand times in his life.

This could be specific to this time of year. Encourage someone who has lost someone close and **Christmas** is hard for him or her. **I could be redirecting their focus back to Jesus and not the diversion that Christmas creates.**

The next one is really complex with so many layers of meaning. Lean in to this so you don't miss a single word.

- **"How can I be of service?"**

I know, it sounds a bit like a maître d at a fancy hotel or an English butler entering a room after hearing some posh gentry ring a little bell with pinky extended.

They may not be able to answer this **question, so here are some options** to suggest.

- Watch their kids for free so they can go shopping.
- Send a note of encouragement to that person who has lost someone.
- Invite them to lunch or for coffee.