

Text: Luke 2:8-20

Title: “The Joy of Sharing Christ”

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the biblical account of the birth of Christ there is woven this note of joy. And that’s been our focus this Christmas season. Joy is something that is *internal*, that eventually explodes in something *external* called rejoicing. What does it look like?

ILLUSTRATION - In the classic Christmas movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” we have the story of George Bailey. He managed a building and loan that was barely staying afloat. His life began to unravel and he lost all joy in living. He even found himself thinking that everyone would be better off if he had never been born. So his guardian angel Clarence is given the task of showing George Bailey what everyone’s life would be like if he hadn’t been born ... to show him that he really did have a lot to live for. George learns his lesson, and the joy returns to his life. My family usually watches this movie on Christmas Eve, and this is my favorite scene in the movie: VIDEO CLIP.

Life isn’t always that way. The happy endings don’t always come on our schedule. But I’m here to remind you again that there’s a joy that is found only in Jesus Christ. When Christ came into the world, and when He comes into a life, He brings joy.

Open your Bibles with me to Luke 2:8. We’ve seen joy all over the biblical account of the birth of Jesus. There was joy in Elizabeth and John in *savoring* the presence of Christ. There was joy in Mary’s life in *servicing* God. And today we’re going to see joy among the shepherds who were among the first to hear of the birth of Christ ... joy in *sharing* Christ. Joseph and Mary are required to go to Bethlehem to register for the census, so in fulfillment of prophecy in the OT, Mary gives birth to Jesus in Bethlehem. There is nowhere for Joseph and Mary to stay, so Jesus’ first home is a barn where He is placed in a manger. Let’s pick up reading in Luke 2:8.

Luke 2:8 - And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

There’s something significant about the shepherds. Or perhaps I should say something *insignificant*. According to the teaching of the rabbis of that day, shepherds were low class individuals. Their work made them ceremonially unclean, and typically they were shunned socially.

You know, we often think in our culture that to have an impact we have to have the earthly advantage. If only Christians controlled the influential entertainment community, or if only we controlled all branches of government, we could really make a difference. What we see is that God is going to make the difference, and He will do it in this case, not through the king in his palace, nor through the priests in their temple, but through some despised shepherds.

And there’s something significant about their flocks. Many scholars believe that the sheep these shepherds were watching over were sheep that would be used as daily sacrifices in the Temple in Jerusalem. Just think about it. Grazing in these fields were sheep that would be offered as sacrifices in accordance with the Law of Moses to atone for the sins of the people. But then not far away God

sends the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world, and those sacrificial sheep would no longer be necessary.

Luke 2:9 - An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

The appearance of the angel and of the radiant glory of the Lord terrified them. The Greek word for “terrified” means literally “they feared a great fear.” They were scared out of their wits.

Luke 2:10 - But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Their great fear is countered with great joy. The Good News is that great joy will be available for all people. It is for all people ... even these despicable shepherds.

That little phrase “I bring you good news...” translates one word: εὐ αγγελίζομαι. It is the word from which we get the word “evangelism” or “evangelize.” It is the word that is used to describe the preaching of the Good News. Keep that in mind.

Luke 2:11 - Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:12 - This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Now what would be so unique about this? Most babies born in NT times would be wrapped in cloths. In other words, Jesus is swaddled. So there was nothing extraordinary about that. What was so unusual about this is the fact that the baby was not in nursery, not even in a house. The only room was in the stable where animals were kept. And baby Jesus’ crib ended up being a manger ... a feeding trough for cattle, sheep, donkeys or horses.

Again, note how common the whole setting is ... at least until angels come along and make it uncommon.

Luke 2:13 - Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

Luke 2:14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Notice to whom the peace is offered. It is offered to those who have received God’s favor ... His grace.

Luke 2:15 - When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

Luke 2:16 - So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

It would not have been hard to find Mary, Joseph, and the baby in the small village of Bethlehem, even if it was crowded due to the census being taken. A new baby in town would have been widely known.

Luke 2:17 - When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

The Good News of great joy that will be for all the people was announced to the shepherds. And now they go out spreading the word themselves.

Luke 2:18 - and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Luke 2:19 - But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:20 - The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

I want you to see that there is joy found in sharing Christ.

- Joy is the inspiration for our sharing Christ.

Luke 2:10 - But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

The shepherds are told the Good News about great joy that was available to them, and ultimately to all people. This announcement then became the inspiration for them to check things out, and when it was indeed true it says...

Luke 2:17 - When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

Joy is the inspiration and motivation for sharing Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – Joy just has to be expressed. If there’s something that comes into your life that fills your heart with joy ... say the birth of a child or a grandchild. You might be able to contain it for a while if there’s no one around to share the good news with. But that joy inside you explodes as soon as you come across someone to tell ... even if they’re a total stranger (like in an elevator). The most effective witnesses I know are people who are just full of the joy of the Lord.

I’m wondering if our failure at being effective witnesses is due to the fact that we are not filled with the joy of the Lord.

So joy is the inspiration and the motivation for these shepherds spreading the word about Christ.

- Joy is the **culmination** of our sharing Christ.

While it doesn't say explicitly that the shepherds were rejoicing, it does say...

Luke 2:20 - The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Friends, that's what rejoicing looks like. I tell you, there's joy in sharing Christ with others, and even greater joy in seeing someone respond to Christ as you witness to them.

Now back to our shepherd friends. I want you to notice what effective witnesses these shepherds were ... witnesses that were inspired by the good news of great joy that will be for all people ... witnesses who discovered joy as they shared that good news with others.

Now there's a bit of irony in this. Remember that the shepherds were not highly esteemed by other Jews. In fact, the rabbis of the day considered most of them to be religious outcasts. On top of that, their testimony was not admissible in the courts. That may have been true in the courts, but these shepherds were actually great witnesses. A witness is simply someone who *knows* something and who *says* something.

1. A GOOD WITNESS **KNOWS** SOMETHING (Luke 2:8-16).

These shepherds knew something because they had been told something. Remember what they learned.

Luke 2:10 - But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

And the next verse explains what the good news is.

Luke 2:11 - Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Notice the three important names of this child. Names reveal something about the character and the nature of the one being named. His names represent all that we need for Him to be in our behalf. Luke is piling title upon title to demonstrate just how magnificent is this Child.

SAVIOR – "a Savior has been born to you..."

This tells us something about His *deliverance*. The angel announced this earlier to Joseph about Mary and the child.

Matthew 1:21 - She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

We need to be saved from our sins, and Jesus is the only One who can do that because He is only One qualified to do that. We know that from the other two titles.

CHRIST

This tells us something about His *destiny*. Literally He is “Messiah” or “the Anointed One,” spoken of repeatedly in the OT prophecies.

LORD

This tells us something about His *deity*. He is born Lord of all. He is born already possessing supreme, supernatural authority over all mankind. Jesus died to take away our sins, and He arose as Lord to give us His life. The phrase “Jesus is Lord” was the public confession of faith and a baptismal formula of the early church.

So the shepherds know something because they are told something. But they come to know it in a more personal and intimate level. It becomes first-hand knowledge.

Luke 2:15b - “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

Luke 2:16 - So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

And they were witnesses of all of the mystery unfolding in the manger in Bethlehem. The long-expected One has finally arrived. And it says later that everything was just as they had been told it would be. It’s true ... it’s all true.

It’s not enough to just hear the Good News ... people have to believe it ... experience it personally for themselves that it is true. You can’t ride to heaven hitched to someone else.

So a good witness is one who knows something, and these shepherds know something. They have not just seen and heard it. They heard it and believed. They responded in faith. And having discovered the truth about Jesus this joy inspires them to do the next thing.

And a good witness knows something, but also....

2. A GOOD WITNESS SAYS SOMETHING (Luke 2:17-20).

ILLUSTRATION – Several years ago I was called to be a character witness in a trial that involved a man who was a member of our church. Obviously I was subpoenaed because I knew something ... I had first-hand knowledge. If I did not possess that first-hand knowledge my testimony could have been thrown out as hearsay, not real evidence. But I had first-hand knowledge of this person. But I’m not a complete witness if I just know something. A faithful witness ultimately has to say something.

And that's what the shepherds do. They made known to others what they had been told.

Luke 2:17 - When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

You see, just seeing the baby Jesus in the manger was not enough. That scene had no meaning without the explanation that the angels had already given. So when they go out to spread the word, they talk about what had been told to them ... the Good News ... and how they were eye-witnesses that it was true.

After seeing the Baby, the shepherds were the first messengers to proclaim the arrival of the Messiah: they spread the word.

Luke 2:20 - The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Again, joy is the inspiration for our witness, and it is the culmination of our witness. While "joy" is not specifically stated here, what they are doing is rejoicing ... they are glorifying God with the praise and gratitude.

I tell you, there is great joy in sharing Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – Over the weekend I drove up on a wreck that had just occurred. A woman was driving on slick streets and lost control of her car and skidded into a pipe railing that lined the road. As I stopped to see if I could help, there was a man who got there just a minute ahead of me. As I walked to the car I noticed the woman inside was pinned up against the steering wheel, like she had her seat moved way up. She was uncomfortable from being shoved up so close to the steering wheel, but otherwise she seemed fine. As I walked around the car I realized what had happened. When her car plowed through the pipe railing, the pipe broke off and pierced the side of her car and went into the back of the driver's seat where the woman was pinned. The pipe went through the back of the seat, through the foam padding inside the seat and stopped just a fraction of an inch before it would have punctured the fabric and the back of the woman. The other man and I looked at one another in utter amazement. The woman had no idea how close she had come to a very serious injury. I thanked God. I said to the woman as the paramedics arrived, "God was watching over you; you have a lot to be thankful for." I wondered if she would share that joy with others. I wondered if her life was different knowing what God had spared her from.

I was reminded that I have been spared a greater danger. I have been rescued from hell. How grateful am I in sharing the Good News?