

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS

WEEK 3 — JOY IN THE MORNING!

The Third Sunday of Advent: Joy

“ . . . I bring you good news of great joy . . . ”

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they [the shepherds] were terrified. 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. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord [or Anointed One]. This will be a sign to you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:8-12)

The shepherds (ποιμῆν) were “keeping watch over their flocks by night” when “an angel (αγγελος) of the LORD appeared to them.” We see shepherds depicted as protectors throughout the scriptures. David the Psalmist, as a youth and before he was anointed king was a herdsman. Shepherds defend the sheep from the lion and the bear, and treat the wounded and sick. It is an isolated and rough existence. The last thing these shepherds expect is a heavenly envoy! They are terrified! Think about it. Do you think you would be a little agitated if an angel lit up your room in the middle of the night? These are unremarkable people chosen to receive an extraordinary message. Do you think the irony of the situation was lost on them? Of all people, shepherds! What next, wise men from the East?

The shepherds receive the message from the angel and the “great company of the heavenly host” with wonder and curiosity. What is their response? “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see,” and they find everything “...just as they had been told.” Taking their leave with reverence, can you hear them rambling back along the way—loud, good humored, boisterous shepherds—regular people, singing songs of praise and worship? “Heaven came down and glory filled my soul!” They go on their way with great joy telling the news to anyone who will listen. They return to their

lives, “praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.” (Luke 2:20)

The joy of the shepherds is contagious! We cannot help but smile and reflect in their merriment. The joy of the shepherds may remind us of joy we once knew. And yet Jesus has not left us, he is here to give us a joy that overflows. See Him now! He stands at the door of your heart, invite him into the center of your life. The shepherds decided to go and see. What is your decision?

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20)

Routine disrupted! Week 3, Monday

Routine is a wonderful thing! It is when we are on a schedule, with a to-do list in our hands that many of us are the happiest. After all there are priorities to shuffle and things to accomplish! We often look upon interruptions with disfavor and irritation. This reaction is especially true if we are Christ followers; after all, some of these tasks are part of a divine mission! Well maybe we would not put it like that but when we are on an outreach project or a task that would benefit others in the community of faith we are apt to lapse into a “I know what is best for me right now, and this is not it” attitude. We may even think of interruptions as opposition to our good works on God’s behalf! Yet sometime there are speed bumps in the Journey we are taking with Jesus. He changes our plans, reverses our course and we are confused. But our God speaks and acts in the world today much as he did with those shepherds. They were in the midst of their routine and then the angel of the Lord showed up! It got their attention, their fear turned to curiosity, and their curiosity turned to action. What they discovered was just as the angel had said.

“...He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” (Acts 14:17)

Receive with joy! Week 3, Tuesday

The angel told the shepherds, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

And when the angels left, "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 2:11-15)

Luke not so subtly reminds us that Joseph is one of David's progeny. This is the reason the shepherds are roused from their herdsman duties to see this thing unfolding in David's town. Though insignificant in the eyes of the powerful, shepherds become eye-witnesses to the glory of God because Joseph is required by decree to register in his ancestral hometown. The legacy of the first coming of Jesus is the response of the shepherds on that remote Judean hillside to angels who appear out of the darkness. The shepherds received the message of the angels with joy and verified it with thanksgiving and praise, explaining the details to anyone who would listen. The Apostle Paul updates and extends the message, "By this good news you are saved... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

(1 Cor. 15:2-4)

"Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1) Will you believe?

Let's go see! Week 3, Wednesday

The angels appear to three of the central characters of the Nativity drama: Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, Mary and the shepherds. (The angel appeared repeatedly to Joseph in a dream.)

The angel appears to Zachariah, the most religious, during his priestly duties in the temple. It causes quite a stir to those praying outside the Holy Place as to "why he stayed so long." His response to the angel is unbelief, for this he is not able to speak until John's circumcision. Then he speaks!

Mary's response after she understands the answers to her informational questions is one of acceptance, "I am the Lord's servant, let it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1)

At first the shepherds are afraid but fear gives way to wonder as the angel unfolds the message that the Anointed one is nearby. Imagine, rough as a dry corn cob, shepherds being made privy to this wondrous news.

They are told where and when they can find the Savior of the world and how they will recognize him! The information is punctuated by a heavenly multitude, who proclaim, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." There is only one possible response for shepherds, "Let's go...and see!"

Today, Jesus is more than the child in a manger, he is our Savior. He sends the Holy Spirit to heal us, help us, forgive us, and lift the burdens from our lives. Will you turn to Jesus today and receive the grace and mercy he has for you? Come and see!

Joy Unspeakable! Week 3, Thursday

Did you ever notice that shepherds who feature prominently in the Nativity story are the ones who are the most insignificant? They are not related to Mary or Joseph, nor have they had contact or influence with kings, wise men, or government officials. They do not figure in with the priestly line of Levites, nor do they have wealth or position or influence in the community. They are working people, nine-to-five folks.

Their response singles them out to us. They react like us. They are us. They are first fearful, then curious, then overwhelmed by the magnitude of the heavenly host!

There are those that say, contrary to words of carol and hymn, that the angels did not sing. To them, I rely on my sanctified imagination and respond that the heavenly host may be speaking and not singing. I don't know, but in my heart their voices are so beautiful that it is more like music than anything I know.

I think it might sound a little like this 200 year old Negro Spiritual and carol:

When I was a seeker

I sought both night and day

I sought the Lord to help me

And He showed me the way. [last verse]

Chorus: Go, tell it on the mountain

Over the hills and everywhere

Go, tell it on the mountain

That Jesus Christ is born

Joy at his coming! Week 3, Friday

The shepherds' joy was at the beginning of Jesus time on earth. The appearance of the Savior in Bethlehem changed them.

Jesus has come to you. How has he changed you? "What kind of people ought you to be?" The Apostle Peter responds to this rhetorical question, "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you *look forward to the day of God* and speed its coming." (*Italics mine, see 2 Peter 3*)

The coming or Advent of Jesus was not just an event in history. Jesus comes to us today in many ways, especially in the breaking of bread in our communion services.

Jesus also promises to return again and come for us, at an appointed future time.

What is our response in the meantime when the Savior calls? Are we surprised like the shepherds or are we ready to follow through with the next step like Mary?

Paul prayed that we might see spiritually:

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Even so, come Lord Jesus!