

Rev. Lisa Schrott  
December 24, 2024  
Luke 2:15-20  
Hungering for Good News

Here now the rest of the story from Luke chapter 2:

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them. **The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

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Yes ... we shepherds went back to the fields. You might have heard us that night, unusual, for our band of shepherds is normally a quiet bunch. Some say we were the first evangelists – the first ones to share the Good News of the birth of the Messiah. Everyone was hungering for Good News. Bethlehem was packed full of with people who had come to their “home town”. Not much choice in the matter –Caesar Augustus – that being the Roman Empire – said that all the world should be registered. So everyone hightailed to the town of their ancestors to register for the census.

You might think that this was good news... after all it was kind of like a family reunion. While there was some joy seeing just how much the little ones had grown, the census was not good news. It brought a lot of stress. All of your holdings - property, livestock, crops, and household members were counted. And then they were taxed. No one was spared, not a single villager. Not a single shepherd. Money was tight and with this new registration, things were about to get much tighter. So you could say that the people were hungering for Good News that night.

So where was I..... You might have heard us that night, unusual, for our band of shepherds is normally a quiet bunch. We tend to be pretty sheepish when it comes to publicizing ourselves. Our sheep tend to be too slow to make those Tik-Tok videos interesting. A couple of our flock are Insta-worthy, and a few entrepreneur-ish shepherds have tried to boost their wool prices that way. But in general we tend to fade into the background. That is why this night was so amazing... why we couldn't stop praising God on our way back to the fields for all we had seen and heard. We heard and shared the Good News that people were so desperately waiting to hear.

You see the aunties and cousins made way for us - I couldn't believe it. It could be that we smelled pretty bad or maybe it was the promise of the wool from our best sheep or maybe that is just the kind of family they are - ones who invite shepherds in from the field.

They listened to our story of the angels visit - not once claiming that there must be a logical explanation - that they must be airplanes or drones – or some otherworldly flying object - causing confusion or concern or downright terror in the villages.

No, they believed us when we said we had seen and heard an angel of the Lord telling us about a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And what is even more amazing - they didn't throw us out or call the authorities or even check to see what was in our water flask when we told them that this baby - lying right there in front of us - cooing and dribbling and fussing just a little - was the Messiah, the Lord.

Other people receiving this news might have checked to make sure our hearing aids didn't need batteries and suggested that we stay away from the mushrooms while the sheep were grazing. But no - they listened to our story with full attention, a wry smile appearing on the mom's face as she flashed at her husband (I think it was her husband) the "I told you so" look. You know the look, the ones wives have perfected across the millennia.

They listened to our story and all those gathered around, the extended kinfolk who were there to ooh and aww over the new baby were amazed by our story - incredulous. Except for the mom - I think they called her Miriam - she brought her hands to her chest, clasped them together and her face just shone - like she was lit from the inside.

The family was so kind. They sent us off with some warm cocoa and something they called Christmas cookies. I've never had them before - but man they just hit the spot. So here we are back in the fields, sharing this not so terrible, horrible, very good and not so very bad day in the life of a Bethlehem shepherd. In fact, if I had describe the kind of day - well really night it was - I would say it was a night of indescribable joy.

As I look back on that night, about 33 years ago, my joy is even fuller, for I know now how the story of the baby I saw lying in the manger ends. This baby was named Jesus by his parents

– I don't know if what we shepherds said to them about him being the Messiah, the Lord, influenced the name. Or if they had special knowledge about him, because his name means "The Lord saves." You may think it is kind of funny that they used the Greek name rather than the Hebrew names Joshua or Yeshua. But pretty much everyone spoke Greek by then, so it made sense.

Jesus' life was pretty remarkable. You see we stayed in touch – as much as one could stay in touch when you live in the fields. Jesus, he had a thing for us shepherds. He used tell stories and use us as examples. He called himself the Good Shepherd, one who would lay down his life for his sheep. We shepherds understood what he meant. He told this one story that a lot of people didn't understand – but we did. A group of tax collectors and religious leaders were asking him why he welcomed and even shared meals with everyone – even those who had some questionable jobs and styles of dress.

Jesus said to them: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."<sup>1</sup>

That story made an impression on me. I remembered back to the night when the angels told us: "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." This is what the angels meant... Jesus -remember his name means "the Lord saves" had come to bring forgiveness and grace and love and hope to all people.

Jesus spent a lot of his time telling stories. He and some of his friends travelled throughout Galilee and way down to Judea telling people that they were loved, no matter what other people said about them. Now it was not all rainbows and unicorns – Jesus was very clear that people need to turn away from the things they were doing that were hateful and harmful, things that caused others pain, things that kept them from enjoying a deep relationship with God.

It sounds kind of funny, but the people back then, and I suppose people today and people way in the future, were hungering for this Good News. Good News that they are loved and that there is path back to God and to family and friends. While sometimes Jesus used fancy words like repentance and reconciliation and redemption, we shepherds knew what he meant. Own up to the things you have done wrong, ask God and others to forgive you, change your ways so you are less likely to stray from the path again. Now if we could get just get the sheep (and especially the goats!) to do that too, we would be in business.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 15:1-7

I mentioned awhile back, that when I look back on that night, about 33 years ago, that my joy is even fuller, because I know now how the story of the baby I saw lying in the manger ends. The people were really hungering for Good News – for hope and peace and joy and love. Yet not everyone welcomed that message from Jesus – that message that the angel shared with us shepherds: “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” That is the message we shepherds got to share with Jesus’ family that night.

Well, that Good News of great joy had an unexpected ending. Jesus’ love triumphed over sin and death, over all of the ways we people failed to care for each other and the earth. And Jesus left us with a gift to remind us that he was God with us - in flesh and blood. Jesus invited us – all of us - to share a great feast, a feast of bread and cup. He told us he was the Bread of Life and that anyone who comes to him would not hunger. Not hunger any more – for he is the Good News – a savior for all people. Amen.