



# Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

**Behold the Wondrous Mystery - Christmas 2018**

**Family Bible Study - Shepherds Visited by Angels**

**Luke 2:8-20**

**12/23/2018 (No Sunday School on Sunday)**

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## Main Point

Please use this study to remind your family of the real reason we celebrate Christmas this week. The good news of Jesus Christ produces worship and joy in the hearts of believers.

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## Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What experiences, images, and ideas come to mind when you think about Christmas?**

**Christmas can be a frustrating and stressful time of year for many. Why do you think that is? Do you sometimes feel that way about Christmas?**

**What distracts you from worshipping Christ during the holidays?**

If we're honest, when we think of Christmas, there are dozens of things other than Jesus that come to mind. This is because we live in a culture that does not value worshiping Jesus and we often fall in the trap of worshiping lesser things. Christmas, however, should be a time of rejoicing in God's decision to take on flesh and dwell among us. From the example of the shepherds, we learn that worshiping Christ joyfully should be the primary ways we celebrate Advent.

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## Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:8-12.**

Socially, shepherds weren't Bethlehem's most popular men. Shepherding was a dirty job, usually preformed by the lower class. In the countryside near Bethlehem, shepherds worked. Their primary responsibility was to guard the sheep, which were used for temple sacrifices among other things. How appropriate that the first people to hear about Jesus' birth were those who guarded the sacrifices He would later replace, when His crucifixion and resurrection permanently atoned for sins.

### **What is symbolic about God announcing Jesus' birth to some of the lowliest members of society?**

By letting the shepherds know about the good news of Jesus' birth and sending them to meet Him, God made it clear that no one was outside His love. The Messiah came for everyone. Verse 9 tells us "an angel of the Lord" appeared to the shepherds. The men were stunned and terrified by the angel's presence, but the angel quickly made it evident that his presence was cause for worship, not fear. God wanted the shepherds to know the good news about Jesus' work of salvation. This good news was a reason to stop what they were doing and worship God where they were.

**What did the angel reveal about Jesus' uniqueness? What three titles are given to Jesus in verse 11? What is significant about them?**

The angel announced the content of the good news, which signaled a new era in how God relates to sinful humanity. The angel heralded the Savior. In that culture, people usually thought of "saviors" as those who claimed to heal or to rescue from danger. Jesus would infuse the title with a much deeper meaning. He had come to save people from their sins (see Matt. 1:21). Luke further identified Jesus as Messiah the Lord. The translation "Messiah (or Christ) the Lord" emphasizes Jesus' identity as both Messiah and Lord. The term "Messiah" meant "anointed one." God chose (anointed) Jesus and set Him aside for a special purpose. Moreover, Jesus Himself was divine (the Lord).

**Of the truths about Jesus in these verses, which moves you to worship, and why?**

**As Jews, the shepherds probably knew a little something about the coming Messiah. What might they have thought about the mixed messages of "Savior" and "in a feeding trough"? How would you describe to someone that Jesus is fully divine and fully human?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:13-15.**

In case the shepherds harbored any doubts, a further sign ensued. A multitude of the heavenly host appeared. The word host signified an army from heaven present on earth. Instead of presenting themselves for battle, however, the heavenly host announced a message of peace. The host proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven." They worshiped the One God who revealed Himself in all His sovereign greatness to lowly, sinful human beings.

**What is the gospel message in verses 11-14?**

**What do we learn about God's love for us through the shepherds' encounter with the angels?**

Between the angel's announcement and the angelic song, we get an incredible picture of the gospel. The Messiah is here, He brings with Him our salvation and peace, and that deserves our praise and worship.

**Have someone read Matthew 2:3-5. How did the shepherds' reaction to the news of the Messiah's arrival compare to the religious leaders' reaction? What is significant about this contrast?**

Following the departure of the angels into heaven, the shepherds expressed their eagerness to go to Bethlehem. They recognized the Lord as the source of the revelation they had received (v. 15). A sense of expectancy and urgency on the part of the shepherds is evident. Verse 15 reports their first words as "Let's go straight to Bethlehem." Even though they had earthly responsibilities, these men knew they were experiencing something divine. We need to worship God with the same level of abandonment and expectancy.

**What keeps us from embracing the message of Jesus with the same abandonment as the shepherds?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 2:16-20.**

God first revealed the good news of Christ's birth to these humble shepherds. Verse 17 tells us they weren't about to keep their divine encounter to themselves. Being guests to the Messiah's birth announcement changed the way they saw themselves and gave their lives purpose beyond tending sheep.

**How has encountering Christ changed your identity? If you are a Christian, what is your ultimate purpose in life?**

The shepherds responded positively to Jesus' birth. They praised God. The Savior's birth represented hope. Christ's birth also can encourage us to respond positively to live a life of hope through faith in Him. We can worship God who gave His only Son to save us. We can proclaim this good news to others.

**How can we be more intentional about worshiping God for the birth of Jesus with our family, Christian friends, and non-Christian friends?**

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## **Application**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What things in your life are distracting you from delighting in Christ? How might you need to reevaluate your relationship with those things?**

**What are some ways to keep Jesus' sacrificial work which began with His birth—central to your thinking as you go about your week?**

**Why is Jesus' birth good news for "all the people"? What is our church doing to help spread the news around the world? How are you helping, or how can you get involved?**

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## **Pray**

Thank God for Jesus' humble birth and sacrificial death. Pray that God would inspire your group members to worship God boldly and passionately in light of His grace towards us in Christ.

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## **Commentary**

2:8. God chose a small group of humble shepherds to be the first to hear about Christ's nativity. That the earliest witnesses included shepherds was most appropriate for the birth of the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God. Too, these shepherds were faithfully carrying out their duties, keeping watch in the fields to protect their flock from predators of the night. God rewarded their faithfulness by sending His messenger to declare to them the birth of His Son.

2:9. The shepherds likely were going about their usual routines when the quiet night was shattered by the appearance of an angel of the Lord. The angel is not identified by name. The absence of a definite article (in Greek) separates the identification of this messenger from "the angel of the Lord" who is mentioned in the Old Testament and whom some scholars believe to have been the pre-incarnate Christ. (See Gen. 16:7-14; 22:11-18; Ex. 3:2; and Judg. 6:11-12.) The natural reaction of human beings to supernatural appearances is fear. These shepherds were terrified as they encountered the angelic messenger and were surrounded by the "glory of the Lord," by which the darkness was turned into brilliant light. The phrase glory of the Lord refers to the unique manifestation of God's presence.

2:10. Quieting the shepherds' fears, the angel declared his purpose for being there. Far from doing them harm, the messenger had come with good news of great joy. The single word translated "I announce good news" is the verb form of the same word from which we get evangelism. The root word is "angelion," message or news, from which we also derive angel. The good messenger from heaven was bringing a good message! This news would produce unspeakable joy in the hearts of those who heard and received the One of whom the message spoke. Such wonderful news is not for a select group of people, but for all the people. Although the Jewish people believed the Messiah was uniquely promised to them, God intended His Son to be the Savior of the world. At the end of His earthly ministry Jesus would command His followers to make disciples of all people groups, every nationality, in every part of the world (see Matt. 28:19-20).

2:11-12. The cause of celebration was the birth of the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Each phrase of this announcement is important. Noting that the birth occurred in Bethlehem, the city of David, this verse does more than identify a location. It refers to the fulfillment of prophetic promise. The three titles of Jesus are distinct, yet unified. He is the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah sent by God. He is Lord of all creation. He saves us when we acknowledge who He is and trust in Him as our Savior and God's Son. In case the shepherds had doubted the reality before them, the angel offered a way for them to recognize this

particular baby. Their sign would be finding the child lying in a manger. Undoubtedly, not many newborns would be sleeping in stables that night, even in overcrowded Bethlehem.

2:13. These heavenly declarations brought praise to God and good news to the human race. No longer was the angel alone, but without warning a multitude of the heavenly host appeared. The natural function of the heavenly choir was to praise God. If believers are to become accustomed to the roles they will have in heaven, they should spend more time on earth praising God for the gracious gift of His Son.

2:14. Demonstrating what should be the joyous expression of everyone who encounters the reality of Christ, the angels filled the sky with worship as they gave glory to God in the "highest heaven." The term highest heaven described the unique dwelling place of God, who at the same time is present in every part of the universe. The birth of the Savior not only glorified God but also made peace possible on earth to people whom God favors. Luke used what some have described as contrasting parallel expressions to demonstrate God's grace. God reached down to people. Heaven touched the earth through Jesus. The glory of God is the peace pact that He made in the sacrificial gift of His Son.

2:15. No one should be able to hear the good news about Jesus without wanting to meet Him personally. After the angels departed, the shepherds held counsel among themselves about what to do. They agreed they should go straight to Bethlehem. Nothing would delay or detour them. They had to see this thing that had occurred. The shepherds did not have any doubt about the validity of this news. That the Lord had made known the birth of the Christ was enough for them. For the shepherds the term Lord referred to God the Father. They would soon meet the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son.

2:16-18. The shepherd's reaction was one of haste. They did not wait; they hurried to see the Son of God. We are not told how the shepherds found the particular inn whose stable housed the baby. We are explicitly told that they found the family exactly where the angels had said. What did the shepherds do at the sight of Jesus? Luke's account gives no clue. Most likely, they knelt in awe and worshiped before Him. However, we do know exactly what they did afterward: They reported the message. The message included the angelic announcement and the miraculous reality they had witnessed. The phrase "all who heard it" perhaps included people from the inn. Those who heard the shepherds' witness were "amazed" at the witness of the shepherds. The Greek word for amazed describes "wonder" or "marvel." The word portrays a positive, happy reaction, not perplexity or doubt.

2:19. While everyone else continued to talk about the events, Mary treasured in her heart everything that had occurred. Each word of the witnesses was precious treasure, and Mary

gently placed each in the safekeeping of her heart. This verse does not mean Mary decided to keep the news of Jesus to herself but that she valued all her experiences related to Jesus. The mother of the Christ child pondered the meaning of all she had been told and had experienced. Meditating on them, she mulled the events over and over in her mind. Her reaction was not the intellectual analysis of an objective observer but rather the emotional response of a mother whose life was devoted to the Son she had just borne.

2:20. Finally the shepherds returned to caring for their flock. The spectacular happenings of the night did not exempt them from their responsibilities but gave new meaning to their work. As they went home, they were glorifying and praising God. The natural response of anyone who has met Jesus is to magnify the Lord. After seeing Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, the shepherds praised God and shared the message they received. The good news of the Savior is too important to keep to ourselves. Its joy is to be shared with others.