

So Close and Yet So Near: Shepherds

Welcome/Prayer

Foreword

During this Advent season, which our sermon series is following, we've been looking at how people responded to the news of Jesus' birth. Some chose to keep their distance; others drew near to Him. With this message, we're going to look at how the shepherds responded upon receiving the message of Christ's birth.

Introduction

In the ancient world, shepherding was considered the lowliest of professions. Shepherds were social outcasts and considered religiously "unclean." Yet, when it came time to broadcast the news of the Savior's birth, they were the first persons to be contacted by the heavenly messengers. It was this group who first received and responded to the news that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem.

1. If you had exciting news to share, who would you tell first? Why?
2. Why do you think God chose the shepherds to be the first recipients of the good news about Jesus' birth?

Preparation

Read the following text related to today's message:

Luke 2:8-11, 15-20 (NIV)

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

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." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 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.

Break it Down

Having learned from the angel that God had come close to them, the shepherds did what was necessary to be near the Christ-child. We would do well to follow their example.

Like the shepherds, we come near to Christ by...

Receiving the message of salvation.

The angel's message was personalized for the shepherds. They needed a Savior (as do all of us), and they needed saving (as do all of us). By realizing that we are in desperate need of a Savior and then welcome and receive the message of salvation, we, too, will draw near to Christ.

We never get closer to Jesus than when we receive the message of salvation and realize that we are in desperate need of what Christ has to offer.

1. What evidence do you see that our world needs a Savior?
2. How and when did you come to that realization yourself?
3. What change(s) has (have) receiving God's salvation brought to your life?

Finding Jesus.

Instead of just talking about what the angel had told them, the shepherds did something about it. There was a sense of urgency in them ("they hurried off," ref. v. 16), and this excitement made them determined to find Jesus and draw near to Him. When we take that spiritual journey...through prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, private/public worship...we will find Jesus and be able to be near Him.

1. How did you "find" Jesus? Or, how did He find you?
2. What are some things we can do to insure we find Christ and stay close to Him?

Sharing with others.

According to Luke, the shepherds were the first evangelists of the Christian faith. They had no formal training, and they were not credentialed by any denomination. Their only qualification was that they had an important message to share. When we share the message of Christ with others, we come near to the One who has come so close to us and enable others to draw near to Him, as well.

1. What do you typically talk about when you get together with family and friends? (especially around the holidays)
2. Describe a time when you witnessed to someone and it brought either you or that person closer to Christ.

Singing God's praises.

Just as the shepherds were the first Christian evangelists, they were also the first Christmas carolers. When we sing God's praises, especially for what He has done through His Son, Jesus, we come near to the Lord and experience His power and presence.

1. What is your favorite Christmas carol? What makes it special?
2. Describe a time when you have been drawn into God's presence through music.

Conclusion

God has come so close to us through the birth of His Son. Now is the time to draw near to Him by receiving the message of salvation, by seeking and finding Jesus, by sharing Him with others, and by singing His praises.

1. Who is someone you can share the gospel with or invite to our church, especially at this time of year?
2. What is one thing you can do to make sure you stay close to the Lord in 2015?

Close in Prayer