



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 2:8-21

To understand how the birth of Jesus happened.

The Foolish of the World

One of the earmarks of the kingdom of God is that those who the world deems as foolish are actually given wisdom, and those who are wise in this world are actually fools. Paul reminds the believers in Corinth of their social standing: “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor. 1:26). However, that won’t stop God from using them; in fact, it makes it more probable: “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor. 1:27-29). God has a habit of choosing the most unlikely people to work through.

In this week’s lesson, this could not be *more* true. The first visitors to see the newly born Lord are not the religiously powerful, nor the upper-echelon of society, nor the skilled or learned, but the lowly and oft-rejected shepherds. Their part in this story is not unintentional; there is a clear message being sent by bringing them into this narrative - God will use whomever He chooses regardless of how uncommon or unpopular it might be according to worldly standards.

The Same Region

Verse 8 indicates to us that the events that are about to follow are not too far removed geographically from the previous verses of chapter 2. While Mary is giving birth in the bottom floor of Joseph’s family home, not too

far away are shepherds out in a field “keeping watch over their flock by night” (Lk. 2:8). Below are some key details regarding these events.

SHEPHERDS

That God chooses to bring this news to shepherds should not surprise us, given His propensity to use the most unlikely individuals to accomplish His most incredible purposes. Shepherds were, during this time, highly questionable individuals. They were a nomadic sort, rarely enjoying regular human community, and thus they were mistrusted by the general public. However, their involvement is a fulfillment of what Zechariah prophesied: “He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate” (Lk. 1:52). Already, the things Zechariah prophesied are coming to pass after the birth of Jesus. It is also interesting that Jesus will take on the title of “Good Shepherd,” given the notably questionable reputation of shepherds. In taking on such a title, Jesus is undoing the negative connotation for shepherds and also bringing fulfillment to Ezekiel 34:11-16.

ANGELS

In chapter 1 we were introduced to one angel, Gabriel. Verse 9 introduces yet another angel, but this time unnamed: “And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.” Whether or not this is Gabriel is irrelevant. Notice that the shepherds reaction to angels is similar to Zechariah’s and Mary’s as well, in that they were terrified. Angels are intimidating creatures, apparently.

THE GOOD NEWS

The angels proclaim a message to the shepherds: “And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” It is noteworthy that this is the second time we see the word εὐαγγελίζω (euangelizō), the word from which we get our word that means “to preach the Gospel.” The first time we saw it was in Luke 1:19. Already, the Gospel is being proclaimed: “The Savior has come! Sin will be forgiven! Right standing before God is coming! The Savior has been born in the city of David, and you will know who He is when you see a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a feeding trough!”

HEAVENLY WORSHIP

Before they can respond, more angels appear in what is one of the most majestic worship scenes in the entire Bible: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!’” In an otherwise uneventful night in Bethlehem the Savior is born, and no fanfare is given nor any grandstanding. The same is not true in Heaven. The heavenly host are rejoicing at the wondrous work of God the Son taking on human flesh to redeem those who would cast themselves in faith upon Him.

The First Visitors

After these events took place, the shepherds went “with haste” to see if they could find the baby (Lk. 2:15-16). We aren’t told exactly how they found the holy family, but when they arrived “they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child” (Lk. 2:17). Verse 18 indicates that “all who heard it” were filled with wonder. The question is, “who does all include?” Recall the birth narrative in the previous lesson, and that Mary and Joseph were at the family house. With the shepherds arriving at the family house, it is reasonable to assume that they were greeted by not only Joseph and Mary, but also all of Joseph’s family staying there as well.

MARY'S RESPONSE

Mary had already been visited by Gabriel, and impregnated by the Holy Spirit as a virgin. She didn't need confirmation of the things that happened to her. Her response is a response of edification: "But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19). The word for "treasure" means "to preserve." She thought about what the shepherds saw and heard, and preserved them in her heart by thinking on them over and over. This was a miraculous event in and of itself, and it all was connected to her and this new baby.

THE SHEPHERD'S RESPONSE

The shepherds were equally impacted: "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (Lk. 2:20). They went back to their fields to continue their work, but they did return as the same men they were when they left. They had an angelic encounter in the field followed by a divine encounter at Joseph's family's home. They returned to work praising God for the entire experience. Imagine the impact and witness they likely had after this, and yet how despondent people likely were because of their profession.

THE NAME GIVEN

After eight days, when it was time for the baby to be circumcised, they did as they were told and named Him Jesus. Like John, and unlike the cultural norms of this time, Jesus was not named until eight days after He was born. The connection between Him and John continues even in the way they are named; first, prescribed by an angel, and second, given after circumcision.

What About Now?

One major takeaway is the effect that the work of God has on all parties, even when it is difficult to understand. This event was certainly a strange one, and yet the results of it were edifying for all involved. The shepherds were changed, Mary was impacted, and God was glorified. Whenever God works in our lives, even when we don't understand it fully, you can tell if it's valid by the way it not only lines up with Scripture, but edifies those involved and brings glory to God.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 2:8-9. When and where did the events of this passage take place? Who did the angel visit? Why is this significant? How did they respond to seeing the angel?

2. Read Luke 2:10. What did the angel say to them? What is implied by him saying, "fear not?" How is this consistent with other angel sightings in Luke's Gospel thus far?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 2:11-12. In your own words, write down all of the significant parts of this message.

2. Read Luke 2:13-14. Who else appeared suddenly? What were they doing and saying?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 2:15-16. When the angels left, what did the shepherds say to one another? Where did they go, and who did they find?

2. Read Luke 2:17-18. What did they do when they saw baby Jesus, just as the angels said? Who all else was there, and how did they respond to what the shepherds said?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 2:19-20. How did Mary respond? What happened to the shepherds after this?

2. Read Luke 2:21. When did Mary and Joseph name their baby Jesus? Why is this significant?

Week 7 Discussion: The Most Unlikely People

The involvement of the shepherds is socially strange, and yet biblically predictable. God has a knack for using the most unlikely people. Talk as a group about why this is actually a very hopeful thing. If God can use them, he can use us too!

1. Icebreaker: How does it make you feel to know that God can use the most unlikely people for His purposes?
2. How does this change the way you listen to other unlikely people who have had a life-changing God encounter?
3. Why do you think God uses unlikely people?
4. If God chose to use you for His purposes, how would others in your life respond?
5. If God doesn't need a person to be qualified in order to use them, what's the point of becoming qualified?
6. How can the church reinforce the need for us to strive to be regular, "unlikely" people?

Takeaways:

1. Angels come to a group of shepherds and announce to them the birth of the Savior.
2. The first visitors to the newly born Lord are the lowly and unlikely shepherds.