

“The Unseen Glory in Christ’s Story”

**Scripture: Luke 2:8-20**

December 14, 2025– 8:15 & 11:00 am services

Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA

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**Introduction**

This morning, we will be turning our attention toward a part of the Christmas story - the story of shepherds in a field. This is not a sermon on doing something, but rather it is meant to slow us down and give us an opportunity to reflect on the glory of Christ’s story that changed the world, and that we sometimes miss in the birth of our Savior. So, it is my prayer that in the midst of the distractions of the end of the year, the struggles you are facing, that the glory of the Lord would shine brightly in your heart and mind and would move you toward hope and joy this day. With that introduction, let’s turn to Luke chapter 2.

**Scripture Reading**

Luke 2:8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

Luke 2:14 “Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Luke 2:15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste....

This is the word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. [Is 40:8]*

Let’s pray together.

**Shepherds in Darkness**

A few years ago, while we were living in southern Peru, our team took a trip to visit Colca Canyon – the third deepest canyon in the world (almost 11,000 ft. deep). To get to the canyon, you have to drive quite a distance and stay in a town that sits at around 12,000 feet.

Interestingly, the reason I bring this trip up now is not because of the depths of those canyons, or the heights of those mountains, but actually because of how rural it was. The place we stayed in, where rare vicuñas llamas, sheep and cattle grazed, gave us the opportunity to see some of the most impressive evening skies we’ve ever seen.

Miles from any city lights, it was so dark that the stars in the sky were overwhelming. High in those Andes mountains, far from the city, we experienced some of the thickest darkness I've ever experienced in my life.

And the setting of this Bible passage begins in darkness. Maybe not the same darkness I experienced, but then again, with no street light pollution to dilute the darkness, no car lights, no electricity, it must have been a thick darkness.

And that is the setting of our passage. It begins outside the city limits, in the fields, in the dark of the night we find some shepherds and their sheep.

And darkness was not the only challenge the shepherds faced.

***The life of a shepherd was difficult.*** There were physical dangers as they had to protect the sheep from lions, wolves and thieves. Cold at night and changing weather patterns would have also been a harsh part of the job. Being a shepherd was very hard labor, for very little pay.

And these shepherds were outside the city so their sheep could graze, but also because shepherds were largely disliked. They were considered unclean and unreliable. According to some rabbinic literature, we learn that herdsmen were looked down upon as thieves and tax collectors to such a degree that their witness in court was disregarded. They were considered lawless and dishonest. [Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 25b]<sup>1</sup>

They were marginalized by the religious class, and because Levitical laws of ritual purity restricted those who were unclean from participating (Lev. 11-15), it would have also made it difficult for those who were in contact with animals and dead animals to participate in temple worship. Since shepherds lived outside of towns, and often miles from Jerusalem, it would have also been particularly difficult to participate just geographically speaking.

In many ways these shepherds were alone. They were far from family for long periods of time, they were rejected by society and disregarded by the religious.

Like anyone else, they would face loneliness, financial strains, grief and hopelessness. Especially as they were taxed by the Romans who would have brought many additional challenges to their lives.

And the setting of this passage puts these ordinary shepherds here in the fields far off, in literal darkness, doing mundane, ordinary work.

And along with that literal darkness, we imagine that there was also a spiritually heavy sense of isolation from the people of God and from God himself.

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<sup>1</sup> While shepherds were seen to have a more noble occupation in the book of Genesis, some argue that Egypt prejudiced Israel against shepherding. According to Rabbinic literature it appears that shepherds were disqualified from acting as witnesses in court and were as despised as tax collectors and thieves. Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 25b. <https://www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.25b.15?lang=bi>

The setting begins in the fields, in the dark of the night.

The historical setting reminds us that the shepherds and all Israelites were under Roman rule, and were still hoping for a rescue operation, a removal from their current oppressors. Shepherds had no social, economic or religious status. What could they do to change their circumstances?

### **Our Human Limitations and hopelessness**

Over the years, I've given several messages about the sin and temptation to complain and grumble. We live in one of the most advanced and wealthy periods of time ever. We have anything we could ever want at our fingertips, and yet we still struggle.

While we are very blessed to live where we do here in Washington state, it is easy to find things to complain and grumble about. We're too tired, too busy, anxious or overwhelmed, no one appreciates what we're doing, everything costs too much. It can feel like the whole world around us is in chaos. There are so many problems in our own lives, and in the lives of those around us.

While very different than the shepherds, we might feel our own level of discouragement. We might have more power or resources and live in a powerful country, but what can we really do to change our circumstances and the darkness and confusion that we see in the world around us? Is there any hope?

### ***Is there hope?***

As I was working on this sermon, I remembered these words I had heard from Jane Goodall, a famous animal behavior scientist and environmental advocate. As an unbeliever, she clearly sensed that there were problems in the world. Here is what she said:

We don't want to bring children into a world where, from the very beginning, they believe everything is hopeless. We don't want to do that; we **must** not do that.... ***If we get together, if we roll up our sleeves and take action, each of us doing what we feel is important, then there's hope for the future of the planet.*** [Jane Goodall – emphasis added]

“If we get together, if we roll up our sleeves and take action, each of us doing what we feel is important, then there's hope for the future of the planet.”

I think most people would agree with her that bringing children into a world where everything is hopeless and depressing is not ideal. No one wants to do that.

And yet the problems we face in this world, and the well-being of the future of the planet, cannot be resolved by our rolling up our sleeves and taking action. If this is our only hope, then we should feel pretty hopeless.

Can a world living in darkness and strife really resolve its own problems?

Looking back at the pages of Biblical history, even the godliest individuals in Scripture were not able to help keep themselves, or Israel, out of trouble.

And if none of our forefathers or patriarchs could do it, what makes us think that we have things more put together now? Or that we are any different?

If the Bible has taught us anything, there is nothing new under the sun. Even the best of the best in Israelite history were sinners.

Even God's covenant people, could not "roll up our sleeves and take action" enough to fix the darkness of the world.

Thousands of years of human failure have proven that. So, what is our hope?

Luke presents hope as a contrast to the darkness.

### **Contrast with God's Glory**

See, Israel was in a deep darkness.

Israel finds herself under the political oppression of Rome, and Herod the Great. A pending census, no doubt leading to further taxation and oppression.

It had been close to 400 years since Malachi the prophet had uttered God's word to Israel. And the silence from God's prophets was deafening.

But God had warned:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord God,  
"when I will send a famine on the land—  
not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,  
but of hearing the words of the Lord. [Amos 8:11-12]"

Israel had been in a "famine from hearing the words of the Lord" and they were feeling it.

And it is there, in the hopelessness, darkness, and silence that **God breaks through the silence with his glory and power.**

And the setting, the power and the glory are not random.

The words of the angel saying, "I bring you **good news** of great joy that will be for all the people" tip off commentators that this language and even the imagery is coming from Isaiah 40-60.

Listen carefully to these words that resemble the message and words of the angel of the Lord:

Isaiah 40:9-11:

"...O Zion, **herald of good news**;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, **herald of good news**;

lift it up, **fear not**;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
“**Behold your God!**”  
<sup>10</sup> **Behold, the Lord God comes with might**,  
and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

In no uncertain terms, Isaiah describes a herald (also another name for an angel) bringing **good news** with **might**. The good news of a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

“**Fear not**” for “**behold your God!**” is with you. The glory in the Highest is with you and comes with might.

These words are the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, and they show the contrast of what was expected versus what took place.

We will see absolute darkness and bright light. Glory in the highest and the humility of the lowest.

Look at the way Luke gives us these stark contrasts in this text in order to further show God’s glory.

1) **In the darkness of night, the Lord’s glory *shines brightly*.**

There is no room for confusion here. The shepherds were keeping watch over their flock by night (v.8), and then the glory of the Lord broke unmistakably into the darkness in that field. It wasn’t a lamp, a fire, or a vision. The shepherds are so overwhelmed by the glorious light and the angelic presence and the heavenly hosts that the text says that ***they were filled with fear***. The several shepherds all see the same thing and immediately agree that they should go with haste in response to this message. There is no questioning in their minds.

And once again the ancient prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled:

Isaiah 60:1-2

“Arise, shine, for **your light has come**,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
<sup>2</sup> For behold, **darkness shall cover the earth**,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but **the Lord will arise upon you**,  
and **his glory will be seen upon you**.”

The passage in Luke and Isaiah contrast light and darkness. Thick darkness has covered all the earth, but your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you! Darkness and hopelessness are defeated in the light of Jesus.

## 2) **Glory of God and the Lowliness of Shepherds.**

A second powerful contrast we see here is the glory of the angel of the Lord in contrasted with the least of men.

The angel of the Lord doesn't show up to a King, or to an Israelite leader. *And*, He doesn't reveal his glory to *everyone*.

And not only does he reveal his glory in the angel of the Lord, but then God revealed his glory in a multitude of the angelic heavenly hosts praising God and saying "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

What a powerful demonstration of God's glory, of a multitude or army of angels. Lifting praise to God! What a sight that must have been to witness!

God, in his perfect wisdom, goes into the lowliest of situations, to the rejected, marginalized, lonely, shepherds. He goes to *rural* Judea, likely rural grazing areas outside small towns in Bethlehem. Fields not in town, but out in the open.

It would be something like the equivalent of something like God waiting for hundreds, no, thousands of years to reveal the greatest news ever told, and deciding to reveal that news and his all-powerful glory in the most spectacular way seen to mankind.

And then, to our surprise, giving that privilege and message to sheep ranchers or farmers in rural areas of Eastern Washington! Not even Seattle, Los Angeles, NYC or Washington D.C.!

What?! Tell me that isn't hard to get your head around! Nothing against sheep ranchers, but it seems to me that there would be more strategic people to announce, you know, THE MOST IMPORTANT NEWS ever given to mankind?!

I mean, who could the shepherds tell? As I mentioned earlier, no one would have believed them! Their testimony was not even valid in court!

THE most glorious thing to ever happen was, humanly speaking, announced to the least glorious witnesses. God in his perfect wisdom reveals the glory of God to the least of these.

No one would have expected this.

## 3) **Angels and Divine Glory**

And yet, even in the angel's presence, there is a contrast. For their radiance helpfully highlights God's ultimate glory in even greater ways.

Looking back to v. 9 we see that the shepherds were absolutely terrified at the presence of the glory of the Lord. As with many other accounts of angels appearing to men and women, an angel who appears out of nowhere and brings good news still must always begin with the words, "do not fear."

Just before this passage, angels say twice, “do not be afraid” – first to Zechariah, and then to Mary. And now here in v. 10, we see that the shepherds are told “fear not.” [Luke 1:13, 30, 2:10]

This was necessary because God’s glory shown all around them.

And yet, as created beings, the angels’ glory is derived from God who is their Creator. [Ps. 148:2-5] People fear the angels *because* of the glory of God. For their glory cannot and does not compare with God’s eternal glory.

For we read that even the angels, when they are face to face with God, cover their faces as they say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts...” [Is. 6:3] In Revelation we read that the four living creatures, with six wings, day and night, never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” [Rev. 4:8]

Of course, when Moses even approached the Lord in the burning bush, he was to remove his sandals for he was on holy ground. And later when he asked to see God’s glory, God responded, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” [Ex. 33:18-23]

And then, “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai...he was not aware that his face was radiant **because he had spoken with the LORD**. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and *they were afraid to come near him*....” So, Moses put a veil over his face for the sake of the people [Exodus 34:29–35].

See, even in just these few instances, we can begin to appreciate the eternal glory of God. A glory so magnificent and so overwhelming that even those who behold God in visions fall at his feet as though dead [Rev. 1:17].

And we begin to see how the glory that the angels emanate is, in the same way, no glory of their own, but the glory of God. Which is why they too praise his name and refuse to be worshipped by man.

And all of these realities help us to see how all the glory belongs to God alone.

### **God’s Glory Revealed in a Manger**

And understanding the glory of God gives us pause, because it is God’s glorious power and wisdom that does what we limited human beings cannot do.

While rolling up our sleeves will not change the human condition, God can. And God, in all his glory, demonstrates that he not only has the power to repair the broken human race, but he does so in his glorious Son becoming flesh.

And this is the message the angel was proclaiming. “I bring you good news of great joy!”

What is this great news? That God is the solution to our hopelessness.

God is the savior. The Messiah. He is the one who came to make all things right.

The angel's good news is that God himself has come into the world to bring peace between God and man. He became man to save mankind from eternal death. Something that is only possible through God's power.

And that is what God did. Listen to how John describes the glory of God made flesh:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” [John 1:14]

Then Paul writes that Jesus:

“...is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” [Colossians 1:15]

And in Hebrews we read that Jesus is:

“...the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” [Hebrews 1:3]

And what makes the birth of Jesus even more incredible is that he not only announces the good news of the salvation to the least of these, but he also comes down to earth as the least of these.

Though our King of Kings, Jesus was born not in a palace, but in a manger. He wasn't clothed in royal robes or luxurious clothes. He was born in a manger in swaddling cloths. His visitors were the despised outcasts – the shepherds.

I cannot even imagine the filth of that manger, or the condition of those swaddling cloths.

And yet, our Almighty God sent his one and only Son to be born in a manger. Born to the least of these, surrounded by lowly shepherds, in terribly humble conditions.

What a contrast! From the highest heavenly places to the lowest of early places.

But again, the ancient prophecy of Isaiah clearly said:

<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup> **He will tend his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms;**  
he will carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead those that are with young.” **Isaiah 40:10-11**

From glory in the highest, down to the lowest of shepherds. God comes in might and glory, but he also comes gentle and lowly. Like a shepherd he will tend his flock. In humility. The glory of the Lord in all his fullness will become flesh, as a shepherd. Despised and rejected.

This is the good news that the angel of the Lord was pointing to.

He was pointing with the mighty power of God, that all the glorious fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Jesus. [Col 1:19, 2:9]

### **Comfort and Joy**

And while I wanted to avoid spilling the Christmas story too soon, I just couldn't contain myself.

The next verses read:

<sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

And the reason they have to be included here is because these verses show the power of God's glory.

For not only do these shepherds hear and go with haste to Bethlehem, but they are also the ones to tell Mary and Joseph what happened. Those who had been rejected by all people now became God's messengers and evangelists!

And the beauty is we get to see the fulfillment of the angel's message, "I bring you good news of great joy." For the shepherds returned to their sheep with great joy. Glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Can you imagine the joy in their hearts? To know that they had met their Savior – the Messiah!??? To know (even if only vaguely understood) that in that baby in that dirty manger, in swaddling cloths, surrounded by shepherds, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell?!

The beauty of this good news is that all the glory is God's. The shepherds weren't seeking God – they were likely mostly asleep. The shepherds didn't contribute anything. This was all God's doing. God broke into their lives and into the world with all his glorious power.

And in so doing, he brought hope, peace and joy into all the world.

And the interesting takeaway for us is that God has already broken into the world. He has given us every reason to hope and rejoice. We have reason for hope, and we have the reason to rejoice.

And yet, like the shepherds, we too go back to ordinary life. Back into the challenges of this life and the hardships that sin and the oppression of this world bring.

But we are changed. We have the comfort and the joy of knowing that our struggles are temporary. That our glorious God has not forgotten us.

He who came into this world will come again and will come with glory and power to usher us all into his glorious kingdom – the new heavens and the new earth.

And until that day, we are like the shepherds, heralds of his message of comfort and joy.

### **In Conclusion**

As we face moments of darkness and confusion in this world, may the glory of Christ break into our hearts and minds, reminding us that in the midst of the discouragement and confusion in this world, we know what the shepherds did and more: that Jesus, the Son of God, is our Messiah. And that in all his glory he reigns overall. And that is the reason we can have true peace and joy for all eternity. Amen.

### **Sources referenced in this message**

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