

**Title: The Wonder of God's Guests (Story of the Shepherds)**

**Text: Luke 2:8-20**

**Introduction:**

Preaching on familiar stories is always a challenge especially those centered on Christmas. I imagine most here are familiar with the facts of the shepherd's story. When I read these words by Luke, I can't help but hear Linus' voice recall the centerpiece of this narrative in "*A Charlie Brown Christmas*" on how angels came to shepherds at night to announce the birth of the Christ-child. The shepherds go find the manger where Mary and Joseph are holding the baby Jesus and then we have that timeless "Polaroid" moment, a picture that has etched in practically all our images that we see it on numerous Christmas cards, nativity scenes and porcelain figures.

In preparation for this message, I have read and re-read Luke's account of this story at least a dozen times, combed over four or five commentaries and read a few popular Christmas books on the Nativity and I had a hard time finding anyone discussing in depth the Shepherds. Though they are perhaps one of the most popular and perhaps revered characters in the Christmas story, it is as if history has cast them to a glorified backdrop figure. With all the volumes written on Christmas story, very little of it focuses on these men. However, though there is much nostalgia surrounding the shepherds, I also believe **THEIR PURPOSE REMAINS FOR MANY OF US A MYSTERY**. I find familiarity can blind us to some obvious questions.

1. Who were these men?
2. Why did God choose to reveal Himself to them and not more famous or influential political and religious leaders?
3. What did He hope to gain from them? How did God want them to respond?
4. Did God get what He was hoping for?
5. What universal principle(s) are we to draw for those of us who know two millennia removed from these events?

In reading and reading this story, what I discerned was **A SIMPLE PATTERN THAT IS DISCERNABLE IN MOST, IF NOT ALL, NARRATIVES IN SCRIPTURE.** In fact this pattern can be found, I believe, in any passage of the Bible. It is a pattern that reveals God's heart and will for any person that He chooses to disclose Himself too. For some people this pattern is blatantly obvious. For others, they spend their entire lives tragically never discerning it. Either life and death, reward and punishment, wisdom and ignorance, contentment and restlessness, peace and chaos will come to those who do their part to pursue this pattern. The pattern is as follows:

**GOD'S REVELATION - General and Specific**

**OUR RESPONSE - Accept or Reject (the weak link in the chain)**

**COMMISSIONING - Purpose and Plan**

**JOY AND AMAZEMENT - Fulfillment**

What sets this pattern in motion is **GOD'S REVELATION.** The God of creation, the God of endless power, infinite wisdom, eternal age, enduring love and compassion has invited mankind, you and I, into His inner circle. To do this, He reveals Himself to us. **REVELATION.** It is a bridge that can **ONLY** be built one way from heaven to earth.

**Preview:**

- 1. How does God REVEAL Himself to mankind?**
- 2. What are we to do with God's revelation?**
- 3. What impact does GOD'S REVELATION have on our life.**

Let's look at the story of the shepherds and see how we can answer these questions.

## The CHOICE of revelation:

*Luke 2:8* And there were **SHEPHERDS** living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

Among the occupations in the Holy Land in the first century, shepherding had a **LOWLY** place. Some scholars believed they held a **DESPISED** place. Because their work made them **CEREMONIALLY UNCLEAN**, shepherds were considered **UNTRUSTWORTHY**. They were debarred from giving evidence in court - an interesting fact given the fact they become the **FIRST WITNESSES**, the **FIRST EVANGELISTS** in the Gospels.

The text tells us they were “**LIVING**” in the fields. The long days and nights often made for a **lonely life**. Their occupation required them to provide **WATER, FOOD, SHELTER, MEDICATION, AID** and **PROTECTION**. Because of lack of rainfall in the Holy Land, the shepherd had to constantly move the sheep to water. Sheep could not find water on their own. Shepherds would have medicine on hand. Bottom line: **WITHOUT THE SHEPHERD, SHEEP WERE HELPLESS**.

Shepherding was strenuous, even **DANGEROUS** work. It was expected that the shepherd would come between the lion or bear when one would attack the flock. The text tell us they were “**KEEPING WATCH**” showing us the picture of one who protects while the sheep sleep often counting the sheep to ensure each one is safe.

There are no more “normal Joes” in ancient culture than shepherds. Definitely a blue-collar job. Essentially, they were “**COMMON FOLK**”. Imagine working the assembly line at the NUME plant on a graveyard shift and an angel appears.

**GOD REVEALS HIMSELF TO THE DOWNTRODDEN AND DESPISED. THEY REPRESENT THE LOWLY AND HUMBLE WHO RECEIVE GOD’S REVELATION.**

Thus, the most obvious implication is that **THE GOSPEL FIRST CAME TO THE SOCIAL OUTCASTS OF JESUS' DAY.** This would of course become a recurring theme for Luke. In fact Jesus' entire ministry is see through this light. **JESUS SEEKS OUT THE DOWNTRODDEN AND DESPISED AND ENJOYS HANGING OUT WITH THEM - PROSTITUTES, DIVORCED, DEMONIZED, TAX COLLECTORS, AND PROBABLY MORE PARTIES THAN YOU OR I WOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE AT.**

What is fascinating to me is that the entire drama that surrounds the birth of Jesus takes place **WITH NO PART GIVEN TO THE SECULAR OR RELIGIOUS RULERS OF THE LAND.** No politicians. No celebrities. No paparazzi. No athletes. No generals at the manger. No religious leaders. Just some blue collar workers whose testimony would be inadmissible in court.

When choosing the cover to His Christmas card, God chooses lowly shepherds as the front cover. They become God's P.R. department.

He is still doing that today. This point should encourage many here today. Society rates importance by at beauty, education, popularity, ethnicity, finances, talent and gifting. God seeks the forgotten, those who society rejects or ignores - the downtrodden and dejected. **No matter how society views you, how your parents view you or even how you view yourself, know that the God of heaven is chooses you.**

The **MODE** of revelation:

*Luke 2:9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

Now this is an often an **over-looked aspect** of the Christmas story. **Have you ever noticed how much SUPERNATURAL REVELATION is in the Christmas story? In fact, NO ONE COMES TO THE CHRIST-CHILD WITHOUT SUPERNATURAL REVELATION. We have DREAMS for JOSEPH, CELESTIAL OBJECTS guiding THE WISE MEN, IMPRESSIONS guiding SIMEON, PROPHETIC WORDS for ANNA and with ZECHARIAH, MARY and now THE SHEPHERDS, ANGELIC VISITATIONS.**

What I find fascinating about this observation is **NOT** the varied manner God uses to reveal Himself, **BUT THAT IN EACH CASE GOD COULD HAVE USED SCRIPTURE IN EACH CASE TO GUIDE THEM, BUT HE CHOOSE NOT TO. ZECHARIAH** could have read Malachi 4:5 and learn that *“one like the prophet Elijah would come before the Messiah.”* **MARY** could have read Isaiah 7:14 and learned that *“a virgin would give birth a son who will be called ‘Immanuel.’”* **JOSEPH** could have read Hosea 11:1 to read that *“God’s Son will be raised in Egypt.”* The wise men, if they had the Scriptures, could have read Micah 5:2 to learn that *“the Christ-child would be born in town of Bethlehem.”* In every case Scripture could have been used to guide people and was **NOT**.

Three facts I want to bring up here. **FIRST, GOD USES A VARIETY OF MEANS OF SPEAK TO HIS PEOPLE.** The New Testament shows us a variety of means. Peter and Paul had trances. John dreams. Prophetic words through the Antioch church and Philip’s daughters. Visions of a Macedonia man. **Personally, I do not see any indication in Scripture that God has ever suspended these means of communication. Some want to refer to that the closing of the canon of Scripture,**

but I see no Scriptural evidence to show that. Now I certainly don't believe these modes of revelation ADDS to Scripture, but like the Christmas story, supernatural means are used to show us HOW TO APPLY SCRIPTURE.

That being said, and secondly, "***THE PACKAGE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE UPS CARRIER.***" What I mean, in the big scope of things, **THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE MEANS BY WHICH IT CAME.**

Which brings up the last fact. ***SCRIPTURE IS TO BE USED TO TEST ALL REVELATION.*** Does the message coincide with the character and message of Scripture? We certainly see that here. The message of the angels could be seen as a series of OT verses.

## The MESSAGE of revelation

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news of great joy** that will be **for all the people**.”

Luke 2:11 Today in the town of David a **SAVIOR** has been born **TO YOU**; he is **CHRIST the LORD**.

Luke 2:12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Luke 2:13 ¶ Suddenly (actions associated with the supernatural world) a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel (such events typically only come in visions), praising God and saying, (Angels reveal to shepherds through praise)

Luke 2:14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **peace to men on whom his favor rests**.”

Now I want to focus in greater detail on the content of this message on our Christmas Eve service. For now I want to highlight the fact that much of what is being said here is taken right from the OT Scriptures. For instance the three titles given to Jesus

(**Savior, Christ and Lord**) are full of OT allusions. By the way, this is the **ONLY** place in Scripture where all three title are found in one verse.

“**Savior**” finds its roots in the OT (Deut. 20:4; Josh. 22:22; Ps. 24:5; 25:5; Isa. 25:9). Deliverer from one’s enemies. God who delivers from various perils: enemies that seek to destroy and disease that seeks to kill.

“**Christ**” from the Greek word for “Anointed One” is indicative of His role as the promised Messiah. Psalm 2:2 is the main root of this.

“**Lord**” - key term for Jesus. Absolute sovereignty and divine relationship.

What I also find significant is that one angel is not enough to bring this message like Gabriel did to Zechariah and Mary. A host, hundreds if not thousands of angels are demanded this time. Angels reveal to shepherds through praise.

Their message comes through music particularly a choir. The means here is a choir. Rather comical picture when you think about it. { Choir picture before a few shepherds. }

The **RESPONSE** to revelation

Luke 2:15 ¶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.”

We find our selves at a critical moment in the story. God has revealed himself. Mankind responds. God speaks. We act in response. **That is how it is SUPPOSED to work. Right?** Well, here is where the story could have taken a left turn. **Somewhere between verses 15 and 16 A SIGNIFICANT MOMENT OCCURS. IT IS A MOMENT THAT OCCURS IN OUR LIVES EVERY DAY.** Though the text does not say it, I imagined the shepherds huddled around and discussed what just happened. I am sure there were dissenting voices. There always are.

*Probably some were DOUBTING what just happened explaining it through bad batch of humus.*

*Others may have been TOO FRIGHTENED to do anything.*

*THE RESPONSIBILITY TYPES reminded themselves that if we leave who will take care of the sheep.*

But others said, “Forget all that, let’s go and see if what the angels said was true.”

I believe **THIS** is the “make or break” moment in the story. Imagine if the scene if dissenting voices prevailed and the shepherds never left the fields. Our manger scenes would have a few less characters. They could have buried God’s revelation and with it any chance for future ministry and accompanying joy.

I believe this cycle repeats itself every day. It is happening now in this room. Through His word, the God of creation is making His appeal to everyone in this room and He is looking for a response.

For those who do not know Christ, God is appealing you to come near and discover what a great Savior Jesus is.

For those who know Him, you are not exempt. God reveals daily portions of Himself, His will, His heart and His plan to you every day. What are you doing with it? Are you debating with Him? Are you arguing with Him? Are you simply not concerned and ignoring Him? { Laps around Sinai }

What makes these shepherds icons for eternity is the fact **THEY RESPONDED TO GOD'S REVELATION.** Will you and I do the same?

## The **VALIDATION** of revelation

Luke 2:16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

*This week Aaron and Shannon Lee had a baby girl, Anastasia Aryn Lee born on 12/15/09 at 8:27 am, 7 lbs 13 oz, 20 inches and a full head of hair at Valley Care in Pleasanton. Now I have learned enough from visiting new moms in the hospital. One thing that it is not always a good thing to show up a few hours after birth. Having three kids myself, babies are indeed beautiful. Birth is messy, especially if there is no hospital or mid wife. I am not sure Mary and Joseph wanted the shepherds there. Separated from family and friends, not able to find a doctor or mid-wife, sitting in a barn, they now strangers knock on the door with their sheep and want a peek.*

What I love about the shepherds is their persistence to **VALIDATE** the message. “So they hurried off and found...” For an engineer like me, I love this part of the story. They don’t take the revelation as fact. They go and validate it. *For those who sit here today and believe to follow Jesus is to leave your brains at the door, I hope you find comfort in this thought. I tell people, “If Christianity can not withstand the scrutiny of honest questions, than what good is it.”* We all have honest questions.

**There are questions of FACT.** *Is it true? Did Jesus really exist? Was He born in the Middle-East and did He walk the shores of Galilee? Did He preach about God’s love for humanity and God’s heart to resolve the dilemma of sin? Did Jesus really perform miracles and yes, did He rise from the dead?* I tell you not to take any of these questions for granted. What has bothered me in the church is that most people

believe not because they have studied and found it to be true, but because someone they respect has told them it was so. **(Mohammed and coffee).**

**There are questions of FRIENDSHIP.** *Does God really care about me? Does He know my predicament? Does He really watch over the affairs of my life - my marriage, my children, my career, my health and my finances? Does He really interact in this world on my behalf.*

**There are also question of the FUTURE.** *What happens after death? Is there an afterlife? What is heaven and what is hell? Why do we even need a hell? What is heaven like?*

Now, I must say not everyone of these question are easy to answer, but I have found in my years of walking with Jesus, there is certainly a significant amount of evidence that give convincing proof of God's existence, His demonstration of love through Jesus Christ, the brilliance of His plan, His care over me and my family, the fact that he has a purpose and a calling for my life.

Just as the shepherds went to validate their revelation, some here need to validate the revelation given you. Don't sluff it off. Don't ignore it. Don't deny it. Investigate it.

The **CALL** to revelation

**Luke 2:17** When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

We **EXPERIENCE** God's revelation. We **RESPOND** to God's revelation. We **VALIDATE** God's revelation.. What I love about the **VALIDATION** stage is that it **results in a personal story**. **The theoretical is now replaced with the actual**. Now we are **COMMISSIONED TO GOD'S REVELATION**

I find it an amazing fact that the first **EVANGELIST** in the Christian era could not give credible evidence in a court case, but God found them viable witnesses to His Son's birth.

First Peter 1:12 (MSG) tells us that:

*"All they (the angels) were told was that they were serving you, you who by orders from heaven have now heard for yourselves—through the Holy Spirit—the Message of those prophecies fulfilled. **Do you realize how fortunate you are? Angels would have given anything to be in on this!**"*

The natural and right response to validated revelation is to share it **WITH OTHERS**. Angels do **NOT** have the right to share the Gospel. Only you and I can. **Heaven sees this as a glorious privilege**. **Many of earth view it as an embarrassing burden**. Just as God used words to create life in the abyss of the universe, you and I, as creatures made in His image, have the privilege to speak life into the vacuum of desperate and lonely souls. Christmas is not merely about exchanging gifts, visiting family, or going to church, **according to the Shepherds, Christmas is about sharing the revelation of the Christ-child to others**. The question for those of us taking our cues from the Bible on how to properly celebrate Christmas is to ask, "Who?" "Who will we see this week in our last days at the office, in the shopping mall, at the family Christmas meal needs to hear your personal story with the Christ-child?"

The **REWARD** of revelation

*Besides Health Care, the Copenhagen summit on Climate Change, and the release of Avatar, the big story the past two weeks is Tiger Woods.*

**14 majors**

**1 billion in endorsements**

**Athlete of the decade**

**Swim suit model as a wife**

**No contentment**

**Luke 2:18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.**

Every notice that there are no sad evangelists in the Bible. I believe one of the lost truths of Christianity is fact that joy is connected to sharing God's message.

**Luke 10:17 ¶ The seventy came back triumphant. "Master, even the demons danced to your tune!"**

**Luke 10:18 ¶ Jesus said, "I know. I saw Satan fall, a bolt of lightning out of the sky.**

**Luke 10:19 See what I've given you? Safe passage as you walk on snakes and scorpions, and protection from every assault of the Enemy. No one can put a hand on you.**

**Luke 10:20 All the same, the great triumph is not in your authority over evil, but in God's authority over you and presence with you. Not what you do for God but what God does for you—that's the agenda for rejoicing."**

**Luke 10:21 ¶ At that, Jesus rejoiced, exuberant in the Holy Spirit.**

If you find yourself living a joyless faith, perhaps it is because you have not shared your personal story of the Christ-child with others.

What I love is the audience's response - amazement. Luke's observation (v.18) that those who heard them "**were amazed**" (*ethaumasán*) is the first of his many comments on the enthusiastic response to the messianic proclamation. The next occurrence is when Mary and Joseph "marvel" at what Simeon says about their child (v.33). In v.47 everyone is "amazed" (*existánton*) at Jesus' answers in the temple discussion. The initial reaction of the audience of Jesus' opening declaration in the synagogue of Nazareth that the prophecy of Isaiah 61 was at that moment fulfilled

was amazement (4:22; cf. 8:25; 9:43; 11:14, 38; 20:26; 24:12, 41). There are also passages that use other words to describe a similar response (e.g., 4:15, 36; 5:26).

Just as the seventy two disciples returned (*hypestrepsan*) with joy after their preaching mission (10:17), so the shepherds returned (*hypestrepsan*) “glorifying and praising God” (v.20).

I can't help but contrast this to an adjective I hear far too often from believers, especially younger teens in the faith - **BORED**. **Rather, than amazement, we are bored.** There is no greater joy than to see a life transformed through the power of the Gospel.

Perhaps we have replaced the Shepherd's message of proclamation with religious routines of church services. Perhaps we have inherited a faith without a personal revelation. We learned the routines, the language, the culture of the church, but have no real defining moment of revelation. If we are honest, perhaps we are living off someone else's faith, someone else's encounter, someone else's story.

The Shepherds had a personal encounter, one they can't wait to share with others. Do you?





the  
**wonder**  
of Christmas

for nothing  
is impossible  
with God



The wonder of

*God's quest:*

the story of the  
Shepherds

for nothing is  
impossible with God



God's Revelation



Our Response



Commissioning



Joy and Amazement

# Revelation

path from God to us



God's Revelation



Our Response



Commissioning



Joy and Amazement

*Revelation*  
path from God to us



# The Wanderer

of God's revelation



1. The **CHOICE** of revelation

# The Choice

of God's revelation

8 And there were **shepherds** living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

Luke 2:8



# The Word

of God's revelation

1. The CHOICE of revelation
2. The **MODE** of revelation



# The Book

of God's revelation

9 An **angel** of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shown around them, and they were terrified.

Luke 2:9



# The Word

of God's revelation

1. The CHOICE of revelation
2. The MODE of revelation
3. The **MESSAGE** of revelation



# The Message

of God's revelation

<sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them,

*“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

Luke 2:10-12



# The Message

of God's revelation

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.*"

Luke 2:13-14



# The Word

of God's revelation

1. The CHOICE of revelation
2. The MODE of revelation
3. The MESSAGE of revelation
4. The **RESPONSE** to revelation



# The Response

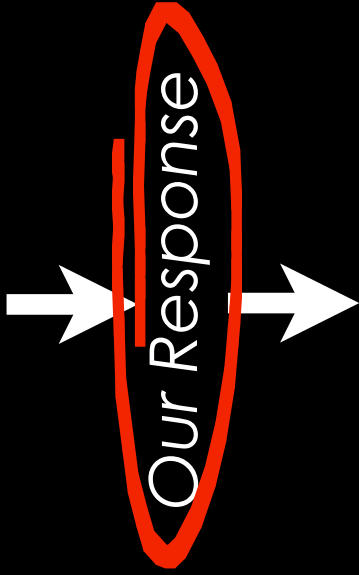
to God's revelation

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, **“Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”**

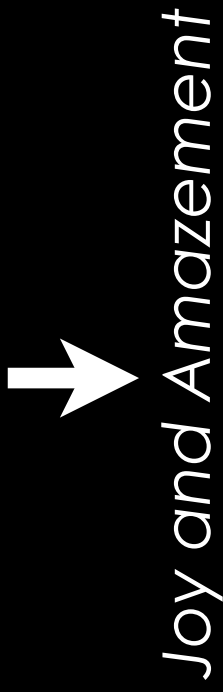
Luke 2:15



God's Revelation



Commissioning



*Revelation*  
path from God to us



# The Word

of God's revelation

1. The CHOICE of revelation
2. The MODE of revelation
3. The MESSAGE of revelation
4. The RESPONSE to revelation
5. The **VALIDATION** of revelation



# The Nativity

of God's revelation

<sup>16</sup> So **they hurried off and found** Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Luke 2:16



# The Word

of God's revelation

1. The CHOICE of revelation
2. The MODE of revelation
3. The MESSAGE of revelation
4. The RESPONSE to revelation
5. The VALIDATION of revelation
6. The **CALL** to revelation



# The Call

to God's revelation

**17** When they had seen him, **they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about the child,**

Luke 2:17



God's Revelation



Our Response



Commissioning



Joy and Amazement

*Revelation*  
path from God to us



# The Word

of God's revelation

1. The **CHOICE** of revelation
2. The **MODE** of revelation
3. The **MESSAGE** of revelation
4. The **RESPONSE** to revelation
5. The **VALIDATION** of revelation
6. The **CALL** to revelation
7. The **REWARD** of revelation



# The Revelation

of God's revelation

***18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.***

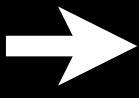
Luke 2:18



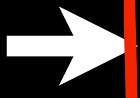
God's Revelation



Our Response



Commissioning



Joy and Amazement



*Revelation*  
path from God to us



# The Word

of God's revelation

1. The **CHOICE** of revelation
2. The **MODE** of revelation
3. The **MESSAGE** of revelation
4. The **RESPONSE** to revelation
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6. The **CALL** to revelation
7. The **REWARD** of revelation





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