

Adore - Unto You

December 16-17

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

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

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*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

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,” (Luke 2:8-20).

Introduction:

From Mary to Elizabeth, the Magi to the Shepherds, Anna, Simeon, the host of heavenly angels, and Christians everywhere, the news of Jesus’ birth elicits the same response — joy-filled worship. Aloha and Mele Kalikimaka, I’m Mark and I want to welcome you to our service. We are one week away from Christmas and we are excited to join you in this season to worship Christ the King.

Last week Pastor Theresa set the stage with a powerful reflection on the song of Mary. Upon hearing the news of Jesus’ birth, Mary responded in Spirit-filled worship. And her song echoed the song of God’s people throughout the ages as they praised the One who saves. Mary was a faithful yet unassuming girl whom God chose to reveal His master plan for humanity. This week we’ll meet another group of unassuming characters whom God chose to reveal the promise of Christmas.

In Luke 2 we witness a royal baby announcement of cosmic proportions. But what makes this angelic declaration so profound is not just *what* is being spoken but *to whom* it is being spoken.

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If a powerful world leader or the CEO of a multi-million dollar corporation wants to make an important announcement, they hold a press conference with reporters and journalists from the biggest news agencies — NY Times, The Washington Post, etc. They want to make sure this announcement gets to as many people as possible through the right avenues. But when God chose to make His announcement about the birth of His Son, His press conference was addressed to...shepherds. No-name shepherds living out in the fields nearby.

Of all the people in the world to announce this incredible news to, shepherds would have to be the worst choice! They were dirty, and stinky, and not to mention, shepherding was very tiring work! Did you hear about the shepherd who fell asleep on the job? He woke up and said, "Oh no! I hope nobody stole my sheep! Let's see, 1 sheep, 2 sheep, 3...snore"

Why did the shepherds bring a camera to the nativity? To capture the *shear* beauty of the moment. How do shepherds in Mexico say "Merry Christmas"? *Fleece* Navidad. Where do sheep get their wool cut? At the baa-baa shop. Alright Pastor Mark, cut the fluff.

But all joking aside, shepherds were the least likely candidates to receive this news!

Christian Theologian Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost writes in, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, "These were most unlikely recipients of such a revelation, for shepherds were despised as a class because they were unable to observe the customary laws of purification. They were considered unclean. They had not been schooled in the law and therefore were considered ignorant."

So the Bible tells us that God chose to reveal the good news of His Son's birth to a group of people who were outcast, overlooked, unchurched, and uneducated. I want us to watch a scene from a short film created by the makers of *The Chosen*. They imagine what it might have been like for a shepherd in those days. Watch this.

Clip 1 - 3:50

Even though the Bible has good things to say about shepherds, comparing Israel's great leaders and even God to a Good Shepherd, being a shepherd wasn't seen as a great job. They weren't respected much in society and didn't have much money. Their job meant they lived outside, away from towns and groups of people. So, they missed out on hanging out with others and going to religious events. Because of their job, they were seen as ceremonially unclean and excluded from worship, so they couldn't join in religious practices or go to religious places. They were left out, excluded, and they couldn't even testify in court as a witness. That's how little people thought of them.

If we're honest, I think all of us can relate to the shepherds on some level. All of us have insecurities and doubts when it comes to being enough. It's that feeling of walking into a room and feeling not as smart, well-dressed, or put together as everyone else. How about the feeling of not being good enough to worship or come to Church? Those were the shepherds. They were excluded from religious events. I'm sure people gave them stink eye if they even came near the Church. Have you ever felt that way? Unworthy, disqualified, not enough?

When it comes to being representatives for God, the shepherds would have been the last candidates on people's list. Many of us might agree the same thing could be said of us. But look what Paul writes about the kind of people God chooses,

27 Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And He chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. 29 As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God,” (1 Corinthians 27-29).

The Bible says that the very ones the world writes off are the very ones God chooses. So have you ever felt insecure, unsure, rejected, lonely, unworthy, or misunderstood? Congratulations, you have all of the qualifications for someone God can use. The very ones who couldn't even testify in court were the very ones God called up to His witness stand to testify about the coming of the Messiah! God loves to choose the things the world rejects and redeem them for His glory.

Prior to this year, there were over 700 inmates awaiting execution in the state of California. A small percentage of these were women. Each committed a crime deemed punishable by death. But that didn't stop a grandmother living in San Diego named Ann Baker. Her call is to love these inmates the way Jesus would.

Baker heads a group that ministers to the men and women on death row. Her team writes letters to these inmates, not to condemn or condone, but out of compassion, believing even the worst criminal is a child of God.

The letters themselves are nothing extraordinary. Baker writes to her prison pen pal about her pet dog, going to Church, or seeing the hot-air balloon festival in Albuquerque. Her pen pal wrote about exercising in the prison yard and of all the screaming and cursing that goes on around him at night. “On a bad night, it's hard to hold onto my sanity.” He writes. Sometimes they'll trade trivia questions trying to stump one another.

One LA County attorney who prosecuted a woman convicted of killing her five children is not a fan of the outreach program. She says, “As a society, we've decided these people are beyond redemption.”

Beyond redemption. Those are the very ones Jesus came to save.

Part of the job of a shepherd is going after sheep that wander astray and get lost. In the words of Jesus, a shepherd will even leave the 99 to go after one lost sheep. On Christmas night, the shepherds were the ones who were far from God. But the Good Shepherd went into the far reaches of the night, to the edges of society to the lonely and rejected to bring them home. Let's watch the continuation of our shepherd's story.

Clip 2 - 4:55

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

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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."

Jesus came into the world to seek and to save the Lost, (Luke 19). He came to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, (Luke 4). He welcomes those who are weary and burdened that He might give them rest (Matthew 11). He says that His Kingdom belongs to those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn and are meek (Matthew 5). He did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10).

This is the Kingdom God came to establish. A Kingdom for the lowly, for the broken, and outcast. Even its King was rejected. One the day of His birth our world made no room for Him. He was born in a manger. His Kingdom was established, not through war and the shedding of other's blood but through love and the shedding of His own blood. In the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we see the kind of Kingdom He came to establish and the kind of King He would be.

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," (Luke 2:16-20).

The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. This is why we worship at Christmas.

Story goes, there was a man named A.J. Gordon who was the Pastor of a Church in Boston. One day, outside of his sanctuary, he met a young boy carrying a rusty cage. Inside of the cage several birds fluttered around nervously. Gordon asked the boy, "Son, where did you get those birds?" The boy replied, "I trapped them out in the field." What are you going to do with them?" "I'm going to play with them, and then I guess I'll feed them to an old cat we have at home." When Gordon offered to buy them, the boy exclaimed, "Mister, you don't want them, they're just little old birds and can't sing very well." Gordon replied, "I'll give you \$2 for the cage of birds." "Okay, it's a deal, but you're getting a bad bargain!"

The exchange was made and the boy went away happily whistling with the money in hand. Gordon took that rusty cage to the back of the Church property, opened the tiny wire door, and let the frightened birds soar off into the blue.

The next Sunday he brought the empty cage up to the pulpit and began to share about how Christ came to seek and to save the lost and paid with His own precious blood. "That boy told me the birds were not songsters," said Gordon, "but when I released them and they winged their way heavenward, it seemed to me they were singing, 'Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!'"

Why do we worship this Christmas? It is because we were those birds, caught in the Devil's cage, doomed for destruction. Like the shepherds, we had no real redeeming qualities. Yet the Son of God came into the world to seek and to save us. He purchased us with His own blood. So now we glorify and praise God singing, "Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!"

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord,

We thank You for the beautiful story of the shepherds, those unlikely messengers chosen to proclaim Your incredible news. Thank You for reminding us that Your love seeks out the overlooked and the unnoticed, embracing them with the warmth of Your grace.

Lord, we are moved by the depth of Your love displayed through Jesus. His birth brought hope to a world in need of saving. Help me, in my quiet moments, to truly grasp the magnitude of this love and to respond by placing my trust in Jesus, my Savior.

Show me, Lord, how to live as a carrier of this incredible news. Give me the courage to share Your love with those around me, especially those who feel unseen or forgotten. Let my life be a beacon of Your light, illuminating the path to Your grace and redemption.

Just as the shepherds couldn't contain their joy and praise, may my heart overflow with gratitude and adoration for Your faithfulness. May my days resound with continual praise, glorifying You in all I do.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.