

The Story Goes On: The First People To See Christ

Finding Christ

Luke 2:8-20

Sermon 1, Christmas Eve 2021

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Friends, have you ever imagined yourself as being one of those shepherds? If you were a shepherd that night, who would you have been?

You can imagine yourself as the teen son of the flock's owner. Not the owner himself, he would have been off to his home town dealing with the same census that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. But as his heir, you could have been out there that night. Once David, the famous shepherd king of Israel, was a teen watching his father's flock. (See 1 Samuel 16.) Perhaps like Jesus' famous ancestor, you began your vocation watching sheep and working with the men your father had hired.

Or you can imagine yourself among the men and women being supervised by the owner's son. Either Herod certainly wasn't interested in counting the poor that night, or perhaps those shepherds were avoiding Herod. Maybe those shepherds had a past they were running from, just like Moses, the greatest leader in all Israel's history. After he was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses had murdered an Egyptian and fled for his life. When he finally came to a well in a neighboring country, Moses found his first real job, one that needed few skills to begin. (See Exodus 2:11-22) It was there that Moses became the leader God needed to set his people free. Friends, are you more like Moses or David as you imagine yourself there that night?

Or if you were a shepherd that night, perhaps you were not human at all. Perhaps you were a dog. Shepherds have always included dogs, some dogs that are good at herding and other dogs that are good at guarding. Have you ever imagined dogs being there as the angels sang?

But there they were, "out in the fields keeping watch over the flocks by night." The sheep were most likely safely in a fold, a stone fence enclosure with a single gate.

That way all the shepherds could have rested, both human and canine, very possibly men and women, and you imagine yourself among them, enjoying a better view of the stars than what we now know, when suddenly the angel speaks. “Fear not!”

Oh, the wonder of that moment!

If you were imagining yourself as one of those dogs, it helps now if you switch to imagine yourself as a human shepherd. Logic says that some good shepherd had to watch the sheep in their fold, and who better for that task than a big, loyal dog? We will leave the canines to be the good shepherds that night.

So, with the other human shepherds you too take off for Bethlehem. You have no need for a smartphone, not even a paper map or a compass. If you were a shepherd that night, Bethlehem was home. On that night Bethlehem was still a small village. Some scholars say there were as few as fifty people living there and no one ever estimates that there were more than 300 citizens of Bethlehem. Of course, thanks to Herod’s census and the successes of David’s descendants, that number had swelled considerably that week, but the shepherds still knew where they were. They knew which homes had stables. They lived in a quieter world than we do now, no generators or furnaces constantly humming. No loud noise from the neighbor’s TV. They did not have street lights that hid the stars. But stars lit their way.

All they needed to find Jesus was their ears, because despite what you sang as a child in Christmas pageants, Jesus was a newborn human baby and all healthy human Jesus was no exception. He cried. He slept. He nursed. He even . . . well, you know.

While finding Jesus was not hard, the shepherds did one other thing that helped them find Jesus. Those shepherds, at least the humans among them, accepted the angels’ invitation. If they had not accepted the angels’ invitation, all that factual stuff I just shared with you would not have helped them find Jesus. The only real way they were able to get close enough to hear Jesus and therefore find Jesus was by accepting that angels’ invitations.

Friends, the angels’ invitation still echoes in the heavens. You too are invited to find the Savior for yourself. How will you do that? Accept the angels’ invitation and fear not.

Amen.

An introduction to this series for my regular sermon readers,

This Christmas 2021 three sermon series began with two questions and three answers. In the early stages of developing Christmas worship for 2021, the worship team and I were drawn to three bible stories, the shepherds in Luke 2, the temple regulars in Luke 2, and the Magi in Matthew 2. We generally know these folks from Christmas pageants, although Anna and Simeon are often left out of the telling and the Magi are turned into the kings they advised. But knowing few shepherds ourselves, we wonder what they did with the sheep as they went into Bethlehem, or just who Simeon and Anna were, as well as if the Magi weren't kings as the pastor insists, what were they?

So, my gift to you this Christmas is a sermons series with two questions and three answers. The first question is who were they? The second question is how did they find Christ?

Grace and peace be with you always.

In Christ's service and yours,

Rev Dawn