

life groups' study guide



Life Groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for spiritual growth, caring for one another, and reaching out to others.

...Is The Story

THE SHEPHERDS
LUKE 2:1-20

We see nativity scenes everywhere this time of year. Joseph, Mary, the manger, the baby Jesus, the shepherds and the magi, and all the animals. Even an angel or two. Always calm, quiet and peaceful. A true Hallmark card moment.

But the truth is, that isn't the real story of the times. The real story and the real world of that day was more like this: there was terrible political unrest, politicians were corrupt, hated and not trusted. Overspending by big government had caused huge new taxes to be created. All the Jews in Judea would be told how much they would have to pay to the Roman government for the privilege of being included in their empire and financing their undertakings. The religious institutions were getting more and more involved with politics instead of meeting the spiritual needs of the people. Divorce and abortion were becoming common. The court system was corrupt, criminals were constantly going free on technicalities. Nations were constantly redrawing their boundaries, and there was a nervous peace around the world, especially in the Middle East. The educated were denying miracles and the supernatural. The disparity between rich and poor was getting greater and greater all the time. **Sound familiar??**

Herod the Great was a powerful figure at this time. He was appointed to be king of the Jews – and he wasn't even Jewish. He played a balancing act between keeping the occupying Roman government happy and the Jewish people from revolting. There had been anger stirring beneath the surface in the land for a long time. Even the religious people of that day were losing hope that the Messiah would ever come; the prophets had been saying he was coming for hundreds of years now and it had not yet happened! This is hardly the picture of that first Christmas most people have today, however! Then - in the midst of all this turmoil and hopelessness, God makes His appearance in human flesh, the baby Jesus.

Galatians 4:4 - "But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law."

An angel suddenly appears in a blaze of Shekinah glory – a light of intolerable brilliance. It was the same light as in the burning bush, the pillar of fire and cloud in the desert, at the Mount of Transfiguration. The angel speaks a divine message to the shepherds. **Then a million angels give the shepherds a heavenly concerto - "Glory to God in the Highest."** And the only guests invited were the shepherds. They were just shepherds. They had no status in their culture. They were uneducated, smelled lousy, and were considered low-class. More appropriately, they were the marginalized forgotten. Simple people who were willing to simply believe what God told them.

Q: Why does God reveal himself to the shepherds? Take a look at scripture.

Psalm 138:6 ; Proverbs 29:23; Luke 1:52; 2 Samuel 22:28; Psalm 149:4; Isaiah 66:1;

Matthew 23:12; 1 Peter 5:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

HEAR THE MESSAGE

The shepherds were terrified – until they heard the message - “Fear not: Be not afraid.” I do not think any greater news can come to us than that announcement. It came to them, as the angel went on to say, because a Savior was born in Bethlehem – a Deliverer. At long last the Messiah had come!

*A Calming Message - “*Fear not*” - *Jesus removes fear* - (Luke 1:13; 30; Matthew 1:20) Things we need not fear - Death, Hell, Satan, Life, etc.

*A Salvation Message - *Good tidings , great joy, to all people , unto you.*

*Three titles were given to Jesus:

**** Savior** - Deliverer; the sacrifice. Our greatest need was forgiveness and redemption, and, therefore, God sent a Savior!

**** Christ** - The Anointed One, the Son of God, the Messiah, the fulfillment of all the promises and prophecies beginning at Eden; (Genesis 3:15).

**** Lord** - Sovereign God. The One to be served, worshiped and adored!

The words "Fear not" appear in the Bible **exactly 365** times.

Q: Did you ever wonder why? Did you ever wonder why we are not to fear?

Q: Are these words part of our vocabulary?

Q: Are they part of our daily living experience?

The reason is that a Savior has been presented – a Deliverer, a rescuer, one who is able to free us from any threat and danger in any situation. That is why the shepherds were told not to be afraid. It did not make any difference what Herod or the Romans would do, or what the clever, manipulative minds of men would try to set in motion; there was a Deliverer, a Savior among them. A Redeemer had come who would change the situation and use it for his own glory and bring them through. That is why the announcement of the angel was “Be not afraid.”

ACT LIKE A SHEPHERD

The shepherds heard the message from the angels, left their sheep and raced into Bethlehem to see the Christ-child. They did not do it casually, they immediately moved on it, they hurried.

Q: What if the shepherds were too afraid to go to Bethlehem?

Q: What if the shepherds were too worried about their jobs, the sheep, to go?

Q: What if they were too afraid to tell anyone what they had seen and heard?

There were no instructions or directions from the Angels on what to do with the announcement. But they did what all Christians should do. They went out and told everyone what they had heard and seen. Luke 2:17 - “When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”

Q: Do you allow fear to limit your belief and obedience?

Q: Would you have gone to Bethlehem in the middle of the night?

Q: Are we as quick to tell the story today?

Had the shepherds not acted on what they heard (that the Christ lay there), they might have seen him ten thousand times without ever knowing that the child was Christ. Someone in your “world” needs to see Him.

The shepherds had received a great gift – they were the first to sign the guest book at Jesus birth, the first to be told that finally the Messiah had arrived. And gifts are to be given. Good news is for sharing. And the shepherds gave. The Bible says that it is more blessed to “give” than to “receive.” Therefore, “giving” must be a greater, more exciting, meaningful, fulfilling, significant and blessed act

than "receiving." The Bible says that no one will become poor by giving, nor anyone will become rich by giving. The Bible does say that if we sow sparingly we will also reap sparingly, and if we sow bountifully, we will reap bountifully. **(2 Corinthians 9:6)** The Bible is very clear – only by giving we can receive. **(Luke 6:38; Proverbs 11:25)** We are to give according to our ability – **(2 Corinthians 9:7-8; 2 Corinthians 8:11-12; Matthew 10:42)**, and we are to give generously – **(Deuteronomy 15:7-8; Proverbs 15:20).**

This is the pattern of Christian giving. Grace stands at the bottom of all that we do as Christians. We love him because he first loved us. (John 3:16) - *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son...."* **God always makes the first move. We are the receivers, always.** And even when we give, it is because we first have received grace from the Lord.

Q: How do you view giving? - (2 Corinthians 8:1-15)

- **Giving is not a punishment, it is a privilege (vs.1-4)
- **Giving is not an obstacle, it is an opportunity (vs.5-9) (1 John 3:16-18)
- **It is an opportunity to be like Jesus (vs.8-9)
- **Giving is not a burden, it is a blessing (vs. 8-15) Prov. 19:17

- **It is a blessing to bring about equality (vs.13-15)

How do you measure the value of a present? How do you judge its worth? By its size, its weight, its cost, its usefulness? (1 John 4:9-11) – *"This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about – not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God. My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other."* (MSG)

The shepherds continued talking about what they had seen and heard. And notice where they did it. The Bible does not say that they glorified God in the temple, though that would have been appropriate. No, it says they "returned" to where they had been. Back to the tiring and unappreciated work of caring for sheep. That is, within 48 hours, if not much less than that, they were back where they were when the angel found them in the first place. Having seen the Babe in the manger, it was time to go back to work.

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8) For us at Christmastime, justice certainly means doing right to the less fortunate because we know God, mercy is doing unto others as God has done unto us, and humbly giving to others without expectations, as unto God.

Do what the shepherds did. Go back to where you came from. Christmas didn't change their circumstances, but it changed them deeply and profoundly. And because it changed them, it changed the way they approached their daily work. So go back to your daily routine. And as you go back, glorify God and praise him. Back to your family duties. Back to your office, to your classroom, your factory, your neighborhood, your job. Find the weakest person in your world, the one no one wants to hang with and buy their lunch. Give them a gift card to Panera, Ask how they are doing, If you are in school, go sit with them at their lunch table. Tell others about Him — witness, plant, cultivate, water, harvest. Let's be people who share what we have, share it in the name of Jesus, and share more than just silver and gold – let's share our lives, and share Jesus with our neighbor.

God wants all of us, especially our willingness to give so that we can receive. Jesus gave his physical life so that we could receive eternal life. Jesus challenges us to give ourselves to something greater than ourselves. Luke 6:37 - *"If you give, you will receive, pressed down, shaken together to make*

room for more, and running over. What measure you use in giving – large or small – it will be used to measure what is given back to you.”

“If you can't feed a hundred people, then just feed one.” Mother Teresa

“Giving is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth. Some of us try desperately to hold on to ourselves, to live for ourselves. We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it, hanging on to the dead branch of a bank account for dear life, afraid to risk ourselves on the untried wings of giving. We don't think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start the better, for we are going to have to give up our lives finally, and the longer we wait, the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace.” Eugene Peterson – Run With The Horses