

Christ as the Good Shepherd is one of the most endearing and abiding images in the Christian faith. This theme has been featured in a variety of art forms throughout history; the earliest depictions of Christ can be traced to the catacombs where a beardless young Jesus, dressed in a short white tunic, carries a lamb across His shoulders. He is the gentle Shepherd who protects, gathers and lays down His life for His sheep.

The painting is filled with theological and spiritual significance. Notice the downward gaze of the gentle Shepherd. It is clearly directed towards the sheep. Christ seems to be engaged in an intimate conversation with His flock. This gesture echoes the words of the Gospel, 'My sheep hear my voice....I know my sheep and they know me.'

The essence of 'the voice' is scripturally found throughout the Bible; it is 'the voice' that calls the sheep by name and leads them out. It is through 'the voice' that the sheep recognize the Master and belong to Him and it is 'the voice' that speaks to the heart of the sheep; the sheep who care to listen to Him. Thus this 'voice' represents the relationship that the sheep share with the Shepherd.

In ancient near-east culture, the profession of a shepherd was a popular one. Because sheep were a popular source of meat and their wool was a major source of material for clothes, shepherding was a popular profession.

People in Israel understood the images and the roles of a shepherd as one who would sacrificially and devotedly take care of their sheep. Here are three things we must understand about shepherds and how Jesus becomes our Shepherd.

He lays Himself down for us.

The job of a shepherd was not always an easy and safe one. The Bible tells us that the young shepherd boy David had to fight off lions and bears just to protect the sheep. Being a shepherd sometimes meant guarding your sheep with your life. Jesus is that Shepherd to us.

He guides us.

To understand the work of a shepherd, we must understand the nature of sheep. Sheep are actually known to have long memories and can easily remember the face of their shepherd. When they see their shepherd they instantly follow and the shepherd guides them to where they can feed and can be protected.

He restores us.

Not all sheep are obedient at all times. When sheep are stubborn, they can get in trouble: break bones, get injured or lose their way. When a sheep is injured or lost, a shepherd carries the sheep on his or her shoulders back to safety.

<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/what-is-the-significance-of-jesus-being-our-shepherd/92655.htm>

Memorial United Methodist Church Lenten Worship Series

Images of Christ

Lent IV – Psalm 23 Jesus with a Flock of Sheep



**Jesus with a Flock of Sheep
Christo Monti, artist**

(Information could not be found about this artist even though this particular image is found on many commercial sites and available as reprints in poster form.)

The **Lenten season** commemorates the 40 days that Christ spent in the wilderness fasting while being tempted by the world. Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness came just after he was baptized by John and before his Galilean ministry. During this Lenten season we will be studying several works of art that depict the life of Jesus Christ.

Visio divina invites the viewer into "divine seeing," to encounter the divine through images. A prayerful consideration of and interaction with a photograph, icon, piece of art, or other visual representation allows the viewer to experience the divine in a unique and powerful way. Art can be a valuable aid into a deeper prayer life. Our hope is that all of the images used in this series will encourage you in your journey of faith and on to a deeper experience of the Lenten and Easter seasons this year.

Dr. Joan

Try Visio Divina during our 'Images of Jesus Christ' Lenten worship series this year:

1. Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Keep your attention on that one part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.
2. Now, let your eyes gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the image. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so. **Read the included scripture** and continue gazing on the image.
3. Consider the following questions:
 - What emotions does this image evoke in you?
 - What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
 - Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write them down if you desire.
4. Now, offer your prayers to God in a final time of silence.
<https://www.upperroom.org/resources/visio-divina>

Luke 15:1-7

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Psalms 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

my whole life long.