

The Real Meaning of Christmas

Dec. 19, 2004

Luke 2:1-20

I want all of you to listen, but my message is especially for four special people who this morning are making their commitment to accept the Lord Jesus and become his disciples. I want you four to listen closely. These are the words I want you to remember as you begin your life, or you adult life, of faith. These are lessons we learn from the story of the shepherds, and they are lessons that you can use your whole life long.

The first lesson is that you MATTER—you matter to God. You are important to God. God loves you. Look at those shepherds--sitting, possibly dozing, on that hillside that night. In the world's eyes they aren't important. Some of them are young--probably the same age as you, David and Jessica. They aren't influential; they are poor. Yet God's angel, God's messenger, comes to them with the good news that a savior is born. Born to the whole world, yes, but, specifically, born to them. This is the good news: God's own son has left heaven and come to earth-- for them. And Jesus came to earth for you —because God loves you, you are important to God, you matter to God.

The second lesson is that God's METHOD is surprising, amazing. Here is an angel for heavens sake, with news of a savior- -then a whole host of angels praising God—what a terrifying awe-inspiring sight. But what is the sign they're given? “You'll find the baby (baby?—not king on a throne, not a warrior on a white horse?) You'll find the baby wrapped up and lying in a manger (in a manger, a cow's trough—not a golden crib in a palace?) We've heard the story so many times it doesn't surprise us anymore, but the shepherds would have been surprised. God's methods are surprising—God's methods are not what we'd expect. God comes in love and weakness to save. We keep expecting force; we keep wanting to use force. But that's not God's way. My church has heard me say before that since God came as a baby, nothing little can ever be unimportant again. God cares for the little ones, the ones the world sees as unimportant, and that's the way God expects us to act, as well. God's method is one of love, not force, God came to earth to serve. And God expects us to be servants, as well.

The third lesson is that the shepherds acted, they **MOVED**. They didn't yawn and say, "How interesting, maybe we'll read more about it in the Bethlehem Times." They didn't say, "Let's check it out in the morning." They left what they were doing to go find Jesus, to see for themselves. Nothing was more important to them than finding and worshipping Jesus. We don't know what happened to the sheep while they were gone. We don't know if they left someone behind to watch them so it must be with you. Worshipping and praying must be the first movements your life takes. Jesus must be the focus of your life.

The fourth lesson is that the shepherds became **MESSENGERS**. The angels were the first messengers of the good news. The shepherds were the second; remember I said that angels are God's messengers—well the shepherds became angels—they spread the good news of Jesus' birth to all they met. You, too, are to become angels, messengers of the good news in all you do and all you say.

Finally the fifth lesson is that the shepherds had a **MISSION**, and a mission field. Did they leave the manger and go immediately to the temple? No. Did they go to rabbi school? No. They went back to their fields. They went back to being shepherds. But everything was different because they were different. They had met the savior, and the savior was in their hearts. You, too, have a mission field. You will leave here and go back to your work, your homes, your school. But everything will be different because you are different. You have met and accepted your savior and he is in your hearts. A girl's school in Africa has the motto, "Bloom where you're planted." That's your mission as Christians.

These are the lessons of the shepherd's story: First you matter to God, God loves you. Second, God's method is love and service—and that is to be the method of your life. Third, the shepherd moved to find and worship the Christ child, and you should too. Fourth, you should share the message as they did. And fifth your life is your mission field.

May God bless you as you begin this exciting adventure.