

Why Shepherds? - Part 1

Scripture: Luke 2:8–20

Code: B101225

We are so familiar with the Christmas story we've lost its shock factor. We see shepherd figurines in stores and front lawns, we sing about them, our children dress like them. We are confronted by the image of shepherds a hundred times each December. But do you reflect on why they are in the story?

The story of Jesus' birth is short and includes a small cast of characters. Anyone involved plays a big role. On one level, the shepherds hear an announcement, find the baby, and go back to work. As far as we know it didn't change their lives, they didn't become disciples, and there is no record of them spreading the news beyond those present with Mary and Joseph. If that's the case, why are the shepherds in the story?

The angels reserved their most magnificent announcement of Jesus' birth for the least likely recipients. Who were shepherds, and why did they deserve such a privilege?

Shepherding is one of the oldest professions in the world. Adam was charged to have dominion over the animal kingdom (Genesis 1:26), and Abel is called a "keeper of the sheep" (Genesis 4:2). Throughout biblical history, significant men were experienced shepherds—Jacob and his sons, Moses, and David.

Shepherding is also a prominent theme in Scripture. Remember Psalm 23? "The Lord is my Shepherd . . ." God as shepherd is all over the Old Testament, and Jesus is described as a shepherd in the New Testament. Believers are comforted by Jesus' words in John 10, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep... I know my own and my own know me . . . I lay my life down for the sheep."

In many respects, shepherding is a noble occupation. But there is a downside to shepherding. Shepherds had a hard time maintaining religious purity as the Pharisees defined it. They couldn't keep the Sabbath because sheep need constant protection. Shepherds spent most of their time in the fields away from society and had no influence to speak of. In modern terms they were blue-collar workers largely unnoticed by those in power. Shepherds were in the lower classes of society.

Imagine God hired you to plan the announcement of His Son, the Savior of the world. Who would you choose to tell and why? It probably wouldn't make sense to go to Caesar or Herod—they would destroy any threat to their thrones. But wouldn't it make sense to tell those who had favorable influence over the people? Wouldn't it make sense to declare the arrival of the Messiah to those who studied His coming their entire lives?

Yes, it would make sense—from a *human* perspective and with a *human* agenda. But God's perspective and God's agenda are quite different from ours.

So why shepherds? Why would God choose to make His most spectacular announcement to a group least able to spread it? We'll consider some possibilities next time. In the meantime, make sure you take the time to read or listen to John's messages on [Luke 2:11-20](#). He provides fascinating historical detail and, as always, illuminates the passage in a meaningful way.

G. Gabriel Powell
Web Programmer

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