



RockPointe Small Groups

The Advent of Christ • Shepherds and Angels • Luke 2:8-17 • 12/15/2019

MAIN POINT

Jesus' birth demonstrates God's profound love for us which motivates us to worship Christ, proclaim Christ, and demonstrate Christ's love to those around us who don't know Him.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is one food that you would say you "love"? Why do you love it?

How do you think our culture would define love? How is this different than how you think Jesus defines it?

How is the Christmas story a demonstration of God's love for you?

Christmas is a time when we celebrate that out of His great love, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, as a gift to the world to bring us back to a relationship with Him. Christmas sets in motion Jesus' sacrificial work for us, which culminates at the cross. As we discuss the shepherds' response to the good news of Jesus' birth, consider how you respond to God's gift of love to you.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read Luke 2:8-14.

In the countryside near Bethlehem, shepherds worked. Their primary responsibility was to guard the sheep, which were used for temple sacrifices among other things. How appropriate that the first people to hear about Jesus' birth were those who guarded the sacrifices He would later replace, when His crucifixion and resurrection permanently atoned for sins.

What's symbolic about God announcing Jesus' birth to some of the lowliest members of society?

How does God's appearance to the shepherds relate to Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55?

How can these verses reassure you when you're tempted to feel unworthy of God's love?

By letting the shepherds know about the good news of Jesus' birth and sending them to meet Him, God made it clear that no one was outside His love. The Messiah came for everyone. Verse 9 tells us "an angel of the Lord" appeared to the shepherds. The men were stunned and terrified by the angel's presence, but the angel quickly made it evident that his presence was cause for rejoicing. God wanted the shepherds to know the good news about Jesus' work of salvation.

What did the angel reveal about Jesus' uniqueness? What three titles are given to Jesus in verse 11? What is significant about them?

The angel heralded the Savior. In that culture, people usually thought of "saviors" as those who claimed to heal or to rescue from danger. Jesus would infuse the title with a much deeper meaning. He had come to save people from their sins (see Matt. 1:21). Luke further identified Jesus as Messiah the Lord. The translation "Messiah (or Christ) the Lord" emphasizes Jesus' identity as both Messiah and Lord. The term "Messiah" meant "anointed one." God chose (anointed) Jesus and set Him aside for a special purpose. Moreover, Jesus Himself was divine (the Lord).

How would you describe to someone that Jesus is fully divine and fully human?

As Jews, the shepherds probably knew a little something about the coming Messiah. What might they have thought about the mixed messages of "Savior" and "in a feeding trough"?

In case the shepherds harbored any doubts, a further sign ensued. A multitude of the heavenly host appeared. The word host signified an army from heaven present on earth. Instead of presenting themselves for battle, though, the heavenly host announced a message of peace. The host proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven." They praised the One God who revealed Himself in all His sovereign greatness to lowly, sinful human beings.

What do we learn about God's love for us through the shepherds' encounter with the angels?

Between the angel's announcement and the angelic song, we get an incredible picture of the gospel. The Messiah is here, He brings with Him our salvation and peace, and that deserves our praise and worship.

Have a volunteer read Luke 2:9-17.

Have you ever had an undeniable encounter with God? If so, describe the experience. What made it so evident God was present? How did you respond to Him?

Have someone read Matthew 2:3-5. How did the shepherds' reaction to the news of the Messiah's arrival compare to the religious leaders' reaction? What is significant about this contrast?

Even though they had earthly responsibilities (keeping the flock of sheep), the shepherds knew they were experiencing something divine. Seeing angels, hearing them speak of God's peace, and knowing that the Savior had arrived was something worth abandoning their daily routine over. We need to embrace the message of Jesus' arrival with the same abandonment.

What keeps us from embracing the message of Jesus with the same abandonment as the shepherds?

How did encountering Christ change your identity? How does becoming a Christian change your purpose?

How would you explain the significance of Christmas to someone who doesn't already understand it? Who in your life may need to hear this explanation?

Read 1 John 4:7-12. Based on these verses, what is the biblical meaning of love? What happens to our efforts to love each other if those efforts aren't connected to Jesus' love for us?

God did more than shout down from heaven, "I love you!" to the people on earth. He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die on the cross. That's the nature of love—it's more than mere emotion or

sentiment. True love is intentional and action-oriented. When we begin to grasp the depth of Jesus' love for us, we will find ourselves freed to love each other in that same sacrificial and intentional manner.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What most frequently stands in the way of you truly loving others?

What are some tangible expressions of this kind of love you might practice this week: At your workplace? In your home? With your friends?

Why should genuine love trump any fears we may have of sharing the gospel with others?

PRAYER

Spend some time praying for the loved ones in your group members' lives who don't know Jesus personally. Pray that the gospel would reach these individuals' lives, and pray for you and your group members to have the courage to be the ones who deliver the good news.

COMMENTARY

Luke 2:8-17

2:8. The scene changes, and the "humble" of Luke 1:52 are visited (cf. 7:22). One should not romanticize the occupation of shepherds. In general shepherds were dishonest and unclean according to the standards of the law. They represent the outcasts and sinners for whom Jesus came. Such outcasts were the first recipients of the good news. Shepherds were out in the fields with their flocks usually during the months of March to November. Nothing in the two birth accounts ties Jesus' birth to any specific date.

2:9. The subsequent material follows the same announcement form we have encountered in 1:13-20, 28-37. Here we again have (1) the angel's appearance (2:9a), (2) a response of fear (2:9b), (3) a word of reassurance (2:10), (4) the divine message (2:11), and (5) the giving of a sign (2:12). What is lacking is the objection and request for a sign. The glory of the Lord is the manifestation of God's presence among His people.

2:10. I bring you good news translates the Greek verb *euangelizō*, which means to preach the good news. The noun is translated by the word "gospel." This verb is found eleven times in the Gospels, and ten of these are found in Luke. Luke envisioned the gospel as being for all people, including the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-29; 18:10); but here, as in 3:21; 7:29; 8:47, the people of Israel were primarily in Luke's mind. The singular "people" refers everywhere else in Luke to the people of Israel.

2:11. Today designates the beginning of the time of messianic salvation. Jesus' role as Savior is qualified by the title "Christ" and "Lord." This verse gives a brief summary of the gospel message and provides the reason for the statement found in the previous verse. It tells of the birth of a Savior. This title is applied to God in Luke 1:47, but its use here of Jesus is prepared for by 1:69 (cf. Acts 5:31; 13:23). There is a sense in which this statement is not only Christological in nature (in what it says about Mary's child) but also anthropological, for it says that the Gospel's readers, both past and present, are the kind of people who need a Savior. This verse also states that the child's name is Christ, for Christ functions here primarily as an identifying name. Although "Christ" is actually a title (Acts 5:42; cf. also Acts 17:3), this verse reveals that the title was so closely identified with Jesus of Nazareth that it soon became part of His

name—Jesus Christ. The reader has been prepared for the use of this title by 1:32-33,69; 2:4. This Savior is also the Lord. Although the realization of the authority of the titles “Christ” and “Lord” would await the resurrection (Acts 2:36), Jesus at His birth was already both Christ and Lord, for the one born to Mary in Bethlehem is the same person who is raised in glory and given the authority to be Lord and Christ. No doubt for Luke’s readers this description of the child would have far greater theological meaning than for its original hearers. These three titles also appear together in Phil 3:20.

2:12. Since the odds of finding another newborn baby boy lying in a manger would be extremely small, this would function as a sign of identity for the shepherds.

2:13-14. “Praising God” is the proper response not only of the believer (Luke 2:20; 19:37; 24:53; Acts 2:47; 3:8-9) but all of God’s creation (cf. Ps 148:1-4). The term “praising” was a favorite of Luke and is found eight times in the New Testament, six of which appear in Luke-Acts. We find a parallelism in the following two lines consisting of glory-peace; in the highest-on earth; to God-to men. Here the “highest” refers to the highest heavens (cf. 19:38), not to the highest degree. For the glory of Jesus, cf. 9:26, 32; 21:27; 24:26; for his receiving glory from people, cf. 4:15. “Peace” refers here to the fullness of blessing which the Savior/Christ/Lord brings and is essentially a synonym for salvation (cf. Acts 10:36). The favor/goodwill referred to in the verse does not belong to men but to God. This is clear from Luke 10:21 (cf. also 4:32-33; 11:9), where the Father’s good pleasure or favor is referred to.

2:15-17. Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened. “This thing” is literally this word as in Luke 2:17,19, but “this word” can refer to an event as it does here. The angelic intermediary is left unmentioned, and only the ultimate source of the revelation—the Lord—is mentioned. The child was found just as the angel had prophesied in 2:12.