

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

## An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 2- Luke 2:8-11** 21- The Announcement of the Incarnation

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March 8, 2009

### **Luke 2:8-11**

It's Christmas in March here because we're in the **Gospel of Luke** and we're studying the Christmas Story. And it's a real treat to study the Christmas Story without the materialism and the greed and commercialization that normally occurs during the Christmas season- but to just be able to take the Story itself and savor it and relish it without the context that clutters it up around December.

And as I told you last week- I have no idea when Jesus was born- I just know that He was born and I know that He lived and He died and he rose again. And this is a very refreshing way look at the true Account of the Birth of Jesus Christ.

Now as I told you last week- the key statement in the narrative of the Birth of Jesus Christ is found in **Luke 2:11**. In that verse- Luke wrote:

**For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

There has been born for you a Savior- that's the high note of this entire Passage. The shepherds and the angels are just bit players in the scenario in which the Savior Who has been born- is the main Character. "Unto you is born a Savior". That is the greatest News that the world has ever heard. And that is *Good News*. In fact, that's exactly what it says in **Luke 2:10**:

**Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people**

So the News that unto us is born a Savior is the Good News. One has been born- Who will save sinners from their sins and from eternal damnation.

Now you remember when Joseph- the betrothed husband of Mary- found out that Mary was pregnant- he couldn't understand it because he knew that she was a virgin. And when he found out she was pregnant- he was so shaken that he was in deep distress about what to do. Should he stone her as the Old Testament Law required because she would be found in the category of an adulteress? Or should he divorce her as the Law provides and put her away privately? And during the time that he was contemplating what to do- he was instructed from Heaven by an angel in his dream that she was with child by the Holy Spirit and that God Himself had planted a Life in her womb- even though she was still a virgin.

And according to **Matthew 1:21**- Joseph was instructed in that dream by an angel to call His name "Jesus" or "God saves", because this Child shall save His people from their sins. So Jesus is the New Testament version of the Hebrew name- "Joshua", which means: "God is my Savior" or "God saves".

Now from the very beginning- the Child Jesus was not like any other Child. No, this was the long-awaited Savior of the world. And He is the One Who would finally and forever save His people from their sins. This is the One Who would finally be the spotless Lamb Who would offer one Sacrifice that would perfect forever those that are sanctified. This is the One Who would come and pay the complete penalty for sin and offer the final Sacrifice with which the entire animal sacrificial system and Levitical Priesthood would be abolished.

You see, dear friends, millions of animals had been literally sacrificed over the centuries since God gave Moses His Law, and yet with all that animal blood spilled- the Bible says in **Hebrews 10:4** that not one single sin had been forgiven. All that the blood of animals did was to hold back God's Wrath just long enough to sacrifice the next animal. Please turn with me to **Hebrews 10:4**:

**4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.**

**5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME;**

**6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO**

PLEASURE.

**7** “THEN I SAID, ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.’”

**8** After saying above, “SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*” (which are offered according to the Law),

**9** then He said, “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

**10** By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

**11** Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

**12** but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

**13** waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

**14** For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

So the entire sacrificial and priesthood system of the Old Covenant looked forward to the time when the Messiah would come to bring them the fullness. So the people waited and waited and waited for Messiah to come to save them and to fulfill the Promises made under the Old or the First Covenant.

Jesus Himself said in **Luke 19:10** said:

**...the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.**

... in **John 4:42**, Jesus is called "The Savior of the world." In **1 John 4:14**- is found the most important statement of all of those when the Apostle John said:

**We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.**

So Jesus came to save the world. He didn't come to be an example of nobility or morality or integrity. He didn't come to be an example of passivity or social change. He didn't come to demonstrate patience and kindness and mercy and tenderness. He came to be the Savior of the

world. Jesus was not a prophet- He did not come to speak *about* the Truth- Jesus is the Truth; He didn't come to teach *about* a moral way for us to live- Jesus is the Way; Jesus did not come to give us tips for better living or how to have a better marriage or how to be happy or how to have more money or how to have whiter teeth and hit more home runs. Jesus is the Life. Jesus is not *a* way, He is not one choice among several choices, Jesus is not even the *better* choice among several choices- no, Jesus is *the* Way, the *exclusive* Way, the *only* Way, the *sole* Way, the one Way, and Jesus is *the* Truth, and Jesus is *the* Life. Jesus is the only Way, He is the only Truth, and Jesus is the only Life, and no one- absolutely no one- can come to the Father and be saved and go to Heaven any other way other than through Jesus Christ.

And so everything that both the Old and New Testaments says about Jesus must be just that way or else none of it is true. It is all or nothing. Either Jesus was exactly Who He said He was or else He was a liar or a lunatic.

And the Jews had long awaited for the Messiah to come. They had some limited knowledge about God being a saving God. And they knew the Nature of God was to save because He delivered them from their enemies over and over again, and He had so often delivered them from the immediate consequence of their sin- consequences which they deserved. And He had rescued them from every imaginable kind of situation in spite of their sins.

So they knew God was a saving God. The God of the Old Testament had revealed Himself clearly as a Savior- but there was also the fact that though God was a saving God- there had never yet come One Who had provided fully and finally that promised Salvation in an eternal sense. And so they awaited the Savior of the world- the One Who would come and satisfy the Justice of God and save them in spite of their sin- not because of their righteousness.

And so we find in this passage the angelic announcement that the Savior has been born. The One of whom Luke writes about in **The Book of The Acts 4:12**- the One Who would come and be the Savior to the degree that there is Salvation in no other Name but the Name of Jesus Christ. So now the long awaited Savior has been born. The One Who would not only be the Son of David and would rescue Israel politically from their enemies, not only the One Who would be the Son of Abraham fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant and rescue Israel from its time of

suffering, but God's Promise to David would come to pass and Israel would have a kingdom that's literally a kingdom of peace, and the Messiah would rule over Israel in peace and not only over Israel- but also over the whole world, and His Kingdom would have no end and this Kingdom would be eternal. So not only would the Messiah come and establish the fulfillment of Abrahamic Promise, and that is the end of suffering and the fullness of righteousness and holiness and blessing on the nation, but the Messiah would also come and save sinners.

In fact, they knew that they were never going to receive the Davidic Promise of the Kingdom, and they were never going to receive the Abrahamic Promise of blessing until they had received New Covenant Salvation through the Messiah. So they were looking for the New Covenant to be fulfilled. They were looking for a Savior- Who would come and take away their sin; A Savior- Who would come and forgive them for their sin; A Savior- Who would come and wash them; A Savior- Who would come and take out of them the stony heart and put in them an heart of flesh; A Savior- Who would come and give them His Spirit; A Savior- Who would rescue them from God's Judgment- the eternal damnation of Hell.

And the great announcement of this passage here- the great angelic announcement is in verse 11:

### **“Born for you a Savior “**

This is the high point of redemptive history- this is the greatest moment in the history of the world. A Savior would come and He would take on the Judgment of God for sinners. And He would be punished in our place. Just as the animal died in the place of the sinner in the Old Testament sacrificial system- this Lamb- this perfect, spotless, pure Lamb of God- would die for sinners and He would die such a perfect death and bear sin so perfectly that never would there be another sacrifice.

Jesus would be the Savior of the world by taking on the full punishment- the entire punishment for sinners. He would die under the execution of God's Wrath. God the Father would literally execute God the Son for your sins and my sins. And since the penalty was fully paid- God would then be free to forgive us and take us to eternal heaven and

not send us to hell to bear the punishment for our *own* sins because Christ had bore it for us.

Seven hundred years before this baby was born, seven hundred years before this Savior was born- a Hebrew prophet by the name of Micah had predicted that when this Savior would come- He would be born in a little village called Bethlehem- a somewhat obscure village except for one fact- this village was the hometown of David- the greatest and most beloved King that Israel had ever had.

Bethlehem is where David's father, Jesse, had lived. And that was very important because that played in with the fulfillment of the prophecy. The prophet Micah said that when Messiah is born- He'll be born in Bethlehem. Though it would be a little place- He would be born there. The great Messiah, the Savior of the world- the King of the Universe would be born there.

And so God Himself had to orchestrate all the events to make that happen. Caesar Augustus didn't know anything about Micah or the Old Testament or God and couldn't have cared less- but God laid it upon his heart to issue a decree that a census be taken. And he decreed that census would be taken in all the fullness of the Roman Empire- that so happened to include Judea. And so the Jews had to comply with the decree because it so happened to be that the Rome governed Judea.

And when the Jews did comply- Herod or somebody in Israel, maybe the Sanhedrin, maybe Herod required that the Jews had to register for the census by physically going back to the city of their ancestry. And it so happened that Joseph and Mary, who were both in the direct line of David, had to go to Bethlehem which was the home of their ancestor to register. And it just so happened that the timetable, the census required them to be there, probably there was a deadline like April 15 that required them to be in Bethlehem at a certain time, and so they had to make the 85 to 90 mile journey while Mary was in the last weeks of her pregnancy- something you wouldn't normally do under those conditions because it was really a distance you had to walk or be carried on a donkey. But they did it because they had to, they were compelled to go- not just to fulfill the decree by the pagan Caesar- but to fulfill the Word of God. And all of this working together puts Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem at the precise moment when it was time for the child to be born- exactly what the prophet had said would happen – 700 years earlier.

And this should amaze us that God goes to such great lengths to fulfill His Promise and that tells us that God is reliable when He promises something- that He is not like a man who may or may not keep His Promise, but that God is perfectly willing to move nations and to move upon pagan Caesars and to move upon civilizations so that what He has Promised will come to pass exactly as He promised that it would.

And that is important today for us right here this morning because when God promises you that He will never leave you nor forsake you- that you need not fear the Recession or the Depression, and that you need not place your trust in money or in material possessions or in sexual sins, and you need not fear to open your home to strangers and you can be free to visit those in prison because you know in your heart that God will never leave you nor forsake you and that He is good for His Word.

Now when Jesus was born- He was born in obscurity. The Roman presence would have been heightened in Bethlehem at that time because the census would have been going on there, and they would have had Roman officials who were taking the census there. And these Roman officials would have taken up every available room in the city. And the people would be coming into town from all over and staying with families and friends because they would be related to them, going back to the house of their ancestry.

But by the time Joseph and Mary got into Bethlehem- there wasn't any place for them to stay except in what was most likely a shed, or a large lean-to. Now all throughout Bethlehem there was an overnight stopping place for travelers. And it was a situation where you have four walls surrounding a courtyard. And those four walls would have little shanty-type rooms and probably a loft so that you could have some people below at ground level and some people to climb up a little ladder and stay above. But all those places-as primitive as they were- were all taken- and even they were better than what Joseph was able to provide for Mary that night- which was in the courtyard and was occupied by all the animals of all the travelers- the donkeys, and the goats, and probably some sheep and maybe even some camels. It was really an inappropriate place- a dirty place- a terribly unsanitary place for a semi-private or quasi-public birth in a very obscure and very unlikely circumstance.

But that is where the Owner and the Creator of the Universe was born- and that is where the savior of the world was born.

Jesus was born in obscurity. And apparently nobody around there knew. None of the people knew. None of the Romans knew. None of the inhabitants of Jerusalem or the visiting folks knew. To them- this was just another baby being born as they heard the cry of Jesus when He came into the world. And it was so obscure- we don't hear any announcement at all going on in Bethlehem- just Joseph knew and Mary knew. But it wasn't long till we come to verse 8 and an announcement is made. And the greatest event in the Story of Redemption has occurred, and it's about to be announced- look at **Luke 2:8:**

**8 In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.**

**9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.**

**10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;**

**11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

**12 This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**

**13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,**

**14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”**

Now keep in mind that the Jews have been looking for a Savior for a long time. And even the Romans were conscious of a Savior of the world. In fact, they gave that very title to Caesar Augustus. There is existing a Roman indication in some of the ruins that Caesar Augustus had the title "savior of the world." So people are always looking for a great deliverer- always looking for a great savior. And while Caesar Augustus was in Rome celebrating himself as the savior of the world- the true Savior of the world was being born in Bethlehem in obscurity.



Now there was only one true Savior. He had come to deliver His people from their sins and to bring them out of the judgment of God and to rescue them from eternal hell and to bring them out of suffering into blessing as had been promised to Abraham and out of subservience into royalty and reigning as had been promised to David. So He had come.

And He had come to bring the blessings of the New Covenant, the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, the blessings of the Davidic Covenant. He had come to save sinners and then to give them all the promised blessing.

So it is little wonder all Heaven broke loose and the angel showed up and started praising God. And it is little wonder the shepherds when they left, at the end of this passage, verse 20, were praising God as well.

So this is the high point of all Redemptive History- this is the greatest moment in the history of the world. God has become man and Salvation as being initiated. And that's why you have to stop a little and consider what's going on here. You can't just blow by this to get to something more juicy.

Now the message is "glad tidings of Great joy". That's the message from the angel to the shepherds. And what are the glad tidings of Great Joy? Verse 11:

**For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

There has been born for you a Savior Who will save His people from their sins, and, therefore, from death and hell, from the judgment of God- and that is the best news that anybody can ever get. Now listen- it is great news when the doctor comes in and says- "*It's not cancer- you're clean!*" That's great news. It is great news when the boss says, "*You're getting a huge raise*". That's great news, too.

But this is the greatest news; the best news that any sinner could ever hear:

**For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**

There is a Savior Who is born. There is forgiveness of sin. You can escape hell. You can go to heaven forever. You can be blessed by God. Without this news- any other news is vanity and meaningless.

Now as we unfold this passage I want to give you a few points. I'll give you two this morning:

1. The Proclamation of Good News
2. The Persuasiveness of God News

Let's look at each one.

## **1. The Proclamation of Good News**

You know- this group of shepherds is probably the most unlikely group of people to make this Proclamation to. If you were orchestrating this- if you were a PR agent and you were designing a campaign to announce that the Savior of the world had been born- the Owner and Creator of the Universe- the last people you would go to is a bunch of shepherds.

A good PR man would say, "We want to get this thing out and we need to go to the people who have the greatest influence. We want to go to the movers and shakers as they would be called today. We want to go to the people who have the ear of the world, and the clout, and the ability to make things happen.

So at that time- the first person you would want to go to would be the high priest. I mean, he would be the religious leader of all of Israel. And we might be considering going to the chief priest and the scribes who were the teachers. And we might even go to Sadducees- who basically made up the Sanhedrin who were the ruling body of Israel- a body of 70 elders of Israel- who were responsible for the nation as a theocracy under God. Or you might say we go to the Pharisees because they were the religious fundamentalists who were fastidious about prophecies, and we might want to go to them because they search the Scriptures and they were supposedly looking for the Messiah. And we might even want to send a memo or a press release to Caesar Augustus to let him know that the true Savior had been born. But shepherds? Not a chance.

But that's exactly where the Lord sent the greatest Proclamation in the history of the world isn't it- to a bunch of uneducated, dirty, shepherds- who had no influence at all with anyone. Now notice what **Luke 2:8** says:

**In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.**

Verse 8 says, "In the same region." In the same region- the region around Bethlehem. Now Bethlehem was about six miles south- directly south of the city of Jerusalem. And it's just a small village- certainly not a city- not even really a town- just a village. So, down in that region around Bethlehem there were some shepherds. Now Luke doesn't give us an adjective for these shepherds. It just simply says, "There were some shepherds," in the Greek- just shepherds. It doesn't tell us anything about them- there's really nothing to say about them. This is the most unlikely group to which God's angel proclaims the Good News of the Savior.

Now nobody would have assumed this except for the fact of what Christ says about Himself in **Isaiah 61**. **Isaiah 61** is a prophecy where the pre-Incarnate Christ is speaking about His Own coming as Messiah. And He says in verse 1:

**"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,"**

... and this is the verse that Jesus quotes in **Luke 4** and says He fulfills. And he goes on in **Isaiah 61** to say:

**1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me  
To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the  
brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners;  
2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our  
God; To comfort all who mourn,  
3 To grant those who mourn *in* Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes,  
The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a  
spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of  
the LORD, that He may be glorified.**

... and that word "afflicted" there in verse 1 in the Hebrew can mean the lowly or the humble, or as it's translated in the KJV, the "meek". So Isaiah prophesies here that the Messiah will come to preach the Good News or the Gospel to the meek, to the poor, to the weak, to the afflicted, to the outcasts, to those who are not influential or strong or wealthy or powerful- but to the meek.

So when the Messiah comes, He's not coming to the movers and shakers; He's not going to come for the influential or the rich or the politically connected or the powerful. No, when the true Messiah comes- He's coming to the poor, to the lowly, to the meek, to the afflicted, the broken hearted, the captives, the prisoners. That's just a motley crew of outcasts.

When God becomes Man- He's going to touch the outcasts, He's going to touch the low lives, He's going to walk among thieves and prostitutes, and adulterers, and drunkards and sinners. In fact, as Jesus went through His life- He attracted to Himself the outcasts of society- the tax collectors and the absolute nobodies, and the Jewish elite, the aristocracy of religion in Israel, criticized Jesus for that and they said He hangs around drunkards and prostitutes.

But that's what messianic prophecy said He would do- the Messiah would come to the weak and the poor. And listen- the shepherds of that day qualified as being just that.

You remember in her Magnificat- Mary was praising the Lord when she was told that she was going to be the mother of the Messiah in **Luke 1:52**, and she praised God for exalting the humble and exalting the lowly. And if you go to **1Corinthians 1:26**- you have the Apostle Paul saying:

**26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;**  
**27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,**  
**28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,**  
**29 so that no man may boast before God.**

And that begins at the very beginning because the very first Proclamation of the birth of the Messiah is made to the lowliest, the most commonest of unskilled peasants in the Jewish social strata.

Now that doesn't mean that being a shepherd was somehow an illegitimate profession or something that ought to be despised for its own sake- not at all. In fact, Abraham functioned at some point in his life as a shepherd. And Moses functioned, you remember, caring for the herds of his father-in-law in Median as a shepherd. And David was a shepherd. In fact, a thousand years before Jesus was born- David was watching sheep in this same area- maybe in this very same field where these shepherds were. So it isn't that being a shepherd was a shameful profession- no, but it was a very lowly profession- in fact- being a shepherd was the lowliest of tasks at that time.

Shepherds were insignificant. They were all basically ignorant and uneducated. They were unskilled. They did the kind of work that was generally given to children to do because it was so simple to do. It didn't take any particular talent or any skill- so they were basically unskilled- they had no trade, they had no skill- and they were really the lowest paid of all the occupations in Israel.

And beyond that- they would be the lowest people on the social ladder- by virtue of the necessity of caring for sheep seven days a week- and they lived in some level of violation of Mosaic law. They couldn't maintain the Sabbath the way the Sabbath should have been maintained because of their necessity to work- they violated the Sabbath to some degree. They couldn't maintain the myriad of manmade regulations that had been added and piled and heaped on top of Sabbath law which confounded the people, for the most part, because of their inability to keep those regulations developed by the Pharisees, and certainly shepherds couldn't abide by them. So they were looked not only as low socially- but they were looked at as living in general violation of religious law, and, therefore, to some degree or another they were outcasts because they violated the ceremonies.

So these shepherds were really the lowest of the low. And as time developed from the time of the New Testament on as the legalism of the Pharisees began to capture more and more of the hearts of the people- shepherds began to be more and more and more despised. And if you read Jewish literature over the next hundred years or so- they were more and more and more despised. In fact, it wasn't long after this that

they began to be seen as unreliable, untrustworthy, unsavory characters- who were largely suspected of stealing sheep and doing all kinds of illegal things. So these were not people who were operated in the high echelons of society- and maybe that's a shock to you because all your life you grew up imagining these shepherds were some kind of special people when, in fact- they were the *least* special of all the people.

But isn't that the point? Isn't that just like God to disdain the religious elite, to disdain the quote/unquote spiritual establishment, to disdain the hypocrites who thought they were good enough to achieve relationships with God by their own self-effort? And isn't it just like God to make the Proclamation- the greatest proclamation that's ever been made in the history of the world- to the lowest of the low- the humblest of the humble- to a group of shepherds?

And by the way- lest you demean being a shepherd- Jesus Himself was happy to call Himself the Good Shepherd. So there's nothing wrong with the task in itself. But in Israelite society- these men were the lowest and commonest nobodies of Israel's society and culture- so much so that shepherds were not allowed to testify in court in Israel society for a number of reasons:

- ✓ They weren't trusted
- ✓ They weren't thought to be intelligent enough to put things together
- ✓ They had such poor standing and poor reputation

...just perfect for God.

If that's not a metaphor for God saving the lowly sinner- what is? The Apostle Paul got a grip on this, didn't he? Look at **1 Timothy 1:15**:

**It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.**

So the more lowly a sinner is- the greater the Glory to God Who saves him, right? So this is just perfect for God- He disdains the palace, He disdains the temple, He disdains the priests, and He goes for the outcasts- the lowliest of the low.

Now I would believe, and I can't be dogmatic about this, but I would believe that the shepherds that the Lord picked for this

announcement were probably shepherds who believed in the true and living God- so they were probably devout. They may have been among those who in verse **Luke 2:25** are described as looking for the consolation of Israel- that is they were looking for the Messiah- they were looking for the Redemption of Israel- looking for the Redeemer. Because in **Luke 2:20**- when they had gone and seen the child and realized what happened- verse 20 says they were glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. So it must have been that they were living in anticipation of that. And it's very likely that though they were socially on the lowest level- that they may well spiritually have been on the highest level- they may have been very devout- they may have been the ones looking for the redemption of Israel. Why else would the Lord tell them this? And, of course, when they heard the Proclamation- they were so filled with excitement that they went immediately into Bethlehem to find Jesus.

Now- by the way- they were never commanded to do that- this was just their immediate response to the angelic proclamation- but they were not commanded to go see Jesus- they did that on their own- which is why I say that they were likely very devout even though they were shepherds.

Now it also tells us in verse 8,

**... staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.**

They were staying out in the fields. Now according to most of the history of that time- shepherds stayed out in the field from April to November. Typically the land of Israel is very much like it is here- out west in California. In fact, it is almost a mirror image of the weather that is in the state of California. In Israel- they have a sea and a coastal plain, coastal mountains, a central valley, inland mountains and the desert. And that's exactly the way it is over in California. So the weather patterns are very much the same.

And the city of Jerusalem is located on the mountains that fall down into the desert. And the desert there is even deeper than the desert in California because the desert in Israel goes down to the depth of the Dead Sea which is the lowest point on the earth. But the city of Jerusalem itself is high. Now if you go into the mountains- the Sierra

Nevada Mountains from December through March, you can be extremely cold but from April through November it can be warming up. And so typically shepherds would stay out in the fields on the elevated plain of Jerusalem- the mountain area near Jerusalem- from April to November. And this is one of the reasons why people doubt that Jesus was born in December because typically the shepherds wouldn't be out in the field in December. But you can't be dogmatic about this because there is really no way to know for sure. We don't even know what year Jesus was born- the best we can get is somewhere between 6 and 4 B.C. But there's no reason to believe it was December 25- that was simply invented in order to try to sanctify a pagan festival. The leaders of the Roman Church thought if they put the birth of Christ's Celebration on the same day as Saturnalia- the worship of the sun god- then they could sanctify it- but all they really did was to corrupt the celebration of the birth of Christ with all the Christmas legends that aren't even true- so it backfired on them.

But there's sure way to know when Jesus was born. It is possible that the shepherds could have still been out in the field in December- but not likely.

But the sheep at that time would roam the fields and then they would have a little lean-to made out of stones gathered or wood gathered together, something to enclose them. And at night the shepherds would bring the sheep in and keep them in the fold and the shepherd would lie across the entrance. That's why Jesus says in **John 10:7:**

**Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.**

You might think He's mixing His metaphors here- but He's not. The shepherd is the literal door of the sheep. The shepherd would put his bed and lie across the entrance to the fold- so no sheep could get out without walking across him, and he would make sure that no one or no animal came in to hurt the sheep. And so Jesus calls Himself the door because He wants us to know that once we're in His sheepfold- He'll never let us out and He will protect us from all eternal harm. That's **The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints.**

So the shepherd, gather his sheep. They would be all out in the fields during the day- but at night- they would pull them in and they'd



put them in this little open-aired lean-to. And he and his other shepherds would take turns to watch and others would sleep at the door to protect the sheep from getting out. So they were staying out in the fields which puts this somewhere from April to November- and could be even as late as December.

So what are these shepherds doing out in the field? Look again at **Luke 2:8:**

**... keeping watch over their flock by night.**

So nighttime has come and so they're in the fold now. And they could still be out in the field- if it was a full moon they might have left them out- but typically they would bring them into the fold so they could carefully watch them and no predator could get them. Now there may not have been mountain lions that close to Bethlehem- but sometimes thieves would steal animals at night-so they were keeping and watching over their sheep. And it's night and some of them are awake when the angel arrives.

Now what is interesting is that the Mishna- which is the clarification of Jewish law- and the Talmud- which is the rabbinic teaching- both required that flocks be kept only in wilderness areas. Flocks could not be kept in the populated area so they were out there in that wilderness area.

Now here's another very interesting note I want you to know. Remember that Bethlehem is about six miles south of Jerusalem- six miles from the very center of Jerusalem. And when you're driving out of Jerusalem- it's an uninterrupted suburb all the way to Bethlehem.

But the rabbis had made a rule and it's recorded for us in the Mishna- in the clarification of Jewish law- that any animal found between Jerusalem and a certain spot in Bethlehem was subject to be used as a sacrifice in the temple. So there were sheep grazing in that area purposely to be used as sacrificial animals.

But the rabbis reserved the right in the event that there were more people than available animals to literally commandeer any animals in the area and take them and use them as sacrifices. And if we remember history- we remember that there could be as many as a quarter of a million animals slain around the Passover season. That's a lot. And all during the rest of the year- there were thousands upon

thousands upon thousands of animals slain. So the priests went through sheep very quickly and they had the right to go into that area between Jerusalem and a certain spot near Bethlehem and take any sheep they found and use it as a sacrifice in the temple.

So these particular shepherds because of the location they were in- may well have been caring for sheep that would be offered as sacrifices to God. So the Proclamation of the final and full Sacrifice- the Lamb of God slain from before the foundation of the world- the Savior of the world- was made to shepherds who very likely took care of sheep that were offered as types of that Perfect Sacrifice.

So the Bible says that the tranquil normalcy of that night of shepherding was violated in an amazing way in verse 9- let's read **Luke 2:9:**

**And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.**

Now these shepherds were out there and it was a night like any other night. It was the very same period of time, the very same 24-hour period as the Child had been born in Bethlehem. And they were outside in a field and it was just a night like every other night and they were doing what they had always done- telling their normal stories, playing their little flutes- doing what shepherds did. And suddenly-

**... an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them**

Now I've been telling you all the way along in our Journey through Luke that nobody saw angels. There hadn't been any sighting of an angel in 500 years- half a millennium. And now, all of a sudden, we start seeing angels all over the place.

Gabriel- not just any angel- but Gabriel appears to Zacharias, and then Gabriel comes back and appears to Mary. And very well this angel of the Lord here could have been Gabriel back for a third visit. Perhaps the most likely candidate is Gabriel. And it says here he comes, the Greek verb is *ephistemi*, and it literally means: *to stand near somebody*.

So the shepherds are there- checking out the fold- doing whatever they do- and all of a sudden here's Gabriel, or at least an angel,

standing there. And it's evident that he's not one of the regular guys- it is very evident that this one is an angel.

Now remember- it is a dark night to whatever degree- and it's all of a sudden emblazoned with the highest of all created beings standing in the midst of the lowliest of all earthly folks. And the sequence is the same as it always is when an angel appears.

Remember when Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and when Gabriel appeared to Mary- or anytime an angel appears- the sequence is always the same. There is first the appearance, then there is absolute fear, then there is a comforting word given by the angel, then there is comfort and a message and a sign.

That's always the sequence- appearance, fear, comfort, message, sign. And that's exactly what we see here. We saw it with Zacharias when Gabriel came to him, and we saw it with Mary when Gabriel came to her, and we see it here.

And so, the angel of the Lord suddenly- instantaneously- immediately, with no anticipation- he's standing near these shepherds- and if that isn't enough- the Bible says that in addition to the angels standing by them-

**“And the glory of the Lord shone around them.”**

Now we read that and we've heard about this all our lives but we really haven't thought about it very deeply. And I can't even describe to you what a significant statement this is. This is one of the high points of all of history.

And if you go back and study the Glory of the Lord- it is simply defined as the manifestation of the Presence of God in light. Now God is not corporeal- in other words- God doesn't have a physical body- He doesn't have a physical form. He's the invisible God. But when He reveals Himself- He reveals Himself as light- some kind of glowing, brilliant, shining, incomprehensible manifestation of light. In fact, if He revealed Himself fully in light- in **Exodus 33**- it would burn everyone up.

And that's why God said to Moses, *"I can't show you My full glory, you'll die."* So God tucked Moses in a rock and just let a little bit of His afterglow shine so that Moses could see it.

But if you study the Glory of God- you start in the Garden of Eden and God is there with Adam and Eve, and there's no sin so there's nothing to fear, so the Presence of God is not something that consumes them because there is no sin. So they're walking and talking with God in the cool of the day and they're in the Presence of the Lord. And they're walking with the glorious, shining Shekinah manifestation of God.

And then sin comes in and immediately God says, *"I can't have fellowship with you anymore,"* and He throws them out of the garden and puts an angel with a flaming sword there...and that wasn't because He didn't care about them, it was because He *did* care about them, and if they were to enter the garden and come into His presence after they sinned- they would have been immediately destroyed. So God put the angel with the flaming sword there in a sense as protection- protecting them from being destroyed.

So here was man walking and talking in the Presence of God with the Glory of God. All of a sudden he's alienated from the Glory of God completely. And it's a long time before the Glory of God appears again. In **Exodus 40**- they finished building the tabernacle. And the tabernacle is where they're going to be where they worship the Lord and there's a place in the tabernacle called the Holy of Holies where God is going to take up residence, and when they finished that- according to Exodus 40- the Glory of God came out of Heaven and came down. And the Glory of God came and just filled that place, just the great shining Shekinah Presence of God came down and filled that place and the Glory of the Lord had come back and God was manifesting His great Presence and His great Glory. So it was a monumental moment. It was the establishment of worship; it was the establishment of the place of worship. So there was an establishment of that place where sacrifices were to be made in order to give people access to God, where once a year the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would go into the holy place and then into the Holy of Holies and he would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat and sins would be atoned for. And God signified the great importance of that when His Glory came down.

And His Glory- you remember- came out of the tabernacle and went up into the sky during the day as a cloud and led them, and as a pillar of fire at night and led them. And they saw the Glory of God, the great light manifestation of God. Later on when they build the temple-

the same thing happened. The temple was completed in Solomon's day and the Glory of God came down and God again said, *"I'm taking up residence here and I want to be the focus of your worship and I want you to give your attention to Me and to worship and glorify Me."*

But it wasn't very long until they turned against God, and you can read in **Ezekiel 8 to 10** that the Glory of God left- it departed and went away from the temple. A very sad and tragic moment. The prophet stands and he watches the Glory of God go up over the temple and go up over the door and up out over the mountain and it disappears and God leaves Israel.

And the Glory never came back until this night here with these shepherds out in this field. So even before David was King- the Glory of God leaves and it stays gone until this night, and right here with these shepherds- the Glory of God appears on earth again.

So this is not just a small event- it was signified in the Garden in the Presence of God. It was signified in the tabernacle in the Presence of God. It was signified in the temple in the Presence of God coming into the world. And it is signified this night here with these shepherds that the very Glory of God- the Presence of God- had come into the world again. But this time- the Presence of God has come not in a building, it was not under a tent- this time the Glory has come in human flesh in the Messiah- Jesus Christ.

So the Glory of God that had departed from Israel was now back in Israel in the Life and Words and Actions and in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Let's come pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.