

SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING

LUKE 2:8-20 DECEMBER 11, 2016

Merry Christmas everyone! We've already read through our passage for this morning. Luke, chapter 2, verses 8 through 20. Let's find our way there together.

In the 1960's Neighborhood Watch groups started popping up in the United States. The idea is not that citizens would become a vigilante patrol, but that members of a close community would have their eyes open to take note of suspicious or criminal behavior and communicate with one another what was going on, getting in touch with the police when necessary.

The Department of Homeland Security took the idea nationwide after 9/11 with their "see something, say something" campaign. They even trademarked the phrase. On their site they have a tagline that reads: "We all play a role in keeping our community safe."

These days, smartphones have provided a modern spin on neighborhood watch programs. A new app called Nextdoor, as well as an officially branded "Neighborhood Watch" app are bringing the idea of seeing and saying into the 21st century.

In our text this morning we have the *only* eyewitness account of the night of Jesus' birth. When I think about that, it's kind of surprising! When you read the Bible you come to the conclusion that there are 3 moments in human history that are the most significant and the most necessary: The birth of Jesus, the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. All of history, all of existence is composed around those 3 notes which together give us God's melody of redemption.

And now, after thousands of years, that *first* moment had come. And to announce it to the world, God the Father chose a group of shepherds. Men who looked after sheep for a living. Theirs wasn't a neighborhood watch, it was a *livelihood* watch. They would spend their days and nights looking for food and water for their flocks. Watching for predators. Keeping their eyes on the horizon to forecast the weather. Observing the flock and counting their sheep, checking their health and disposition.

These watchers were a great group to use as the first eyewitnesses of Christ's birth, for a lot of reasons. But what stood out to me this week was the many phrases and terms that had to do with *looking* and *seeing*.

Verse 8: Keeping watch. Verse 12: You'll *find* a Baby. Verse 15: Let's go see this thing. Verse 17: When they had *seen* Him. Verse 20: the things they had heard and seen.

Now, the power of the Bible is not only that it reveals God, but it's relevant for our lives. This passage is not only a *chronicle*, it is an *example* for us. As we see this story unfold we find that the tidings the shepherds received were not only for them, but they are for us. And as recipients, we are included in the continuation of their work. A magnificent, eternal version of *see something, say something*.

As we look through this story, let's put ourselves behind the eyes of the shepherds and see what sort of wonderful things God was revealing and how that would change their lives forever.

We begin at verse 8, where we read:

Luke 2:8 - ⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

It is generally accepted that these guys would've been stationed at what is called the Tower of the Flock. It's believed that these were the lambs that were raised for the Temple sacrifices. We're not specifically told that, but it not only makes geographical sense, but also it makes a huge amount of *theological* sense. The final Lamb had come. The Lamb of God who would take away all the sins of all the world. And so it is altogether appropriate that the Lord would choose these shepherds to be the first to know that the Savior had arrived.

It's hard to know exactly where they would be on the map, and it's hard to know exactly the route that Mary and Joseph would've taken on their trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem (despite what tour guides would have you believe), but to me it is not at all outside the realm of possibilities that Mary and Joseph could have actually walked by these men and their flocks the day of Jesus' birth. Whether that happened or not, these men had no idea that such a significant, world-changing thing was happening right in their midst. The Messiah, promised all the way back in Genesis 3, was finally arriving. God was going to break through in an incredible way, right near them. And He very much wanted them to know about it.

Luke 2:9 - ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Now, I hope I don't ruin any mental images you have, but it doesn't seem that these angels appeared in the sky. Rather, we're told here that the first angel stood *before* them. The shepherds who were up during that watch of the night were leaning on their staffs when, all of a sudden, a bright and shining angel popped up right next to them in all his brilliance and splendor. And it was a jolting thing. If you're reading the King James Version you'll see it says that the angel "came upon them." The word there is a word for attack!

You know, God loves to surprise us. Often times it's easy to think of God as this far-away personality who doesn't want to be disturbed. But in the Bible we see that He *loves* to jump in. He's startling people all the time. And in the Christian life we find that God still wants to surprise us with His presence. Surprise us with His power. Surprise us with a word of direction or preparation or preservation. Why? Because God keeps watch over *His* flock. And as we see with these shepherds, the Lord knows *exactly* where we are and how to get to us and He takes joy in jumping in.

As God's glory surrounded these men, they were terrified and full of awe. This is always what happens in the Bible when an angel or God's presence shows up. Because a *real* manifestation of the Lord's power will immediately expose the fact that we are categorically un-glorious and unholy in comparison to Him. And so, the shepherds were greatly afraid.

Luke 2:10 - ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

When the angel says "I bring you good tidings", the language there is that he has come to *evangelize!* He said, "I have a message that is not only incredibly good, but also incredibly important! And this message is not at all meant to be known only by you guys, but it is a message that must go out *from* you to *all* people." We note that this global message was *only* delivered here. The angels had no other stops that evening. We'll see that after this little meet-and-greet they leave and head

back into heaven. Which means that the shepherds were given the heavenly responsibility to go and announce this message. It was the same with the disciples. Same with the prophets. It's the same for you if you're a Christian here this morning. A heavenly message, full of importance *and* joy, that we are responsible for.

We note also here the fact that the angel said "I bring you *tidings*." News. Meaning that it was something these shepherds didn't know. This essential, life-changing information was *news* to them. God give us a heart to reach those who have never heard the Gospel!

Luke 2:11 - ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

There it is. The message is a Messiah. What God wants us to know is that there is a Person who can deal with our sin and save us from death, and He is Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, laid in a manger, killed on a cross and risen from His tomb.

Now, think about this: These guys were shepherds. Shepherds who watched over the temple lambs, who were raised for sacrifice. Once the Messiah came and did His work, there was no longer a need for sacrifices. Meaning, this message was effectively going to put them out of a job! Their whole livelihood was going to be rendered *obsolete* once Jesus died.

What a great reminder that the Christ is not simply an *addition* to our lives. He's not an extension of our own plan. He supersedes our thoughts and intentions and replaces them with Himself. *He* has the supreme right to redefine us and reassign us according to His will and purposes. But as He does so He gives us Himself. He was born to us. He was given for us. He was brought and delivered unto us that we might experience God's salvation and peace and goodwill toward us.

The angel has revealed the Baby, and now gives them a hint about where He'll be.

Luke 2:12 - ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

A sign, but no address. "Look for a Baby, but you don't get the family name. This Child will *clearly* stand out because of the circumstances of His birth, but you are going to have to go looking."

Notice also that the angel didn't say Bethlehem. He said "the city of David." Now, it was *Jerusalem* that was referred to as "the city of David" over 40 times in the Old Testament. And these shepherds were somewhere in-between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

I think this shows us a wonderful example for when we are following the Lord. Often, there will be some information about God's plan for our lives or what He wants us to do in some situation. But what we're given will require a few things. It will require we *pursue* the Lord. The shepherds were going to have to put their feet to the pavement and go find this Baby. Second, it will require that we *probe* the Scriptures for understanding. If a Jew knew their Scriptures, they knew that Micah had prophesied that the Messiah would be born in *Bethlehem*. Both cities could be called the City of David. Jerusalem was the city he captured and made his great capital. Bethlehem was the city of his birth and where he grew up.

But when the shepherds are told, “Go find a Baby, *somewhere*, in the City of David.” They would need to choose to pursue. They would need to have probed the Scriptures and they needed the Lord to *point* the way. And the same is going to be true of our spiritual lives. We *probe* the Scriptures to discover God and His will for us. We *pursue* Him and follow after as He *points* the way by the leading of the Holy Spirit. It follows the same pattern we see exemplified here in Luke 2.

Luke 2:13-14 - ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

The most monumental scavenger hunt in human history had just begun - but you know what - there was time for a worship service! There was enough time to sing to the Lord and magnify Him for what He was doing. The highest God was directing His infinite power and grace and goodwill all the way down to the lowness of mankind. And I love that the angels took a moment to praise. There’s always time to praise God and to thank Him for who He is and what He does. And we should follow their example and make it a priority to publicly worship God in whatever moments we can.

Luke 2:15 - ¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Just like that, the angels were gone. What an amazing thing that this heavenly army was not attending their King. Not because they didn’t *want* to, but because Christ came for mankind. He came for you and for me and it would be *shepherds*, not seraphim, who would first attend to Him.

Look at what they say here. They had *heard*, now they wanted to see for themselves. What an incredible contrast from the story we read in Matthew 2, when the Wise Men from the east come to Herod’s court. They say they’ve seen the sign. Messiah the King is born, they’ve seen His star. The chief priests and scribes come out, hear what’s said, tell them, “Head over to Bethlehem.” And then just go back home. But not these shepherds. They said, “If there is a Savior, I want to *behold* Him.” They weren’t going to squander or ignore what the Lord had made known to them. They were going to take the opportunity to sit at His feet, be in His presence, gaze upon Him and worship this Babe.

Luke 2:16 - ¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

They rushed to the city. They came with *haste*. There was an urgency and eagerness to find the Lord.

I wonder how many people they woke up before they found Mary and Joseph’s stable? We know the city was packed with people. No room in the inn. They rushed over in the middle of the night. Pounding on doors. Peering into barns. Looking for this Baby. I imagine that just about the whole city was awake before they found the manger.

But then, they finally find them. And, let’s just take a moment to point out just what great troopers Mary and Joseph are in all this! When we had kids it was in the comfort of an air-conditioned hospital, with a staff of people waiting on us to make things go smoothly, and I’ll tell you this: I didn’t want strangers coming in and gawking at my baby!

But the shepherds tiptoe in and behold their Messiah.

Luke 2:17-18 - ¹⁷ Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸ And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

“When they had seen Him.” What did they see?

They saw that this Baby, God come in human flesh, is like us. In particular, He was like them. No pomp. No palace. No prestige. He was there among the animals. There, accessible to strangers. Born into the filth of creation that He might deal with the filth of sin.

And from there they went once again house to house, undoubtedly sharing the personal experience they had just been a part of, but more importantly, they shared the *saying* which was told them. They went around, not promoting some emotional experience, but explaining a message. Telling the people of Bethlehem and beyond, “Here is what God has said. And here is how we know it to be true. And the angel told me to tell you that this message is for *you too!*”

These watchers had been shown something amazing. And they went out proclaiming.

Luke 2:20 - ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

They returned to their flocks. Some of them *must* have realized that their jobs were eventually going to be made obsolete. I wonder if that night was the last shift for some of them. And yet, they went with praise and filled with the joy of the Lord. And here’s what the angel *didn’t* say: He didn’t say, “Your job is being phased out, this is all going to burn, so just give up.” Rather, the way the story ends we see these guys returning back where they were but completely changed. Filled with the knowledge of God and doing *His* business as they carried out their regular lives. They made the message known *widely*. They fulfill a wonderful prophecy written in Isaiah 700 years before Jesus was born:

Isaiah 52:8 - ⁸Your watchmen shall lift up *their* voices, With their voices they shall sing together; For they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion.

Isaiah 52:7 - ⁷How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good *things*, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

At the beginning, I said we should put ourselves behind the eyes of the shepherds and see what sort of wonderful things God was revealing and how that would change their lives forever. Hopefully, along the way we’ve caught a glimpse or been reminded that the Lord *still* speaks and surprises us. Their message and commission is *our* message and commission as Christians.

But, what if they had missed it? What if they responded the way the chief priests and scribes did? Shown the sign, given the Word of God, but it didn’t take root in the heart and didn’t put their feet on the pavement. Praise God that these men said: Let us go *NOW!*

If you're a believer here this morning, God still delights to bring you tidings and joy and opportunities to make Himself known to you and then *enlist* you to make the Messiah widely known. We don't have to be a king from the east or a chief priest in order to be used by God or for God to speak to us. Anyone, from any sleepy cow town can do so as we live life in pursuit of God, probing His word, pointed in which ways to go by the Holy Spirit. But if we want to be like these shepherds, then we must be people who have *heard* from God and have *seen* Him work in our own lives. So what have you heard? What have you seen? These watchers were shown a great deal that Christmas night. We can see the Lord too by watching for Him. As Christians, we're called to be witnesses in this world, but to be a witness, we must have seen something. We must know the One we're testifying of and know what He has said. So, what about us? When is the last time we saw the Lord revealed in our lives? When is the last time we heard Him speak to us, not just generally, but personally?

Isaiah 52 opens up by saying, "Awake, awake Put on your strength, O Zion." A great verse for us to remember often, that we might watch and be shown the great things the Lord has done. And, having seen something we then go on saying something.

But, perhaps you're not a Christian here this morning. You've never repented of your sin and asked Jesus to be your King. This passage shows us that God has moved heaven and earth not only to grant you salvation, but to let you know about it. He's not hiding away from you. He has sent out His good news of grace, the glad tidings that the Messiah has made a way for you to be at peace with God and receive life everlasting. But it is a gift you must go get. You must lay hold of it by believing what God has said, and falling down at the feet of this Person, Jesus Christ. Born in Bethlehem. Crucified at Calvary. Raised to life and able to save you from your sins if you will call out to Him today.