

Dear Friends and Family,

I am sure the following is a familiar passage. Today, read it slowly. Read it carefully. Have you ever noticed what this passage says? The first people to hear of Christ's birth weren't politicians, religious leaders, or people of influence by the world's standards. Instead, it was shepherds. Lowly shepherds. *The least of these*. Consider the shepherds. They were living in *the fields*. Men who rarely showered and shaved and *lived in fields*. Primary job? To take care of sheep, the lowliest of animals. These men occupied the lowest of positions. Yet they were awake. They were alert. They were doing the job God had called them to do. And in the midst of their everyday living, the glory of God was revealed.

“And there were in the same country shepherds
abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,
and the glory of the Lord shone round about them:
and they were sore afraid.
And the angel said unto them, Fear not:
for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,
which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord.
And this shall be a sign unto you;
Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,
lying in a manger.
And suddenly there was with the angel
a multitude of the heavenly host
praising God, and saying,
Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will toward men.
And it came to pass,
as the angels were gone away from them into heaven,
the shepherds said one to another,
Let us now go even unto Bethlehem,
and see this thing which is come to pass,
which the Lord hath made known unto us.
And they came with haste,
and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.
And when they had seen it,
they made known abroad the saying
which was told them concerning this child.
And all they that heard it wondered at those things
which were told them by the shepherds.”

Luke 2:8-18

These lowly men were entrusted with the glorious news that had been awaited since before creation. Every prophecy. Every word of the Bible. Every studious religious scholar, all knew that this moment would change the world and eternity. This one moment that all of history hinged upon was first proclaimed to shepherds. Lowly shepherds.

Pastor's Point of View

The big question: **What is the gift of God?**

Day 1 - READ John 1:14

1. In the opening verses of John's gospel, he makes clear the absolute deity of Christ. Jesus Christ is the Word of God.
2. In verse 14, who is responsible for the Word becoming flesh?
3. What then, is the gift of God, given to us?
4. What do we do with the knowledge of this gift?
5. How does God entrust us with the Gospel? How are we to share it where God has placed us?

Day 2 - READ 2 Timothy 1:1-5

1. Christmas should be a time of joy and celebration. Families gather together, children wait anxiously for gifts, and possibly snow. School lets out for an extended break. There is much that this season brings about.
2. What Christmas traditions do you have in your family?
3. How have those traditions been passed down from generation to generation?
4. Is the true Christmas message of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh of humanity one of those traditions?
5. How can you, like Eunice and Lois, begin to ensure that you are passing on your faith, teaching about the true gift of God?

Day 3 - READ 2 Timothy 1:6

1. Perhaps, for you, Christmas is a time of mourning or grief. The pain of loss is always the most difficult during this season.
2. How can you kindle afresh the gift of God, while acknowledging your feelings?
3. We live in a sinful and fallen world, but we have the hope of a future with our Lord and Savior. Hope is the theme of the first week of Advent. READ: Romans 15:13.

4. What hope do we have? What is it based upon?
5. Because of the gift of God, one day He will declare, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” - Revelation 21:3-4

Day 4 - READ 2 Timothy 1:7

1. Commit this verse to memory.
2. May you boldly proclaim the truth. “God has not given us a spirit of timidity (fear, cowardice, passivity), BUT of power and love and discipline.”
3. Those shepherds were given a message. They proclaimed it loudly and boldly after their life-changing encounter. May we share the Gospel with the same passion, as we have been changed by Christ!
4. Do you believe that the greatest gift ever given was a baby in a manger in Bethlehem? And that the baby was Christ, who came to seek and save the lost? And that He came to lay down His life, AND take it back up again (John 10:18)?

After a glorious encounter and a message from heaven above, the shepherds went **straight and in a hurry** to lay their eyes on what the Lord had already told them. They saw, they believed, and they did. They acted on their faith. And then they shared with those around them. May we be like the shepherds, living changed lives through the gift of Christ!

Merry Christmas and grace be with you!
Pastor Matt

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*