

Give Glory To God

Luke 2:8-20

SS Lesson for 12/21/2014

Devotional Scripture: Rev 19:1-10

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Key Verse: Luke 2:20

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews the response all should give to the good news of Jesus' birth which is to **Give Glory To God**. The **study's aim** is to describe how God's glory was revealed in the story of the Bethlehem shepherds. The **study's application** is to commit to sharing one's own wonder at the birth of Christ with an unbeliever. (*Adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*).

Key Verse: Luke 2:20

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

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Jesus' birth was dated by Luke as falling in the reign of **Caesar Augustus**, who was officially made the ruler of the Roman Empire in 27 B.C. and ruled to A.D. 14. Because Herod the Great's reign ended in 4 B.C., Jesus was born before that time. The mention of **Quirinius** as **governor of Syria** poses a problem. He was governor in A.D. 6-7, much too late for Jesus' birth. Therefore does the word **first** refer, as in the NIV, to a first, that is, an earlier, **census** by Quirinius? If so, one would have to posit a previous governorship for Quirinius at about 4 B.C. Perhaps a better solution is to take "first" to mean "before," as it does, for example, in John 15:18. Luke 2:2 would then read, "this was the census that took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria" (i.e., before A.D. 6). For the census **Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem**, Joseph's ancestral home. Joseph was a descendant of **David** (cf. 1:27), who was born in Bethlehem. Some have argued that it seems strange that people were not registered in the places where they currently lived. However, other instances of the same practice are known (see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 101-2). Mary accompanied Joseph for several reasons. The couple knew she would have the Baby during the time Joseph was gone, and they most likely did not want to be separated at that event. Also both of them knew that the Child was the Messiah. They also would have known that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The Child was born during their time in Bethlehem. The fact that Jesus was called Mary's **firstborn** implies that later she had other children. The couple was housed in quarters which were not private. According to tradition, they were in a cave near the inn. The Child was **placed... in a manger**, from which livestock fed. Being wrapped **in strips of cloth** was important, for this was the way the shepherds would recognize the infant (v. 12). Some infants were bound up in that way to keep their limbs straight and unharmed. **An announcing angel** and other angels appeared **at night** to a group of **shepherds** and heralded the birth of the **Savior in the town of David**, that is, Bethlehem (v. 4). The shepherds may have been caring for lambs which were destined for sacrifice during the time of Passover. The appearance of the angel and of the radiant **glory of the Lord... terrified** them. The Greek for "terrified" (lit., "they feared a great fear") stresses the intensity of this fear. The angels' message was comforting. The shepherds were told **not to be afraid** (cf. 1:13, 30). The message was that "a Savior," **Christ the Lord**, was **born**. This was **good news of great joy**. Throughout Luke "joy" is often associated with salvation. This news was to be proclaimed to **all the people**. These were specifically the people of Israel, but perhaps Luke also hinted that the Savior would be for all mankind. The **angel** was then joined by a **great company** of other angels engaged in **praising God** in the highest. The NIV's **on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests** is preferred to the KJV's "good will toward men." God's peace is not given to those who have good will, but to those who are recipients of God's good will or favor. **The shepherds** went to see **the Baby**, and they told what **the angels** had related to them. The shepherds understood that the angels were speaking for **the Lord**. They believed the message and went to confirm it for themselves. This was much like the action of Mary after she had heard the message of Elizabeth. Such an attitude contrasts sharply with that of the religious leaders who knew where the Baby was to be born but did not take the time or the effort to confirm it for themselves (Matt. 2:5). After seeing the Baby, the shepherds were the first messengers to proclaim the arrival of the Messiah: **they spread the word**. Those **who heard... were amazed**. The theme of amazement at the proclamation of the Messiah runs throughout the Book of Luke. (The Gr. verb *thaumazō*, "to be amazed, to wonder, to be astonished," occurs in Luke 1:21, 63; 2:18, 33; 4:22; 8:25; 9:43; 11:14, 38; 20:26; 24:12, 41. Two other words for amazement were also used by Luke; see 2:48.) **Mary** reflected on this momentous event in history. Of all the women of Israel *she* was the mother of the Messiah! **The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God**, much as the angels had done (vv. 13-14).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

"How was your holiday?" When Christmas is over and life gets back to its normal routine, people gather together to talk about their experiences over the break. Some will have exciting things to share. "That recipe turned out even better than I had hoped! Everyone loved it." Others will share disappointments. "The reviews said the motel was clean and the staff was great, but we found it subpar. We'll never go there again!" Even with gifts, people will be getting on the Internet or talking with friends, rating their new gadgets or toys. Did the seller deliver what was promised? Was the item of good quality? Customer service counters will be flooded with people returning items that did not meet their expectations. Have you ever thought about rating Christmas, not the commercial aspects of Christmas but Christmas itself? The shepherds did. They had been living their normal lives and doing their normal jobs when God arrived. An angel told them what had happened and what to look for, and those shepherds rushed to see whether what they had been told was true. It was! Everything they had heard and seen was just as it had been told to them. Nothing was less than what had been promised. Nothing was less than what they had hoped for. This was true for the shepherds that night, but it is even more so for all of us on a much grander, eternal scale. Everything we have heard and seen regarding Christmas has been as it was told to us. Every prophecy regarding Jesus' birth (some made thousands of years beforehand) has come fully and completely true. We like to evaluate whether our Christmas holidays were as good as we hoped, but let us take time to realize that Christmas itself is beyond what anyone could have hoped for. God loved the world so much that He sent His Son to be born for us (John 3:16; Isa. 9:6). For us! Though the shepherds spread the good news they had heard (Luke 2:17), they did not just tell others about this wondrous thing. They also told God. The golden text says they returned to their normal lives (though life would never be the same for them!) glorifying and praising God for everything they had seen and heard. This Christmas, rather than focus on whether an event or a gift was better or worse than we had hoped, let us realize that the greatest gift we have received never disappoints or fails to deliver what was promised: hope, unconditional love, forgiveness, and eternal restoration to God Himself. As important as it is to focus on the true meaning of Christmas, let us also take time to praise and glorify God for what He has done. We believers truly have much to celebrate. This Christmas, let us take a look back, both at our own lives before Christ and at the prophecies made before He came. Let us realize what has come to pass. How have our own lives personally changed because Jesus came? How has all of history changed because God keeps His promises? And how does that give us hope as we face another uncertain year?

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

People love baby pictures. Announce that a baby has been born, and people will immediately ask, "Do you have pictures?" We carry them in our wallets and purses. We share them through social media. We frame and hang them in our homes. Years later we look at those pictures and ask ourselves, "Was he ever really that small?" "When did she get all grown up?" We hold in our minds the contrast between the tiny, helpless baby and the growing child or grown adult that the baby has become. The story of Jesus' birth can call up similar feelings. When we think of the infant Jesus at Christmas, we are awestruck that God was entering the world in that child. The Creator chose to enter his creation as a human baby, one as weak and vulnerable as any other. That baby grew up in a lowly setting to demonstrate amazing power that could belong only to God. Yet he also chose to surrender himself to his enemies and die a tortuous death. Today's text exemplifies this contrast. As we gain in our understanding here, we will move closer to comprehending what God has really done for us through Jesus Christ.

Our lesson text is part of a much larger story of Jesus' conception and birth in Luke 1 and 2. Luke weaves this story in with his account of John the Baptist's conception and birth. Both births were announced by an angel, accomplished by God's miraculous power, and accompanied by wonders that God performed. Both children were announced to be God's future instruments. But Jesus stands supreme in this pairing. He is God's Son (Luke 1:32a), the promised king (1:32b, 33), virgin born (1:35), the Lord (1:43), and the source of the salvation (2:30). To him alone the glory of God belongs. But as Jesus was born against the backdrop of Roman imperial power, there was another who claimed glory. Caesar ruled much of the world and had ordered it to pay him taxes (Luke 2:1). Some said that the true glory in the world was that of Rome's political, military, and economic power. Of such glory Jesus and his family had none. Shut out from ordinary living quarters for humans, the newborn Jesus lay in a manger, a feeding trough for animals (2:7). Where was true glory to be found—in the palaces of Caesar or the manger of Bethlehem?

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

As a historian, Luke identified the time period of Jesus' birth by naming the Roman emperor and the local governor. The contrast between Jesus, the divine King of kings, and Augustus, the first Roman emperor, would have been striking to Luke's first readers. Octavian, who had been renamed Augustus (meaning reverend) by the Roman Senate, was the first Roman emperor ruling all of the vast Roman Empire under his sole authority. The month of August was named after him—to honor him. "In contrast, Jesus was born into humble circumstances, even having a livestock's trough as His cradle. Jesus, the beloved Son of God, did not shrink from coming into this earth to the most modest of circumstances (Osborne, gen. ed., Life Application Bible Commentary, Tyndale). Fortune and fame were not what Jesus' coming was all about, nor should they be the driving goal of believers. Everything related to Jesus' coming was humble and simple. Bethlehem, a small town about five miles south of Jerusalem, was not without fame. It was here that Samuel had found David, the youngest son of Jesse, caring for his family's sheep (1 Sam. 16:1-11). Micah had prophesied that a ruler of Israel would be born here (Mic. 5:2). It was in Bethlehem that David's descendant and successor would be born (Luke 1:30-33). Once again shepherds and their sheep would be featured in the dramatic event that took place. It would be expected that He who was to become the King of Israel would be born in a palace or a mansion, but He was sheltered in animal quarters and laid in a manger (Luke 2:1-6). It would be expected that His birth would be attended by rich nobles, but He was visited by shepherds. Wise men (Magi) from the east did not come until He was a toddler in a house (Matt. 2:1-12). He who came as a servant would not come as a king until the end of time (Rev. 19:11-16). There was to be a vast difference between His first and second advents.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Glory to God for the Good News Announced (Luke 2:8-14)

8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.
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.
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.
11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."
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!"

Announcement of joy (8-10)

Joy because God has come in the flesh (Isa 40:9)

9 You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

Joy because God has come to reign (Isa 52:7)

7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

Joy because of being in the presence of God (Ps 21:6)

6 Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.

Joy through worship (Luke 24:52)

52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy .

Announcement of a Savior (11-12)

A Savior who brings repentance and forgiveness (Acts 5:31)

31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

A Savior of the Church (Eph 5:23)

23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior .

A Savior who destroyed death and brought immortality (2 Tim 1:10)

10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

A Savior of the world (1 John 4:14)

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

A one and only Savior (Jude 25)

25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Announced of peace and goodwill (13-14)

A peace greater than anything in the world (John 14:27)

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

A peace that comes with having a Lord of all (Acts 10:36)

36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

A peace that comes from having a Savior who overcame the world (John 16:33)

33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

A peace provided us through justification (Rom 5:1)

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

A peace provided us through reconciliation (Eph 2:14-18)

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

A peace through Jesus' blood (Col 1:20)

20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Glory to God By Responding to the Good News (Luke 2:15-20)

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."
16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.
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.
19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.
20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Respond by investigating (15-16)

Investigation through searching God's word (Acts 17:11)

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Investigation through testing the spirit by the Spirit (1 John 4:1)

1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Investigation through testing to see if it is good (1 Thess 5:21)

21 Test everything. Hold on to the good.

Investigation through seeking God's kingdom (Matt 6:33)

33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Investigation through prayer (Matt 7:7)

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Respond by spreading of the news (17)

Witnessing to others started with the scattering of the disciples (Acts 11:19-21)

19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Witness to others because Jesus commanded it (Matt 28:18-20)

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Witness to others through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Witness to others through teaching (2 Tim 2:2)

2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Respond with Amazement (18)

We can be amazed, but should know enough to glorify and praise God (Mark 2:12)

12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

We shouldn't be amazed at the power of God, because He is the most powerful (Acts 3:12-13)

12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

Sometimes amazement comes from a hardened heart (Mark 6:51-52)

51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

Respond by Meditating (19)

Meditation on God's works (Ps 77:12)

12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

Meditation of the heart (Ps 19:14)

14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Meditation on God's unfailing love (Ps 48:9)

9 Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.

Meditation on God's wonders (Ps 119:27)

27 Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

Respond by glorifying and praising God (20)

Glorify God through unity (Rom 15:5-6)

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Glorify God through living a godly life (1 Peter 2:12)

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Glorify God through doing good works (Matt 5:16)

16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:20)

20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Glorify God through suffering for Christ (1 Peter 4:16)

16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

There are four lessons which I wish to underscore here, which I believe are taught in our text. Let us prayerfully consider what God has to say to us from this passage.

(1) The sovereignty of God in history. Luke is a historian, and his historical account of the birth of Christ surely seeks to demonstrate the sovereignty of God in history. In the first 7 verses of the text, everything is viewed solely through a “secular” grid. A pagan potentate makes a decree, and the Israelites comply with it by registering in the town of their birth. In the process, a pregnant woman is forced to make a long journey with her husband, and to bear the child far from home and without the conveniences of a home.

Luke then lifts the veil, showing us that all of these seemingly sad events occur in order that God’s Messiah might be born in the vicinity of some shepherds, and in conditions which set Him apart from all other babies in Bethlehem. These shepherds are guided to the Messiah by a divinely appointed angel and an angel choir, so that they serve to edify and encourage Mary and Joseph and to announce Messiah’s birth to all who live in that area.

You will note that no mention is made of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Micah 5:2 is specifically mentioned by Luke because the recipient of the account, Theophilus, is a Gentile, who probably holds a high-level political position. While Theophilus would not be particularly in the prophetic fulfillment aspect of the birth account of Luke, he would be greatly impressed to learn that God is sovereign, and thus able to achieve His purposes and fulfill His promises by means of pagan powers, even the highest political power of that day—Caesar. Theophilus would be very impressed by this fact, which Luke is careful to reveal.

(2) Luke provides us with a lesson in the communication of the gospel. Luke is writing an account of the gospel here, and in doing this very well he provides us with some lessons in communicating the gospel to others. Luke passed up the opportunity to highlight the fulfillment of Micah 5:2 because it would not have as much impact on his Gentile recipient as it would have had on a Jew. Luke emphasized the sovereignty of God over history and over a heathen king, which would have had a great impact on Theophilus. In what he has done and not done Luke teaches us that we dare not change the gospel, but we should carefully chose to focus on those details of the gospel which will have the greatest impact on our audience. Thus, the need for more than one gospel is once again apparent.

(3) Luke’s account of the birth of Christ reminds us of the principle of proportion. We have already pointed out that Luke alone records the details of our Lord’s birth. Only one gospel in four describes the birth of Christ, while all four carefully depict His death. To press this point further, only a very few verses describe the events surrounding the birth of Christ while several chapters of each gospel are devoted to a description of the arrest, trial, crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension of our Lord. The principle of proportion teaches us that much time and space is devoted to what is most important, while little time and space is given to that which is of lesser import. On the basis of this simple principle we would have to conclude that the death of Christ is more important to the gospel writers than His birth. Why is this so? Because it is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that saves us, not the babyhood of Christ. Granted, Christ had to take on human flesh before He could reveal God to men and save them, but it is His atoning work on the cross of Calvary that saves us.

Why, then, is the Christmas story so important to many today, even those who do not believe in Christ for salvation? Because, I fear, the babe in the manger is far less threatening than the Christ of the later gospels, who interprets and applies the Law, who condemns sin and who speaks of faith in His blood. The baby in the manger is sweet and cuddly, and “controllable.” The baby in the manger is a kind of “God in the box,” a God whom we are comfortable to approach, to think about, even to worship. But the Christ hanging on the cross is not a pretty picture, He is not one to whom we are drawn, who evokes in us warm and fuzzy feelings. Many have made much, too much, of the babe in the manger because this is the kind of “god” they wish to serve, a “god” who is weak, who is helpless, who needs us, rather than a God who is sovereign, and who demands our obedience, our worship, our all.

What kind of God do you serve, my friend? What is the Christ like whom you worship? Worshipping the “babe in the manger” is not enough, for this is only the way He came. The way He will be for all eternity is the way He is described by John in the book of Revelation:

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. *Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen* (Rev. 1:4-7).

According to Revelation and the prophecies of the Bible, the Jesus who came the first time as a little baby, is coming again, as an avenger and as a righteous judge, to punish the wicked and to reward the righteous. This may not be the kind of Jesus you wish to think of or to serve, but it is the same Jesus that came to Bethlehem. His second coming will be vastly different from His first appearance. Then, He came to humble himself, to die on the cross, and to save. Next time, He comes to judge. Are you ready to face this Jesus, to fall before Him in worship? This is the Jesus of the manger. This is the coming King. I urge you to accept Christ as He came the first time, as your Savior, and then to wait for Him eagerly, to come the second time, to make things right, to establish His kingdom on earth, and to rule over all creation. Let us learn from Luke's account that the babe in the manger is the Savior of the world, whom we must accept as our Savior.

(4) Finally, we learn that God's purposes are often achieved through suffering, and that God's purposes in our suffering are often not immediately apparent. All of the suffering, inconvenience, and discomfort that was occasioned by the decree of Caesar was not immediately recognized as the sovereign hand of a loving God, who was bringing about His purposes, in a way that was for the good of those who suffered. Let us learn from Mary and Joseph that those seemingly "secular" sufferings of life are most often instruments in the hand of God, which time or eternity will make clear to us.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/birth-messiah-luke-21-20>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The contrast in today's passage is between the power of the world and the lowliness of the Son of the almighty God. That contrast is the contrast of the ages! If we know Jesus, we can never think of life in the same way again. Life can never be about becoming powerful, wealthy, or important. It can only be about seeking and embracing the lowliness of Jesus Christ, thereby giving our lives in service for the sake of others who need to follow him as well. Perhaps we feel like shepherds, alone in the night, ignored by others. If so, we can know that the angelic message is for us, that Christ comes for us. We can and should join the shepherds in joyfully sharing that good news.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

In biblical times, being a shepherd was a difficult occupation, but it was not held in high regard by most people. These shepherds cared for animals out in the wild. They protected the animals and helped them get to where they needed to be in order to have food and water. The shepherds referred to in our golden text were followers of God. They were not of the religious ruling class but were just common Jews who believed in God. When they saw the angel, they knew it was an angel, but it still scared them because they probably had never seen an angel. Nevertheless, they believed the angel. They went to see what he had declared and found that the Baby Jesus was just where the angel had said He would be. Their response was to praise and glorify God. They also told everyone in Bethlehem what they had seen. It is remarkable that God chose to tell shepherds that the Messiah had been born instead of telling the Jewish religious rulers of the day. From Scripture prophecy these religious elite knew where the Messiah was to be born and were even alerted to the event by the arrival of the wise men (Matt. 2:1-6), but they did not go out to see for themselves. Obviously the possibility that it might be true did not excite them. This illustrates the difference between having the trappings of religion and having a heart that is truly responsive to God. The shepherds, in stark contrast to the religious elite, were eager to run and see the Messiah as soon as they got over the shock of seeing angels. They were also the first messengers of the gospel in that they proved to be good witnesses of the birth of Christ. Their commitment was one based on a heart that was thankful to God. Even though they did not work in a religious profession, the shepherds were tender toward God. They were doing a mundane job faithfully, but when it came time to respond to a heavenly message, they were ready. It is interesting that often in biblical history, God uses the person who is humble and faithful in heart more than the person of religious standing. This does not take away from the value of religion, but it is true that God reaches out to ordinary people. Throughout Jesus' ministry He was in constant conflict with the Pharisees, one

group of religious rulers of the day. The followers of Jesus were also often in trouble with the religious authorities. God's church is a spiritual building, and He constructs it using living stones (I Pet. 2:5; cf. Eph. 2:19-22). These stones are not necessarily distinguished people in the religious world; however, they are always humble people, like the shepherds, who simply take God at His word. The thing that made the shepherds significant was their simple faith. They saw the angel, heard the message, and responded. They did not take the time to consider all the implications or try to analyze the situation. Instead, they went to see Jesus just as the angel had directed them to do. When they did this, they found Jesus, just as the angel had promised.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. God reaches out to the lowliest of people, like the shepherds, who were looked down on by society (Luke 2:8-9)
2. By choosing to be born in a stable, Jesus exhibited humility that we can emulate (vss. 10-12)
3. We should praise God with the same enthusiasm that the angels use to worship Him (vss. 13-14)
4. Seeing God's glory should cause us to seek Him more (vs. 15)
5. We should tell other people about the truths God reveals to us (vss. 16-17)
6. We should not stop worshipping simply because exciting spiritual moments have passed (vss. 18-20)