

# Behold! I Bring You Good News

## Luke 2:8-20

### Introduction

This is the fourth Sunday in Advent and thus the fourth installment in our series of sermons on the story of Jesus. As you know, our key word is:

### BEHOLD!

We are defining this hard to define word as like this:

*Stop what you are doing! Pay attention! Something important is happening right now. You don't want to miss it.*

So as we have throughout this series we are looking for that easy-to-miss detail. We are searching for something we might otherwise scoot on by so that we might find something bigger and more important – at least something bigger and more important in our own eyes.

The “behold” in today’s text is itself easy-to-miss. It is not the first word in the sentence, but presented midway into it – almost as a throw away comment.

The setting is the countryside surrounding the little village of Bethlehem, where shepherds are keeping watch over their flocks. It is an otherwise peaceful night, just exactly what you would find on the front of the Christmas cards you have been receiving.

But all that changes when the sky lights up with the glory of the Lord when an angel suddenly appears. Now, be listening, you don't want to miss it. Verse 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... (Luke 2:10)*

I bring **you**. The good news came to the shepherds. The angel is speaking to the shepherds! Yes, the good news that brings great joy is for all the people, but it came to the shepherds. I bring **you**.

Now, why is that simple little fact “behold” worthy? I see three reasons in this text:

### REASON #1: THE SHEPHERDS WERE READY TO RECEIVE IT

Verse 8:

*In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. (Luke 2:8)*

Do you remember what was going on in Bethlehem at this same time? We talked about it last week. Approximately 500,000 people were crowding into a sleepy little village with a normal population of 3,000. Bethlehem was a mad house!

Two pictures come to my mind. First, have you ever tried to fly anywhere around a major holiday? Picture the chaos. That's Bethlehem.

The other picture involves the Dr. Seuss story "How the Grinch Stole Christmas. It is one of two non-biblical stories I read every Christmas. The other is Clement Moore's "A Night Before Christmas." Both are classics.

In the Dr. Seuss story, Grinch is annoyed by all the noise that comes from Whoville. He enjoys the quiet of his little home on the mountain. I picture the shepherds out in the fields, with noise of Bethlehem penetrating their silence.

Why is that important? Because no one in Bethlehem was in a position to hear anything! Their ears were all filled the noise of a half million people! They couldn't hear the person standing next to them!

But not the shepherds. They were in a position to hear what God had to say. Think about this for a minute. The text tells us that these shepherds were "in the same region." Why then did no one in Bethlehem see the glory of the Lord when the angel appeared? The answer is: "They were focused on other things." Focused to the extent that the sky was filled with the glory of the Lord. And they missed it!

So when the angel appeared to the shepherds that night, he said "I bring **you**." Because they were in a position to hear it.

## **REASON #2: THE SHEPHERDS WERE IN NEED OF IT**

Let's stay in verse 8:

*In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. (Luke 2:8)*

We don't want to miss the fact that these first recipients were "shepherds." And what an unlikely group of people they were!

Shepherds were a core part of the identity of the Jews. Their ancestors were all shepherds. Abraham, Jacob, Isaac – even King David. These were all shepherds. In the early days of the nation, this was a noble profession.

But the nations around the Jews didn't have the same noble thoughts about sheep and shepherds. When Joseph brought his family to live with him in Egypt, he steered them to the land of Goshen and told them to be coy about their profession because:

*... shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians. (Genesis 46:34)*

By the time of the New Testament, the nation of Israel itself had adopted this same attitude. William Barclay writes:

*Shepherds were despised by the orthodox good people of the day. They were unable to keep the details of the ceremonial law; they could not observe all the meticulous hand-washings and rules and regulations. Their flocks made far too constant demands on them.*

All of this resulted in shepherds being isolated from the religious life of the nation.

*Jews needed sheep for their sacrifices, but they wanted nothing to do with shepherds.*

And it was to people like this that the message first came. Behold, I bring **you**.

### **REASON #3: THE SHEPHERDS WERE EAGER TO RESPOND TO IT**

Verse 15:

*When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." (Luke 2:15)*

A simple, succinct response: "Let us go." They went quickly, and they went "straight." No detours. We are trained to combine all of our errands into one trip. We don't go anywhere "straight." But that's what they did!

You might think "Who wouldn't do that?" But when the wise men came to King Herod later in the birth stories of Jesus – a story we will tell on January 3 – no one else responded like this. As you will recall King Herod consulted the religious leaders who steered the Magi to Bethlehem ... but those religious leaders went straight to work, not straight to Bethlehem!

It was these non-religious shepherds who responded. In fact, so eager was their response, they forgot about the sheep. Who watched the sheep while the shepherds went to Bethlehem?

The text also tells us these shepherds were so excited about what they found in Bethlehem that they didn't hurry back to their duties. Look at verse 18:

*And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. (Luke 2:18)*

They hurried straight TO Bethlehem, but took the long way back to the fields where the sheep were.

I am struck by their enthusiastic responses. These shepherds didn't know much theology. Their spiritual lives were not very deep. All they knew was they heard and saw on that one night.

## **APPLICATION**

And therein lies our point of application from this text:

*What do you do with what you know?*

God has always chosen to speak to and through ordinary people. In our Sunday School series ("An Unexpected Christmas") we are reminded every week that ordinary, sinful people – people like you and me – are at the heart of the story of Christmas. These are people who:

- Are willing and ready to listen. People who are not caught up in the noise of life, but people who, for whatever reason, are in a place where all of those distractions are absent.
- Need to hear the good news. They may not ever have considered matters of faith to matter at all, but they hear it. And they realize "I need this!"
- Are eager to take what they know and to act on it.

The story of Christmas is a story for everyone. But it starts in hearts that are prepared to receive it.

*Behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people. (Luke 2:10)*

Maybe that is what Mary was pondering in her heart.

Where do you see yourself in this story?

Amen.