

“SHAZAM!!”

Luke 2:8-11 ~ Acts 20:21 ~ John 1:46

Luke 2:8-11

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

Acts 20:21

²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

John 1:46

⁴⁶ “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

Shazam! That was the way Gladys Herdsman described the action of the angel of the Lord the 1st time she ever heard the Christmas story. You can read about it in a book titled: *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. The way she put it, the angel of the Lord came out of the dark night with a mighty voice ... a bright light and ... SHAZAM!!!

That was Barbara Robinson’s way of describing the impact of the message of the angels to the shepherds - at least as they were seen through the eyes of little six-year-old Gladys. A few minutes ago we sang the Christmas hymn: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. If you want to leave your hymnal open to that hymn you’ll see that within it are three separate messages for three different groups of people. As we look at the first of those groups, what we hear is ...

1) A Message For the Shepherds (Luke 2:8-11)

The message for the shepherds was: “Listen to the good news.” During His public ministry,

Jesus once quoted Isaiah 61:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor; to set free the downtrodden, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

So the very 1st proclamation of Jesus’ arrival was made to common, low-level, everyday people, shepherds. Shepherds were a despised class. The nature of their occupation brought huge problems: Their time with the sheep made it virtually impossible for them to understand and obey the regulations of the Mosaic law. Add to that the fact that they were commonly suspected of confusing what belonged to them with what belonged to their masters. Because of that they were so detested & not trusted that they were excluded from ever even giving testimony in court.

The 1st 2 verses of ***“O Little Town of Bethlehem”*** remind us that they worked the graveyard shift. If they had a shelter at all, it was just a hut made out of branches. So, while everyone else slept, they were out on the hillside to see the morning stars.

The actual work of keeping watch over the sheep was done by taking turns - some resting while others watched. But in God’s great wisdom, His messenger was sent to these, the lowest of the shabby, dingy shepherds. And they heard good news, the anointed prophet, priest & king, the Messiah, had been born. The promise had been made thousands of years earlier and they were the first to hear that God had kept His promise!

Listening isn’t so easy for us. Mike High confesses that it was never easy for him as a child. One day he said he was watching tv in the basement when his dad called him: “Mike, come up for dinner!”

“I heard him twice,” Mike said, “but both times I ignored his calls. Just when my favorite show ended, Dad shouted again:

“Mike, get up here right NOW!”

As I leaped to the top of the stairs, Dad yelled, “Where have you been?”

“I looked at him innocently. Then I said, I didn’t hear you when you called me the first two times.” I’ll give you just a minute to think about that.

Listening wasn't easy for Mike. It's not so easy for us either, is it? But the message for the shepherds here in Luke's gospel and at the beginning of this hymn is: "Listen to the good news!" The good news is that God Himself - through the sacrifice of His one and only Son brought about the solution to the world's biggest problem: sin. Jesus came to live without sin in any way and then to die to carry the penalty for the sins of all who respond to God's calling them to come.

LISTEN! The angels said. Listen to the good news of what God is doing. But there's more to the hymn than that. Next, we hear...

2) A Message For Theologians (Acts 20:21)

If you'll turn to Acts 20, in v.21, here's what you hear:

"I have declared to both Jews & Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

Here's what's going on: Paul has been traveling through Macedonia and Greece telling people about Jesus Christ. He's on his way to Jerusalem when he stops in Ephesus. While he's there, he calls for the elders of the church & reminds them of two crucial elements to the Christian life: repentance and faith.

Repentance is turning away from past sins. Faith is turning to God and trusting what He has done to ensure our eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ. In a sense, that is exactly what Phillips Brooks wrote in the third verse of this hymn:

***How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessing of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
the dear Christ enters in.***

Theologians grapple with what part man plays in salvation. The hymn reminds us that we do nothing to earn our own salvation. God imparts it to us. In other words, He gives us what we do not deserve. If we go back to the book of Acts for just a moment, Paul talks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord, Jesus. The two are tied together. Too often we don't grasp or accept that very well.

This week I read about two men who were adrift on a raft in open sea. It looked bad for them. Finally, one of them, frightened, began to pray: "O Lord, I've broken most of the commandments. I've got some pretty bad habits. I drink. I curse. I steal. I treat people like dirt. But if my life is spared now, I promise you that I will change: that I will never curse again ... that ..."

Suddenly his friend cried out: "Wait, Jack! Don't go too far. I think I see another ship."

Don't go too far. I think I see another ship. That's not repentance. That is just bargaining. How many times have you tried to bargain with God? When we try to bargain with God we think that somehow we can do something; give up something; start doing more than we are. And THEN, once we do THAT, we think God will like us more.

What Paul told the Ephesians and the message of this hymn is that that attitude just won't wash. God calls us to come to Him in repentance and faith. We must turn away from the sins we hold onto so dearly and cling instead to what Christ did on the cross.

So, there is a message for the shepherds. There is one for the theologians. But there's one more. It is ...

3) A Message For Us (John 1:46)

In John 1:46, here's what we hear:

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

What we just read took place some thirty years after where we started this morning. Jesus was born. While He was still an infant, His parents were warned about Herod's plans and escaped to Egypt. Jesus has grown up. Now He is beginning His public ministry.

Does anybody here like to golf? Once there was a man who loved it deeply, but as he aged, he wasn't able to see the ball after he hit it. The local golf pro suggested a man he could team up with who would be just the right partner, "Because he's got the eyes of a hawk."

The aging golfer took the advice of the pro and sought the man out. The two went out together and on the very first tee he hit a long, long drive. Then he turned to his new partner and asked, "Were you able to see where it went?"

His partner responded, "Sure did. I just can't remember where I saw it go."

We tend to be just like **ONE** of those men. Many of us can't see how God can be involved in our lives day to day. Others see God's involvement in the world. We just forget how He has anything to do with US. Jesus response to both is the same: "Come and See."

The last line of the last verse is a wonderful prayer. When the Lord, Immanuel; God Himself says, "Come & see." We can respond by singing these words: Lord, come to me, put up with me and Lord, help me abide with You.

The book titled: *Executive Privilege* tells the story of a little girl,, Schia, whose parents, when Schia was four, brought home from the hospital one day ... a little brother. When they brought the little guy home, Schia began asking her parents to leave her alone with him. They were worried that she might shake him or hit him, so they said no.

Over time though, since Schia wasn't showing any signs of jealousy, they changed their minds and decided to let her have her private conference with her little brother. Elated, Schia went into her little brother's room and walked quietly up to his bed.

Her parents shut the door, but left it open a crack so they could peek and listen in. They saw little Schia walk up to him quietly and put her face down close to his and then heard her say: "Baby, tell me what God's like. I'm starting to forget."

Maybe that's how they shepherds were; starting to forget about God. Maybe that's where you are today. If you are, let the words of this hymn remind you how much God loves you:

*O holy child of Bethlehem,
descend to us we pray:
Cast out our sins and enter in:
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell:
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Immanuel.*

When you think of the greatness of God's gift, is it any wonder that little Gladys Herdman simply described it all when she said: "SHAZAAM!!"

Pray with me.

Lord, in the next days get our attention again. It is a time of surpassing joy. A point in time when everything changed. Don't let us miss it. We come to You, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.