

**What's Essential? The Lowly**  
**By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison**  
**Luke 2:8-20**  
**December 19, 2021**

The world changed when Jesus came and brought the kingdom of God near to us. Heavenly angels revealed the glorious news to the least likely people in Judea: shepherds. This announcement to such a rag-tag group was counterintuitive. Working with stubborn and stupid sheep was not an intellectual challenge. While some good shepherds existed, like David, many had the reputation of not knowing the difference between “thine” and “mine.” Shepherds were smelly outcasts with a dirty job. The ceremonially unclean shepherds were prohibited from worship at the Temple. But the Lord honored them in a unique way. The Lord delights in showing off in weakness. Look at these verses: *“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”* (Romans 8:26) *“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”* (1 Corinthians 1:25). *“I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”* (1 Corinthians 2:3-5). *“It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”* (1 Cor 15:43). *“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”* (2 Corinthians 11:30). *“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). A baby at Christmas and a crucified Savior raised at Easter are the ultimate expressions of God stooping on our behalf. This fits His M.O.—the lowliest of people are counted as essential in His kingdom.

APPLICATION: When have you seen lowly people exalted? When has this happened to you? When have you seen people filled with arrogance (like King Herod) put in their place? 1 Peter 5:5 *“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”* How can you relate to feelings of weakness? How have you encountered the power of the Lord?

Luke 2:8-20 (#1018). Our series, “What’s Essential?”, begins with a ? but the meaning is changed by a slight adjustment – when the ? becomes an ! Instead of saying, “I don’t know,” an ! confidently resolves an issue.

“What’s Essential?” began with **Jesus’** exclamation mark – *“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things (food, clothing, shelter) will be added unto you.”* This was Jesus’ essential mission – to inaugurate the KOG on earth. **Mary** was a young virgin who became pregnant. She questioned the angel: *“How can this be, since I am a virgin?”* The angel’s remark resulted in Mary’s Magnificat: Luke 1:46-55 *And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has*

*done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."*

Her ? became a witness of faith. She was grateful for her essential mission in life - to birth/nurture the Messiah. Just an ordinary man, **Joseph**, had an essential: to provide and protect the Messiah. Today we look at the **shepherds** whose essential was to **witness** to the glory of God.

As we read our text, watch for 3 things: "**WHO, WHAT** (happened), **HOW** (did the shepherds respond)

*Luke 2:8-20 #1018 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" <sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup> And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. <sup>18</sup> And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

**Who?** (v8): *And in the same region there were **shepherds** out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

While we tend to romanticize shepherds, that was not their reputation then. They had a lowly job. When I was a kid and I was asked what I wanted to do when I grew up, I was serious when I expressed two career ambitions: to pump gas because I liked the smell of gasoline (they used to have the "full service" at gas stations where someone would come pump your gas for you – it cost a little extra) or be a garbage man because I might be able to find some cool toys by rummaging through other people's trash. I can only imagine what my dad, a research chemist, and my mom, a housewife who wanted successful children, thought.

They were **out in the field**. This was a dirty job. Always being outside made them smell bad. Possibly, these shepherds were a notch above the regular motley crews because Bethlehem was where the sheep were being kept for the Temple sacrifices. Maybe these shepherds were more than the typical hired hands.

**keeping watch over their flock by night.** This is a 24-hour, full-time job. It comes with a 3-fold duty: **Provide** for their flocks (sheep can get into trouble) and make sure they get food/water/shelter; **protect** them from danger (jackals, wolves; the terrain can be treacherous); and help **deliver** their lambs.

**Psalms 23** says "the Lord is my Shepherd." When John the Baptist saw Jesus (**John 1:29**), the first recorded words he said about Jesus was: "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" John's gospel doesn't have a birth narrative about Joseph and Mary. Since he writes his book long after Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he doesn't need to repeat the material. Instead, he takes the approach of Jesus being the lamb of God. John doesn't call him a "sheep," but a lamb. Later, John's gospel says Jesus called himself "**The Good Shepherd**" (implying there are bad shepherds):

*John 10:10-16 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. I love the benediction at the end of Hebrews: 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

And the image of being a good shepherd is part of the New Testament role of pastors: 1 Peter 5:1-3 *So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.* In October in Israel, it was interesting to catch a quick glance of a flock of sheep from the bus while we drove on "The Good Samaritan Road." A small sheepdog was barking and running them. It was just him. Someone on the bus said they saw the shepherd – he was up on the top of the hill talking on his cell phone. That is somewhat the role of a pastor – more of a sheepdog. Jesus is the Good shepherd.

**What happened?** (9-14): *And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and 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 among those with whom he is pleased!"* Just one angel. The name, "angel," actually means, "messenger." These angels have been busy. Now the one shows "the heavenly host." My favorite part of Christmas with The Chosen – the Messenger was the heavenly host being revealed. The Lord uses a variety of ways to communicate truth:

Joseph has dreams; Zechariah, Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds, get angels; and the wise men will get a star.

**How did they respond?** (15-20) *When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying, and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

Luke 2:19-20 *Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherders returned and let loose, glorifying, and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. (THE MESSAGE)*

1 Samuel 16:6-8 *When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."*

Isaiah 55:8-9 *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

This week our staff honored **Susan Rizzotti**, as she is retiring after having taught in Asbury's Preschool for 36 ½ years. She has loved our children. She's been a shepherd to them, and to our Preschool staff.

Teachers have been on my heart recently. Teaching in public schools right now is probably the most difficult it has EVER been because of COVID. I've heard stories of unruly children. I've heard the term "feral." Many of the school environments are wild and out of control. Fights happen daily in school with boys, girls, and boys with girls. Kids without home computers were shut out for 18 months from learning opportunities. Many regressed academically, but even more in their social skills. When I called Eric Jellison on his birthday, he said his wife, Stacey, was named this week as the Memorial High School Teacher of the Year. Way to go, Stacey. Asbury has been involved with two elementary schools: Grove, in the Union District; and Walt Whitman in the Tulsa School District. Here are some pictures of our folks in action at Whitman. There may be what we consider "lowly" occupations but there are no "lowly" people. A vocation does not define our ultimate identity. Furthermore, we all have "lowly moments" in life. **Mountains, Valleys & Caves** sermon series starts Jan. 2. Jesus repeatedly esteemed those who were deemed "lowly" – Joseph & Mary, shepherds, children, women, the sick, the poor, the Gentiles, the outcast. He redeems our lowly moments. The Lord delights in showing off in weakness.

*"For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* (1 Cor 1:25).

*"If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness."* (2 Cor. 11:30).

*“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Cor. 12:9).*

A baby at Christmas plus a crucified Savior raised at Easter are the ultimate expressions of God’s nature. The lowliest of people are counted as essential in the kingdom of God. When WE feel lowly - look up. There’s a heavenly host praising & glorifying God. Be encouraged: God is with us. Emmanuel. This all ends well if we let Christ enter into our lives. We, too, can experience the Glory of God. We, like shepherds, are witnesses to this Glory.