

Have you ever wondered why God chose shepherds to be the first recipients of the glorious news concerning Jesus birth? The shepherds were despised by the Orthodox Jews. In the very nature of their work, they were unable to keep the details of the ceremonial laws: they could not observe all the meticulous hand washing and rules and regulations; their flocks made too many demands upon them. So, the shepherds were looked down upon as almost the lowest of common people only marginally better than those who herded the pigs. Notwithstanding this, their dedication was recognized in heaven. God revealed his secret to those shepherds because of their occupation. We are familiar that an unblemished lamb was offered every morning and evening in the temple as a sacrifice. To see that the supply of perfect offerings was always available, the temple authorities had their own flock of sheep pastured near Bethlehem. Most likely, those shepherds were in charge of the sheep from which the temple offerings were chosen. How precious to think that these men were the first to hear of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

God may have selected these shepherds because of their expectation. After the angelic announcement, they said, *let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.* These shepherds were seeking someone, and they were not disappointed.

The shepherds ascertained the facts concerning Christ. *Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.* An event of tremendous significance had taken place. The stillness of the night had been broken by the angelic announcement, accompanied by a blaze of glory. Transfixed with fear and yet of wonder, the shepherds heard the words: *behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: you will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.* This heavenly news was so astonishing and held such far-reaching consequences that the shepherds could do no less than ascertain the facts. We are able to observe that they seriously ascertained the facts concerning Christ. *Let us now go to and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.*

They quickly ascertained the facts concerning Christ. *They came with haste.* To them the matter was urgent, they could not delay. They had to investigate the facts that were announced by the angelic messengers. This sense of urgency concerning God's way of salvation, as revealed in Christ, punctuates the whole Bible. Quoting from the Old Testament including the message of the New, Paul says, *behold, now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.* (2 Corinthians 6:2). We cannot afford to be casual or careless with God. Such an attitude smacks of arrogant presumption. We must, *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, then, all these other matters which daily concern us will find their proper place (Matthew 6:33). We too must come with all seriousness and speed to the cradle of the Christ. Here is God's answer to humanity's basic need.

The shepherds accepted the findings concerning Christ. They found Mary and Joseph, and the newborn baby lying in a manger. Look at what the shepherds found: they found the miracle of the Saviour's birth! They found Mary, the mother of Jesus. The witness of Mary centred in the miracle of the Saviour's birth. She had never known a man. The Holy Spirit has come upon her as the power of the Highest had overshadowed her, therefore the holy thing that had been born in her was called, the Son of God. The natural process of birth had brought Christ to the point of delivery. The miracle of the supernatural conception had preserved the little life from any hereditary sin. His was a supernatural and sinless birth. And so as the shepherds looked into Mary's face and heard the story, they worshiped because of the miracle of the birth of Jesus. Without the virgin birth, we would not have the Saviour. If he had carried a single trait of sin, then he would have needed a saviour, like any other son of Adam's race. Certainly, he could never have been our Redeemer. But thank God, he was a sinless, supernatural child, born of a virgin.

They found the message of the Saviour's birth. They found Joseph. The witness of Joseph centred in the message of the Saviour's birth. An angel had appeared to Joseph saying, *do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people are sins.* As the shepherds heard these words from Joseph's lips, they learned of the Saviour who was born to set men and women free. In fact, Joseph witnessed to and confirmed the angelic message they had heard on the Bethlehem Hills.

What ever else we may think about at Christmas time, the Saviour should have pre-eminence. Christ did not come into the world primarily to teach, reform, heal, or even raise the dead. (1 Timothy 1:15). *Christ came into the world to save sinners.*

The shepherds found the majesty of the Saviour's birth, they found the baby lying in a manger. The witness of the baby centred in upon the majesty of the Saviour's birth. God had contracted to the measure of a child. Only God could do this. Humanity aspires, but God, condescends. Thus, we have the revelation of the majesty of our God.

Look at the words again, *a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.* In the baby we see the majesty of his identity; in the swaddling clothes, the majesty of his simplicity; in the lowly manger, the majesty of his humility. Does this not make you want to worship and adore him? Whether you do or not, the shepherds did. They knelt by their manger and accepted their findings; they believe.

The shepherds announced their faith concerning Christ. *Now when they had seen him, they made widely known the same which was told them concerning this child. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen.* A careful study of the language of this narrative reveals that the shepherds accepted the heavenly announcement as a special Word to their hearts. When they 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,* they were literally saying, *let us investigate this word which the Lord has made known to us.*

The Bible reminds us that, *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.* (Romans 10:17). Having ascertained the facts, they accepted the findings. Now they proceeded to announce the good news which they had received as they knelt before the cradle of the Christ. The evidence that the person has authentic faith is that they cannot keep it to themselves; they must announce it. This is what the shepherds did. They publicly announced their faith. *When they had seen him, they made widely known for saying which was told them concerning this child and all those who heard it marvelled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.*

One commentator described this; *these men at the bottom of the social scale of Israel, were chosen as the first preachers of the newborn King.* As they made this story known, the news spread to Bethlehem, to Jerusalem, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. Indeed, over 2000 years later, we find ourselves reading fragments of the report.

The evidence that a person has truly encountered the Son of God is that they are willing and unashamed to declare their faith to everyone. This was so characteristic of the early Christians that in less than one generation, the whole of the then known world heard the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They praise-fully announced their faith, *the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, and as it was told to them*. There was nothing apologetic or pessimistic about their testimony. On the contrary, they glorified and praised God. Once again, this spirit of praise-fullness was one of the distinguishing marks of the early Christian church. We read that they continued daily with one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house to house, eating their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people, and as a result, *the Lord added to the Church daily those who are being saved*, (Acts 2:46-47). There was something contagious or infectious about their faith: people could not resist the reality and radiance with which they spoke of their Lord and Saviour. This is one of the missing features in our Christian witness today. People are unimpressed because they see nothing joyful about our testimony. After all, the message of Christmas is the Gospel of, *great joy which shall be to all people*. That which is joyous is always contagious.

Christ came to bring joy. He said, *these things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full*. (John 15:11). So, the announcement of our faith should be public and praiseful.

This is a wonderful story. As we have followed the search of the shepherds, surely we have been made to ascertain the facts, accept their findings, and announce our faith concerning Christ. Only when He becomes a personal Lord and Saviour, can we turn to the world outside the Church and make known abroad, the things concerning the Holy Child who was none other than God's Son, the Saviour of the world, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So, the search of the shepherds was a quest for the best. Amen.