

The Faith Of The Shepherds.

Text: Luke 2:15-20

1) The Nature Of Their Faith

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Fruit Of Their Faith

34, 627, 25, 624, 33

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 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.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem were the first to be notified that the Saviour is born. God did not send His angel to the great men of the Jewish nation, to the scribes and chief priests in Jerusalem, to let them know that now the time was fulfilled, and that the Saviour has come.

No; the first people to receive the good tidings of the Saviour’s birth were humble shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. This is significant. It is in full accordance with what St. Paul says 1 Corinthians 1:26–27, ²⁶ *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.* ²⁷ *But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise.*

It is not very likely that the great men of Jerusalem, which was only a short distance, only six miles, from Bethlehem, would have received the angel's message with such a humble faith as did the shepherds, these plain and unpretentious men. These shepherds of the city of David must have been devout Israelites, waiting for the consolation of Israel, believing sincerely in the promised Messiah.

At the end of our Gospel we are told that *the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.* This plainly shows the piety of these men. They appreciated what God had revealed to them. Their hearts were filled with thanks and their lips with praise when they returned from their visit to the village and went back to their flocks which they had left on the plains.

And the same state of mind they displayed, when the angel suddenly appeared and when in Bethlehem they saw the Child in the manger. The most prominent characteristic of these shepherds is their faith. The subject of our sermon is *The Faith Of The Shepherds.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Faith Of The Shepherds

The Nature Of Their Faith.

We read, 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."*

Note well, the shepherds do not say, *Let us go and see whether this is true which the angel of the Lord has said.* They do not speak as if in the least they doubted the angel's statement. They are fully persuaded, they are sure that all must be so. They believe firmly and steadfastly.

And on what do they base their faith? On the word alone. The angel had spoken to them. The angel of the Lord had brought down to them from heaven the joyful message that the Saviour is born. This message they do not receive as coming from the angel, but as coming from the Lord God, as they themselves say, "the Lord has made known to us."

Their faith rests upon the foundation of the word of God alone and they are made so sure and certain about these things because they are fully aware that God Himself has told them, God who is true, and whose word is absolutely reliable.

Behold, then, here we have the true nature of faith. True faith is not a thing which is uncertain in itself. If you are a true believer you will not be in a doubting, wavering state of mind, thinking that possibly the things that are recorded in the Bible might be true, but not sure and certain about them.

No; as Luther says in his preface to his explanation of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, "*Faith is a living and solid confidence in the grace and mercy of God and is so certain that a man would rather die a thousand times than suffer such confidence to be taken away from him.*"

If you are a true believer you will base your faith on the word of God alone, on the word which is written in the Bible. You will believe that God is merciful to you, a lost and condemned sinner, that your sins are all forgiven, and that you have been pardoned for the sake of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who died for your sins on the cross, that heaven is your eternal home, and, that finally you will be received into the celestial mansions.

You will believe these things, not because any man has told you or because your heart desires them, but because God says so. And what is more truthful, what can we rely upon more firmly, what is more sure and certain than the word of God? Such is the nature of faith. It is unwavering reliance in the word of God.

But we learn more of faith. Look at the shepherds! At first they were greatly afraid when the glory of the Lord shone round about them. Being sinners the glory of the Lord struck terror in their hearts. But the moment they received the angel's message, the moment they believed the word, all their fear vanished like the mist before the sun, and they rejoiced in what the Lord had made known to them. Joyfully they hastened to Bethlehem to see the new-born Saviour.

We read, ¹⁶ ***And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.*** They came with haste. Why with haste? Were they afraid to leave their flocks and were they in a hurry to return as quickly as possible to their folds? No; they were overjoyed to know that now, at last, the Saviour has come whom Israel had been expecting so long.

They had been longing for Him, praying for Him, who would redeem Israel. And now He has come. Their most fervent desire was gratified. The state of their mind was like that of Simeon in the temple when he took the child Jesus up in his arms and exclaimed with rapture, *“Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for my eyes have seen Thy salvation.”*

The child in the manger was Christ the Lord, born in the city of David, A SAVIOUR.

They knew that they were sinners, falling short of the glory of God. But they also knew that their Redeemer lived, that the child born at Bethlehem was the Saviour of their souls; and in Him they rested their trust and confidence; in Him they found true and enduring comfort; in Him they rejoiced as in the God of their salvation. Such is faith.

There is not a happier person on earth than a true Christian. Believing in Christ his Saviour, he and he only, has true comfort. In all the changing circumstances of life in this vale of tears, in the consciousness of his sinfulness, in view of the righteous wrath of God as revealed on Sinai, he hastens to the manger of Bethlehem.

With the shepherds he finds comfort and celestial joy in the Son of God and Mary’s son, his brother and kinsman who was born in the city of David a Saviour. Christ was poor that we would be made rich, He was despised and rejected by men that we might be received into grace and glory, the Lord our righteousness.

Such is the nature of faith, firm reliance in the word of our salvation and trustful confidence in Jesus who is set forth in that word as the Saviour of sinners, Christ the Lord. And such faith is also sure to bear its fruit.

2. The Faith Of The Shepherds

The Fruit Of Their Faith.

We read in our text, *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.*

The desire of the shepherds was to have others share their happiness and therefore to rejoice with them. Their hearts were filled to overflowing and they could not but speak. The first whom they told of the angel's appearance and joyful message, were Mary and Joseph; for of Mary we are told that she "***kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.***"

The shepherds had told Mary and Joseph that they want to be their friends and acquaintances. They were the first Christian missionaries, the first to make known the Gospel, the good tidings that the Saviour has come. Their faith would not let them rest; they had to go forth and be witnesses of all that they themselves had heard and seen.

See, then, my friends, one of the first fruits of faith, love of the neighbour, a desire to see others rejoicing and happy. And what is the greatest blessing that we can bestow upon our neighbour? It is to make known to him Jesus his Saviour. Jesus alone can make him truly happy. Jesus alone can rid him of the guilt of his sin and lead him to eternal life. Jesus alone can turn his griefs and sorrows into joy.

True faith will induce you to attend also to the bodily needs of your neighbour, to feed the hungry and thirsty, clothe the naked, give shelter to the homeless, visit the sick, and to show sympathy to all.

But if your faith is true it will also induce you to seek, above all things, the welfare of your neighbour's immortal soul. David says in Psalm 116:10, ¹⁰ ***I believed, therefore I spoke,*** and so every Christian must say, *'I believe, therefore I speak; I believe, therefore I bear witness to the truth. I proclaim the great things which God has shown to me. I praise the name of the Lord to those who still dwell in ignorance and in the shadow of death.'*

And now let us note the closing words of our text. ²⁰ ***Then the shepherds returned*** says the Evangelist. Where did they return? To their herds and daily occupation. They had found Christ the Lord, and to serve Him in true faith was henceforth the task of their lives.

But it was in their humble walks that they sought and found the opportunities for serving the King of Glory, whose praises angels had voiced to their wondering ears, and in whose service the heavenly host find ineffable bliss.

So today we too have been, in the spirit, at Bethlehem, and have heard the good tidings of great joy, and our hearts are filled and overflowing with the gladness of another world. How, then, are we to show our thanks and magnify the praises of the Father who has so loved us that He gave us His only begotten Son, and of the Son who for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might be rich?

Let us follow the shepherds' example, and return to our various occupations with hearts and hands ready to serve Him all the days of our lives in true godliness, until the Lord will send his holy angel and call us from all our earthly toil to our heavenly home.

There we, too, shall see our Saviour, not at Bethlehem, the city of David, but in Jerusalem on high, the city of God, and voice forth His perfect praises for ever and ever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.