



LC STUDY GUIDE

Done in Sync with the "Let There Be ..." Series

The Passage: Luke 2:8-20

For Life Community usage the week of 12/14/14

Intro: If you were at Grace Chapel this past Sunday, we met a shepherd who gave a beautiful account of what he experienced that incredible night in Bethlehem. Shepherds have a mixed reputation in the Bible, as they are generally cast as socially awkward misfits. But this is only half-true as some were sons of wealthy families (Abraham), some were outcasts (Moses), some were loners (David). It was a job that needed diligence not to fall asleep on the job, trust to protect the sheep (as these were ancient financial investments) and it was one that kept a shepherd somewhat isolated from community. It's interesting that God would announce the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. Tonight we'll explore this angle to the amazing nativity story.

Today's Big Idea: The angels announce God's good news to the shepherds because the hope of salvation is for everyone.

Luke 2:8-20 (NIV)

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. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, **14** "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

O – Imagine you are hearing this story for the first time. What details jump off the page for you?

O – Now imagine you are one of the shepherds the angels are speaking to. How do you think you would react? Do you think you could avoid feeling afraid? Would you "shout up" a follow-up question or start running to Bethlehem? What do you think you would do?

I – When the angel says, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord," he is in effect saying, "We know the story of Israel, and God has heard your prayers" (hence, they begin their proclamation by telling them not to be afraid). What else do you hear the angels saying in the passage?

I – Shepherds were generally considered to be unreliable sources of accurate information. Often many of these young men were either forced into shepherding because of possible aptitude deficiencies or social awkwardness and sometimes they chose shepherding as a means of escaping from community (like Moses). In any case, God chose to announce the birth of Jesus first to these shepherds. What can we glean from this information?

I – Throughout Scripture there are many uses of signs and their symbolic message of deliverance – any come to mind?

(The sign of Moses' staff becoming a serpent, the ram being caught in the bushes when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, circumcision.)

Why the need for a sign of a baby wrapped in cloths and born in a manger?

(The angels did not provide a GPS address for Jesus, this was an assurance that this moment was not a hallucination and confirmation it was the right baby.)

Even more appropriate, back in Isaiah 7, a hesitant King Ahaz was given a sign, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14)." Why do you think this amazing moment is brought to the attention of shepherds and not say, rabbis, political leaders, and members of the power establishment?

(It's consistent with God's redemptive theme throughout Scripture—regardless of status, power, and prestige, the gospel of Jesus is for everyone. The question is not, "Why them?" but "Why not them?")

A – Who do you think are the shepherds of today's world? Who have been generalized as social misfits (pastors!), have been presumed to be unreliable (politicians!) and have chosen to distance themselves from community and at times reality (rock stars!)? If Jesus were born today, who do you think the angels would have announced the news to first? And for fun, who do you think would not have likely made the list?

(Ex. Cab drivers, they are out late at night alone and some are reliable sources of conspiracy theories. Least likely examples: TV reporters – it feels like God's nature to have someone else scoop them.)

A – With all sincerity, a cultural observation we can make is that many people-groups formed by ethnicity, ideology, or interests have advocated for their improved status and inclusion. What does the Christmas story of Jesus' coming say to each of them?

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best.
- c. Complement these questions with "process questions" (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- d. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- e. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- f. Application: Pace the study to conclude with "difference making" application.
- g. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching," rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.