

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Luke 2:8-20

New International Version

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Sunday, December 25, 2016

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, December 25, 2016**, is from **Luke 2:8-20**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

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Luke 2:8-20

(Luke 2:8) And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

King David was a humble shepherd before he became king over Israel. God often asks humble people to serve Him and tell others about Him. God cares for the humble and the poor, and the Bible says that God's children must care for widows and orphans just as God does: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27). No one is so needy or underprivileged that God does not care for them, and God expects His followers to care for them too. The shepherds may have been the neediest and most despised people at that time in history, but God does not look upon people from a biased or limited perspective. God looks into our hearts and knows what we can become through faith in Him. Jesus came to bless all people, the rich and the poor; and both rich and poor need salvation from sin through faith in Jesus Christ. Imagine how the shepherds must have felt when they saw angels sent to them from God.

(Luke 2:9) An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

One angel appeared and terrified them. The heavenly host (a multitude of angels) only appeared after the shepherds no longer feared the consequences of experiencing a single angelic visitation and the angel encouraged them not to fear. They not only saw an angel; they saw the glory of the Lord that surrounded him! The angel did not tell his name, but Gabriel, as an angel of the Lord, appeared to Zechariah and Mary; therefore, the angel might have been the angel Gabriel. He appeared with heavenly glory, so no wonder the shepherds were afraid. They may have felt guilty before the angel and have thought “What have we done!” They most certainly felt unworthy of an angelic visitation, but the angel’s words comforted them.

(Luke 2:10) But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

The angel told them not to be afraid because he was not bringing the judgment of God upon them. Instead, he was bringing them good news – not just good news, but joy filled good news for all people (and that included the shepherds). They were not the last to hear the good news because of their poor or low station in life. Rather, they were the first to hear God’s good news and God’s good news would travel from the lowly to the proud and to those in high society. Their experiences watching their flock by night probably prepared their hearts and minds to meet God’s angel, for the heavens tell of the glory of God (See Psalm 19).

(Luke 2:11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

The good news or “gospel” keeps the focus on Jesus from the beginning. The good news of Jesus’ birth was given specifically to the shepherds, who (other than Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem) heard it first. The good news included the shepherds and was for all people. The shepherds’ home was the city of David and the angel emphasized that Jesus was born to be their Savior, the Messiah they expected and their Lord; moreover, He had been born in their city that very day! Angels from God gave Jesus the title “the Lord,” which emphasized the divine nature of Jesus beyond His being the expected Messiah. He was beyond all human expectations or thoughts. The shepherds and all who heard their good news had to ponder the meaning of these three titles for Jesus: Savior, Messiah, and Lord. They and their hearers may have thought more in military terms than in moral and spiritual terms; but Jesus was born to die to save us from our sins; then He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to reign as Lord and King over all before He comes again.

(Luke 2:12) This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

The angel told the shepherds how they would find the newborn Messiah and how they could distinguish Him from all the other newborns in the city of David. They would find Jesus lying in a manger (mangers or feeding troughs were kept in stables and also outdoors; a place that shepherds could easily visit); whereas a palace would have been beyond the shepherds’ social status and intimidating to shepherds. Jesus was so newly born that He was wrapped in swaddling clothes to keep Him warm and snug.

(Luke 2:13) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

After the angel of the Lord had prepared them for greater revelations by telling them the good news about their Messiah and Savior, a multitude of angels appeared praising God. The heavenly host might be thought of best as an angelic choir or an angelic army that belongs to the Lord and is sent to do His bidding. Though probably not in battle array, since they came to bring a message of peace, the host of angels affirmed to the shepherds that they had not experienced a ghostly deception or a mere dream or vision—they had learned the truth about God and His Messiah from many angelic witnesses.

(Luke 2:14) “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, deserve all praise, honor, glory, and our total devotion to their service. The good news included a message of peace. God will favor with peace those who believe the good news that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds. The Book of Revelation teaches that Jesus the Messiah will someday bring peace through military means and conquer all the enemies of God and His people. God favored the shepherds with His peace when He sent the angels to them to tell them the good news about Jesus’ birth. God wanted them to tell others that He was sending Jesus into the world as The Way of peace and not as a military conqueror of the Roman Empire. When Jesus returns, He will conquer all of God’s enemies, especially the godless who rule with intimidating and/or military might. When He comes, He will bring peace to the entire world.

(Luke 2:15) 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.”

The angel told the shepherds how to find the Messiah. The angel did not command them to go and find Him; he left them with a choice to make. They believed the report of the angel and the confirmation of the good news by a multitude of angels. They knew God favored them by sending a message of peace and goodwill to them; so, they went from their fields into the city of David to find the Messiah as the angel said they would find Him. When they found the Messiah as the angel said they would, their experience confirmed for them the truth of the angel's message. They knew they could trust everything the angel told them about their Messiah and Lord.

(Luke 2:16) So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

At that time, Bethlehem was not a large city and the shepherds would have known the location of every sheepfold and stable or cave inside or outside the city. The Holy Spirit may have guided them to the exact stable and manger, so they would not need to search for very long to find Jesus. The first people they met making a temporary home with a baby in a manger was Mary and Joseph. They knew to look in a manger, and there they met Jesus the Messiah.

(Luke 2:17) When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

They saw Jesus exactly as they had been told about Him by the angels. They had an experience that served as a witness for them and others that the angels' appearance was real. Joseph and Mary may not have expected that God would have His only Son born in a stable and laid in a manger because there was no room for them in an inn. They may have looked forward to God providing the most luxurious place in Bethlehem as the best place for Jesus' birth. So, the angels' message to the shepherds which they conveyed to Joseph and Mary that Jesus was their Savior, Messiah, and Lord would meet His parents' possible need for reassurance of God's help and presence with the knowledge that God was still with them despite their difficult circumstances and surprises.

(Luke 2:18) and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

After the shepherds experienced the angels' visit, heard their good news for all people, and found Jesus as the angels described Him, they could not keep their experience quietly to themselves. They were so overjoyed at the good news about the Messiah and having actually seen Him and His parents as the angels had described that they had to tell everyone they knew. Jesus birth, along with His life and ministry, always amazed those who met Him or heard about Him.

(Luke 2:19) But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Mary treasured all the words she heard about Jesus and all the experiences surrounding His birth; so, she could tell Luke (or those who wrote the documents that Luke used in writing his gospel) about these precious events and memories. These words and her experiences were so treasured that we can trust their accuracy. At the same time, Mary had learned truths about Jesus worth thinking about; especially as the mother of her Savior, the Messiah and the Lord.

(Luke 2:20) The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke concluded his report of the shepherds visit to Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus by saying that they too glorified and praised God just as the angels had done when they appeared to them. They had confirmed the angels' words by their experience, and they made the response that Jesus deserves when one hears the truth about Him. Receiving Jesus as God, Lord, and Savior always leads to glorifying and praising God!

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What were the shepherds doing when the angels appeared to them?
2. What possible reasons can you think of for God sending angels to these shepherds on the day Jesus was born instead of to others in Bethlehem or in the region?
3. If an angel appeared to you unexpectedly in the quiet of the night, how would you feel?
4. Read Luke 2:10-11 again. What truths did the angel share with them to help them overcome their feelings of terror at seeing him?
5. If you had been one of the shepherds, what would you have done after the angels' appearance? Give some reasons for your answer.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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