

About the Story

Annunciation to Shepherds (Luke 2:8-16)

Shepherds

Shepherds were among the least respected vocations in the first-century world of the Ancient Near East. There is a tradition in the Mishnah (Jewish teachings) that a father should not recommend certain vocations to his sons: first, not to be a butcher; second, not to be a doctor; and the third, not to be a shepherd.

Butchers were unclean because of being in constant contact with blood. Doctors were often charlatans. They made a lot of money but were not respected at all in the Jewish community. And then there was being a shepherd. They had no status. These were lower class guys out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks of goats and sheep. The literal translation is that they were actually living in the fields.

Angels

The appearance of the angel of the Lord was frightening. People listening to this story about an angel appearing to shepherds would have been reminded of the story of Balaam, recorded in Numbers 22: 23-35. Balaam's donkey saw an angel with a sword and refused to move. This saved Balaam's life, but because Balaam didn't see the angel he yelled at his donkey and struck him with a staff. When Balaam finally saw the angel with a sword, he fell on his face in terror.

That's a normal response to an appearance by an angel because generally angels meant bad news. Their appearance meant that you were in deep trouble. This is why the angel responds, "Don't be afraid; I have good news for you." Fear is generally associated with the appearance of angels (for example, Zechariah in Luke 1:11-13).

The Announcement

"Annunciation" is a fancy word for "announcement." This time, the announcement of the angel is truly good news. The first reference is to all the people, "What I have for you is good news for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. "Savior" means one who delivers from oppression or danger. "Messiah" means "the anointed one" who is empowered by God to establish God's kingdom. "Lord" means "God."

Heavenly Host

The intention of peace for all people is announced in the song of the angelic host. "Host" means a large group. The angel choir is associated in the memories of the people who first heard this story with the angels of God ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder (see Genesis 28:10-17). It is communication between the heavens and the earth.

Peace on Earth

The angel choir sings praises to God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven," and then "on earth peace." The translation is more inclusive than we might assume. "Peace to all men," that is, all human beings, who are the objects of God's favor. It does not mean peace among people of good will as if people of ill will are excluded. It does not mean just people of God's favor with the implication that there are some people who are not in God's favor. The meaning is peace for the world, for all people. All people are, in Jesus' birth, the objects of God's favor, of God's grace, and of God's desire and commitment to peace.

Let's go!"

The last episode of the story is introduced by the shepherd's words. Imagine guy language: "Hey, come on you guys, let's go!" It is not formal English, nor pompous in any way. These are down-home guys saying to one another, "Come on, let's go!" They go with haste, hurrying to find Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. Notice that the article is different at this point. It isn't in "*a* manger," but rather "*the* manger." This is confirmation of what the shepherds heard from the angel.

Source:

Written commentary on Luke 2:1-20 by Dr. Thomas E. Boomershine
http://gotell.org/stories/by-text/luke/lk02_01-20/

Connections

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Below are connections to the story that we might make when we listen to it in light of our own life experience.

A prayer suggestion:

1. Tell the story to yourself, picturing it in your mind's eye.
2. Reflect on these possible connections to your life.
3. Then consider if there is something you want to say to God in response.
4. Listen for what God might be saying to you through the story.

❖ The angelic host sang songs of praise to God. Recall a praise song you like, or a time you enjoyed music in the Christmas season.

❖ The angels proclaimed peace on earth. What are your thoughts about the possibility of peace on earth? How do you find peace in your life?