

“Christmas Character: the Shepherds”

Luke 2:8-20

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Last Friday I led our preschool chapel. We shared the meaning of Christmas and Christmas decorations around the church. I was a little bit surprised to realize that many of our children think that Christmas is Santa Clause, elves, snowmen and, thankfully, some said baby Jesus’ birthday. They all seemed to be very excited about Christmas because they already knew the “good news” that they will get Christmas presents on Christmas day. We parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents ought to prove “the great news” that we bring the presents!

We may have mixed images of the birth of Jesus’ story. Some of you may picture three wise men who wear nice robes and ride camels following the star to the stable, even imagining a warm and bright barn with a cozy manger for the baby Jesus. They are paying homage to the baby Jesus presenting their precious gifts. And at the same time, shepherds were running to see the newborn king after they encountered the angels in the fields. Angels flying like Tinker Bell have guided them to the manger. But the three wise men and the shepherds never met each other in the Bible. The story of three wise men is only recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. In Luke, angels and shepherds are the main characters. Simply speaking, the gospel of Matthew emphasizes the image of the great King for the world, but the gospel of Luke as the great shepherd for all. Theologically, we can’t describe the whole truth as we have pictured. But each gospel tells us its own unique perspectives on the birth. In Mark and John, these characters are not even mentioned. Next Sunday, Mary McCollum will share more about the three wise men. But this morning, we are going to learn more about the Christmas character, the shepherds.

In our Bible story, there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. God’s angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” In the Bible, our God is often described as the great shepherd. The shepherd is a compassionate, guiding and caring person. Do you remember the story of David in the Old Testament? When God chose young David as king of Israel, He chose a shepherd boy. This boy would search for lost sheep. Our new born King, ‘Emmanuel’ which means “God is with you” is like a shepherd. Our New

Messiah will be our shepherd willing to give away his life for the sake of his sheep.

When the shepherds heard the wonderful news, they ran to the small town of Bethlehem to a stable behind the village inn, where the Messiah was born. The whole point of the Christmas story is the news of great joy. In other words, “Joy to the World”! But we cannot underestimate the importance in this story. They were not excited at first, rather, they were afraid and fearful. Our Scripture reading describes that they were alone and terrified. But when they believed in the angel’s message, they were transformed and became the messengers of the good news. They “ran” to the town and “shared” this good news with the people. Spiritually speaking, the shepherds were the first group who experienced joy from the presence of God, the birth of Jesus and received the promise of hope for the future. They experienced “transformation” into the messengers of God! Literally, they became the angels of God as we learned about the meaning of angel during our character messages. Now, they became the messengers of hope and joy for the world!

Let’s think about our life journey. As a parent of a ten month old baby, I notice that babies have no fear. They can go or crawl everywhere we wouldn’t dare as long as their parents are with them. I am a witness of a fearless baby, my son Joshua. Last Wednesday night, I saw Joshua sitting on our couch. Now, he crawls and cruises here and there, but he is not able to get up and off the couch yet. When he saw me, he tried to jump over smiling at me. I was surprised to catch him into my chest. What about us? Somehow, as grown-ups, we have many more fears and anxieties. Trust seems to be a more important, serious, and difficult matter as we grow older. This is the reality of our life journey.

How has your journey and year been? You may have had both times of joy and challenges. Some of us are still grieving over the loss of loved ones. Some of us have health concerns. I have been praying for church members and their family members who have been undergoing chemo treatments or recuperating from illness, but some of them are still fighting. You know that when a family member is ill, it affects the entire family. Some of us have a hard time because of difficult relationships, or betrayal, financial problems and other life issues. There are shadows in our life. Where is the “good news of joy and peace” in this darkness of our life tunnel?

God sent a trustworthy One, Christ Jesus, as our partner on whom to rely. The angel Gabriel announced this great news of joy to the shepherds. And now the shepherds want to invite us to be the next messengers. Let us remember that

the shepherds were not someone else, but they are US, you and me! Angels point to God's call on our lives to be God's messengers demonstrating, speaking, and bringing good news of great joy to others by our words and actions. This is what the gospel of Luke is eager to pass to all of us with the shepherds in this beautiful and joyful season of Christmas. Amen.