

Luke 2:8-20

Introduction: One of the hardest parts of preaching a Christmas or for that matter an Easter sermon series is that even those who don't come to church regularly are familiar with the passages. The passage here in Luke we are looking at this morning was actually featured on television in "A Charlie Brown Christmas" back in 1965 and has come on television every year since. The problem with being so familiar with a story is that sometimes we tend to casually read it and we miss important details that make the story so meaningful not only then, but even today. This morning we are going to look at and focus on the shepherds and their significance in 2012 to the Christmas story. But to fully understand this, we need to understand what life was like for a first century shepherd. One thing that we need to point out as we are setting up this message is that the first people to be given invitations to Jesus' birth were shepherds. If a king was born today do you think lowly shepherds would even get an invitation, let alone the first invitation? We would expect other government officials, important religious people, maybe the closest of friends, but shepherds? Not only did they get the first invitation, but they got the only invitation (the wise men came seeking Jesus because they saw a star). Who were first century shepherds? They were religious outcasts. While everyone else was going to the Temple for religious ceremonies, they had to stay out in the field with the sheep. After all, do you know what happens when you leave a sheep alone by itself? What happens to most humans when the boss or teacher is out for a day (Trouble)? They were kind of like shift workers today or truck drivers who have to be gone during the weekends. Not only were they religious outcasts but they were also social outcasts. They were considered like today's carnival workers. If anything came up missing or any trouble happened in first century life, the shepherds were blamed. Shepherds weren't allowed to give legal testimony because they were considered to be untrustworthy. A first century shepherd didn't have much human contact. Notice in verse 8 it says, "abiding in the field" that means they basically lived in the field with the sheep. No wonder David because such a skilled musician, he had nothing but time on his hands! Even if the shepherds took the sheep to a sheep pen for a night, they had to sleep with the sheep to protect them from being stolen or eaten by wolves. A

shepherd's life was about being with sheep 24/7/365 (kind of makes you like your job a little bit better now doesn't it?). Now imagine you are God, you haven't revealed yourself to your people in 400 years, and now is the time to send the promised Messiah, the One they had been waiting on since the days of Abraham some 2,000 years earlier promised to come, now He is here and who are the only ones you tell, shepherds. That doesn't make a bit of sense to us does it? I remember when Diana and I found out she was pregnant with Eli, for a solid month I told anybody and everybody I was going to be father. But God only told one group of seeming nobodies. Why did God do it this way? Where they some special religious group of shepherds or were they just the only ones up in the middle of the night? I think we find the answer in verse 10, "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy,(here it comes) which shall be to all people." Did you catch that? "Which shall be to all people." **The message of God is for the outcast and for the in-crowd.** In other words, the Gospel is universal. God doesn't discriminate based on health, wealth, skin color, education, or vocation. Big and small, God wants to save them all! God's love is offered indiscriminately and applied to anyone who repents and believes in Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven. God sent His message to the shepherds not because they were extraordinary, but rather because they were ordinary and lowly in the world's eyes. Because when he comes to the weak, His power is more evident and His glory is not stolen. Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." I'm running out of time this morning, there is so much I want to share with you from this passage, and if the Lord allows I will put it up on the blog this week or make it available in print if you would like it. But I feel we need to see this point through to its completion,

because I feel in my soul that time is drawing to a close, not just on this service but on time as we know it. No I don't buy into the whole December 21, 2012 end of the Mayan calendar hype, but I do buy into God's calendar when He says "No man knows the day or the hour" in Matthew 24:36 or "The coming of the Son of Man will be like a thief in the night" in 1 Thessalonians 5 and 2 Peter 3. An unspeakable tragedy occurred in Connecticut on Friday. As a Father my heart hurt and I felt so saddened for those parents. I can't imagine the pain they are in right now not having their precious children at home with them. Do you think they need the Gospel in Connecticut right now? The situation up in Washington where lawmakers can't agree on how much more money they want from people, do you think they need the Gospel right now? But I want to be honest, I believe there are people right here in Franklin County, I believe there are people who are going to watch this message online, and I even believe there are people right here in this sanctuary who need the Gospel. God came to the shepherds, the world's nobodies to show that everyone is a somebody to Him, and that includes you. Will you believe the Gospel which is God sent His Son Jesus Christ into this world to lay down His life for the world to pay the penalty for sin? A penalty you and I and all of the world owed, but could never repay. And on the third day He rose again and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father offering us the gift of salvation if we would admit that we have sinned, repent (turn away) from trusting ourselves to trust Him. God's gift was not placed under a tree, it was placed on a tree for you and I, that though Jesus died you and I might live. Will you accept this gift today?