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The Shepherds and the Angels

Luke 2: 8-20

The shepherds and the angles DIG: How does the shepherds' experience with the angel of ADONAI compare to that of Zechariah (Luke 1:11-20)? And Mary (Luke 1:26-28)? Of all the people the angel of ADONAI could have visited, why did God send him to the shepherds? How did Mary respond to all of this?

REFLECT: The LORD appeared to Zechariah, Miryam and the shepherds when they were just being themselves and doing their jobs. What does that imply about what it means to *be spiritual*? How has God spoken to you in the ordinary flow of life? The shepherds were not accepted by the religious elite of their day. What have you done to include people who might be perceived as social outcasts today?

Shepherds were the social outcasts of **their** day, a necessary yet ostracized cast without whom the Temple could not function. While they tended the animals required for ritual sacrifice, the conscientious Jew - ever concerned with purity - spurned **shepherds** as too unclean to stand among other worshipers. There was nothing to romanticize about **them**. Generally, they were dishonest, and unclean by the Pharisees' standards because they were unable to observe the Oral Laws (**to see link click [Fs - Why Do Your Disciples Break the Tradition of the Elders?](#)**) concerning the ceremonial washing of **their** hands before **they** ate. **They** were considered unclean. Imagine the reception a dirty migrant worker would receive at the door of a sophisticated country club, and you will realize where **the shepherd** ranked in Jewish society.¹¹⁶ **They** were exactly the kind of outcasts and sinners that **Messiah** came to save.

And there were Jewish **shepherds living out in the fields nearby**. **Shepherds** were usually **out in the fields with their flocks**. Many Messianic believers celebrate the birth of **Messiah on Sukkot when He tabernacled among us (John 1:14)**. For an explanation of this view see **[Gn - Conflict at the Feats of Booths](#)**.

They were keeping watch over their flocks at night (Luke 2:8). Down in the valley, sheep were huddled against the chill. More than likely, the **shepherds** were trying to stay awake while guarding **their** sheep. **The flocks** wandered by day, up and down the

grasslands of Judea. **Close to Bethlehem, on the road to Jerusalem, there was a tower known as Migdal Eder, or the watchtower of the flock. It was the station where the shepherds watched the flocks destined for sacrifices in the Temple.**¹¹⁷ It seems deeply significant that those **shepherds**, who heard **the Good News of the Savior's birth**, who first listened to the praises of **the angels**, were watching **the flocks** destined to be offered as sacrifices that pictured the sacrifice of **Yeshua Ha'Meshiach** on the cross.



Some were probably dozing, a few were watching, when the night sky was unexpectedly split apart. Heaven and earth seemed to merge when suddenly **an angel of God appeared to them, and the Sh'khinah glory of the LORD**, the visible manifestation of **His presence, shone around them**. It was brighter than day, more like staring at the noon sun, and the sleeping **shepherds** awakened and, in fear, hid **their eyes** in the folds of **their coats** because **they were terrified (Luke 2:9)**. Sensing this, **their sheep** may have begun to run in circles because they too were **afraid**.

This was the announcement of the birth of the Jewish **King** to Jewish **shepherds**. For the first time since the days of **Ezeki'el (Ezeki'el 10:3-5, 18-19, 23)**, the Sh'kinah **glory** was seen. For more than five hundred years the nation of **Isra'el** had been without that visible sign of **God's presence** among **His people**. And now the Sh'khinah **glory**, for which **Isra'el** had waited, was revealed to the **shepherds in the field**, not to the priests in the Temple. Indeed, **the last [would] be first, and the first [would] be last (Matthew 20:16)**.

But, trying to sooth **their** rattled nerves, **the angel** said to them: **Do not be afraid. I bring you Good News that will cause great joy for all the people (Luke 2:10)**. Throughout **Luke**, **joy** is often associated with salvation. **Good News?** This would make any

Jew open his eyes and lift them to the skies. They had been **afraid** of the justice and vengeance of **Ha'Shem** for centuries. **They** had worshiped carefully, with respect for all the different rituals, for fear that **He** might be displeased with **them**. And now - **Good News?**

They looked up hopefully and the **angel** spoke again. **His** voice seemed to fill up the entire valley. **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you (Luke 2:11a)**. The Greek New Covenant uses *soter* for **Savior**, corresponding to the Hebrew word *moshia*, which is another form of the word *hoshia* and is related to **Yeshua's** own name (**Matthew 1:21**). The New Covenant uses *soter* 24 times and the related verb *sozo*, *to save*, 44 times. But, its use builds on the foundation already established in the TaNaKh. Therefore, when the question comes up if someone is *saved*, it has its roots in the TaNaKh as well as the B'rit Chadashah (see [By - Jesus Teaches Nicodemus](#)).¹¹⁸

He is the Messiah, the Lord (Luke 2:11b). **Jesus'** role as **Savior** is qualified by the title **Messiah** and **Lord**. This verse gives us a brief summary of **the Gospel** message and provides the reason for the statement found in **Luke 2:11a**. The long awaited **Meshiach has been born**. This **Savior** is also **the Lord**. Although the realization of the authority of the titles **Messiah** and **Lord** would have to wait until resurrection, in reality, **He** already was **Messiah** and **Lord**. As **Peter** said: **Therefore, let all Isra'el be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you have crucified, both Messiah and Lord (Acts 2:36)**.

When **Peter** preached at the Festival of Shavu'ot, **he** confirmed that this prophecy was fulfilled (**Acts 2:36** and **10:36**). The message was simple and direct: **do not** fear, a **Savior** is **born** and **He is the Messiah**. This was **Good News!** It was better than **good news**. It was the long-awaited **News**. It was the thing that had been promised by **God** a long time ago. It was the arrival of **the One** who would save **the people** of the world.

Two signs were given to **them**. The first **sign** was that the **shepherds** would **find a baby wrapped in cloths, and the** second **sign** would be that the **baby** would be **lying in a manger (Luke 2:12)**. Again, Doctor **Luke** stresses **Christ's** humanity. **He** came into this world as a human being. **He** is touched with the feeling of our frailty. **He** knows about us. **He** understands us because **the Savior** came into this world as a human being. This also means we can know something about **God**, because **He** took our humanity upon **Himself**. That should be a comforting thought to us all.¹¹⁹

Having announced to the **shepherds** the two signs by which they would be able to find **the Messiah, suddenly a great company of angels appeared with the angel of ADONAI, praising God** and began to sing a two line hymn: The first line is for **God**, singing: **Glory to God in the highest. And** the second line is for humanity: **peace on earth to people of**

good will (Luke 2:13-14). These are **people** whom **the will of God** favors and who desire what **Ha'Shem** wills. This is the third of four songs recorded in **Luke** (the first two were by **Mary** in **1:46-66**, and **Zechariah** in **1:68-79**), the third here by a choir of **angels 2:14**, and finally by **Simeon** in **2:29-32**.¹²⁰

When the angels had left them and returned into heaven, the shepherds said to one another over and over: What did you see? Did you hear what I heard? Is it true the **Messiah** has come to save mankind? After a short discussion, **they** believed the message and said to each other: **Let's go to Bethlehem and see this word that has happened, which ADONAI has told us about (Luke 2:15).** This was much like the action of **Miryam** after **she** had heard the message of Elizabeth. Such an attitude contrasts sharply with that of the religious leaders who knew where **the baby** was to be **born (Matthew 2:5-6)**, but, did not take the time or the effort to confirm it for themselves.¹²¹

As always, in times of crisis, **the shepherds** delegated a few of **their** number to guard the sheep. **So** the rest **hurried off and they** moved across the dark, grassy valley and up the sides of the hills, they climbed, they talked and they wondered. Could it really be? It stands to reason that the older **shepherds** believed it was no hoax. The Jews were students of the Torah, the prophets and the writings. Since there were no common books, they memorized all their teachings about **ADONAI**. **He** had promised a **Savior** who would come through the house of **David**, to be **born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)**. More than likely, the thing that mystified all the **shepherds** the most was that the birth of **the Messiah** was so humble. They could not imagine **the Son of God lying in a manger**.

Hadn't the elders said that when **the Savior** came to earth, **He** would be riding on a great white cloud, sitting in august kingliness, listening to trumpets and songs of hosts of **angels** surrounding **His** throne as **He** ruled over heaven and earth? Tonight, the **angels** seemed to be an afterthought. It was as though **His** birth had been so insignificant, so humble, that the **angels** had to come down from heaven to call for a few lonely **shepherds** to go to a cave and worship **Him**. Could **He** not at least have been **born** in the great palace of Herod the king? A **manger**, **the angel** said. They understood the word. It meant a sort of trough out of which animals ate grain. It would have the sweet odor of old oats and barley, and the side would be chewed and chipped. A salt lick would lie in the bottom.

The shepherds walked among the pilgrims of **Beit-Lechem**, asking where **the Messiah** might be found. Most turned away from **them** in silence. A few asked, "What **Messiah?**" **The shepherds** probably inquired if anyone had seen **the angles**. "What

angels?" Sometimes the travelers were rude, asking if they were drunk. Abuse was not new to **the shepherds**. **They** had known it before. Patiently, **they** carried on **their** search, asking here and there and finally narrowing **their** questions to this: Where can we find a newborn **baby** in this town? Finally someone pointed out where a young pregnant girl and been seen with her husband. They they finally found the house.

The shepherds approached the home timidly. **They** moved down the path in **their** sandals, whispering. As **they** approached the house, **Joseph** saw **them** coming. **He** studied **them** carefully, and the leader told **him** that **they** had seen **angels** in the valley, and one had said that **the Messiah** had been **born** that night in the town of **David**. **They** had . . . if it wasn't too soon . . . come to worship **Him**.

Coming in with the hoods down off **their** heads, their long hair fell on **their** shoulders, and **their** beards trembled with soft prayers. In the flickering yellow light of the oil lamp, **they** saw **the young mother**, probably around thirteen, seated on straw. **She** was looking over the side of an old manger. From **their** knees, **they** also straightened up and peered over the edge. There **He** was, wrapped tightly in **strips of cloth**.

The scene in the family room (see [Aq - The Birth of Jesus](#)), warmed by the bodies and breathing of the animals, was, to the **shepherds**, closer to **their** hearts than if **the Meshiach** had come on a big cloud with trumpeting **angels**. **They** understood babies, and **they** understood animals and **they** were delighted that **God** would see fit to come to earth in a dwelling only slightly less worthy than **their** own homes in the hills.

Therefore, the **shepherds found Miryam and Josef, and the baby, who was lying in the manger** just as the **angel** had prophesied (**Luke 2:16**). So, it was the **shepherds**, and not the magi, who first worshiped **the baby Jesus lying in the manger**. **They** must have been torn between wonderment and happiness. The little **baby** was **ADONAI**, and **the Son of God**, but, **He** was also a helpless, lovable infant. **Their** hearts surely welled with joy and **their** smiles were probably erased when **they** remembered that **they** were in the presence of **the King of kings**. **They** were **men** of such poverty and humility that **their** tattered coats spoke more elegantly than **their** tongues. **They** worshiped **the King** with full and grateful hearts.¹²²

When the shepherds had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about the baby (Luke 2:17). The **shepherds** carried on what the **angels** had begun. **And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them (Luke 2:18)**. The broadest meaning of the Greek word for **amazed** is a sense of astonishment with a tinge of fear at what is unusual or mysterious. **The travelers** who had come for the census

where **amazed** by what **they** saw and heard. As **they** selected their sacrifices in the Temple courtyard, how eager, how curious might **they** gather around to discuss, to wonder, yes, perhaps even to mock the news of **the baby Messiah laying in a manger**. Nevertheless, how the heart of **the righteous and devout Simeon** would be overjoyed in the expectation that **his** life's hopes and prayers were near; and how **the very old prophetess Anna**, who had not left the Temple compound, but, prayed daily for **the redemption of Isra'el**, would be looking for the baby **Yeshua** from that moment forward (see [Au - Jesus Presented at the Temple](#)).

All this made a profound impression on **Mary**. **She treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19)**. The Greek word for **treasured up** means *to protect, to preserve, to guard, or to keep watch over something*. **Miryam** did not fully understand the implications of all that happened to **her**. When it says **she pondered**, it describes someone who is puzzled by what they have heard, but, keeps it in mind in order to understand. Not unlike something like a jigsaw puzzle, **she** reflected or meditated upon them, placing them together for comparison. Everything that had happened to **her**: the announcement by **the angel** Gabriel, the crisis it caused **Joseph**, the timing of the census, the birth of **the Messiah**, and the worship of the **shepherds** all floated around in **her** mind, challenging **her** to arrange them in some kind of order.¹²³ Years later **she** would reveal **them** to Doctor **Luke** for his **gospel**.

In due time, **the shepherds returned to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen**. It was no accident, **they** said to **themselves**, that what **they had been told** by the **angels** and what **they** had **seen** with **their** own eyes, led **them** to believe that **Yeshua Ha'Meshiach** had indeed been **born (Luke 2:20)**. Accordingly, if one can say that the place of **His birth** was small, humble place for animals, then one can also say that **His** first worshipers, **shepherds living out in the fields nearby**, were the most humble and scorned of men.