

Text: Luke 2:8-20

Title: The welcome of the shepherds

Time: 12/14/2025

Place: NBBC

Introduction: One of my favorite Christmas songs is one which I have seldom heard sung. I heard it for the first time at a church we attended in Danbury, CT. The name of the song asks a thought-provoking question about Christmas. It is called, "How Should a King Come?"

"How should a King come?

Even a child knows the answer of course,
In a coach of gold and a pure white horse,
In the beautiful city in the prime of the day,
And the trumpets should cry as the crowds make way.
And the flags fly high in the morning sun,
As the people all cheer for the sovereign one.
And everyone knows that's the way it is done.
That's the way a king should come.

"How should a King come?

Even a commoner understands
He should come for his treasures and his houses and lands.
He should dine with silver on berries and milk
And sleep on a bed made of satin and silk.
And high on a hill his castle should show
All its light to the people in the village below.
And everyone knows that's the way it is done.
That's the way a King should come.

The song makes an important point about the birth of our Savior. Jesus, the King, came to earth in a way that was different from the way kings should come. The wise men looked for him in Jerusalem in the court of Herod, but the star led them to lowly Bethlehem. The Son of God humbled

Himself and became obedient unto the death of the cross that He might die and rise again to save you and I from our sins. If you are not sure you know him as your personal Savior this morning, you ought to ask someone how you can know. It is what Christmas is all about (vv. 10-11).

The King's humble coming had a humble welcoming delegation. They were the shepherds "abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night." I would like us to take some time this morning during this special season thinking about the shepherds and how God used them to welcome the newborn King of kings to the earth.

I. The shepherds welcome the King in weakness (vv. 8-14).

Illustration: Some of you know that I coach basketball for the town. Each year our basketball league will begin the season with a round robin jamboree schedule of games to assess the different skill levels of the teams. This helps the league to divide up the leagues into gold, silver, and bronze divisions, depending on what their skill level is. That is a helpful way to keep the games competitive throughout the season.

Application: In the verses we just read, we meet two divisions or teams of God's servants: the angels and the shepherds. Now if you were a coach, and the task of the team was to welcome the birth of the King of kings, bringing the good news of the great joy of His birth to all people, which team do you think you would pick?

On one hand you have a handful of shepherds, likely not articulate orators or well-versed in theological nuance. In fact, unlike the angels, the shepherds "were sore afraid" (v. 9). Certainly, they were clearly taken by surprise in a way the angels were not, and we nowhere read that they formed a multitude like the angels did.

Think of the skill level of the angels: unlimited talent, great insights, impressive appearance, and great numbers. So which team does the Lord put in the gold division for the gospel task at hand? It turns out that God chooses to use the shepherds to welcome the King's birth and spread its gospel tidings.

One of the themes of the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel is that God prefers to use the humble and the weak to do His work. That book tells us about the battle between David and Goliath, and clearly David was the underdog in that battle. Still, David was the victor. Later on, we read about the conflict between David and Saul, and once again, God is on the side of the underdog – the man on the run.

Much of Biblical history tells the true story of God's preference to accomplish His great work with over-matched, less-great workers. God's use of weak people is one of the great emphases of the theology of this Gospel of Luke as well. For example, Luke not only tells us that God used John the Baptist, he also tells us whom God bypassed in His choice of John (Luke 3:1-2). God's word came to John in the wilderness, not to these others whom the world viewed as gifted and powerful.

So in chapter 2, as we notice that the shepherds welcome the King in weakness, we must ask, "Why the shepherds?" And in many places the Bible gives us the answer – God uses the weak things of the world. The Apostle Paul trusted this truth when it came to his own service of the Lord: "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" (1 Cor. 1:26-31). For us to be used by the Lord, Christ alone must be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption, and He must receive all the glory for any good accomplished.

The shepherds saw that evening that true glory is the glory of the Lord. In verse 9 they meet the angel of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord shines round about them. In verse 15 they affirm that they must see what the Lord has made known to them. And in verse 11, they are told they will see a baby who is Christ, the Lord. An angel of the Lord appeared, the glory of this Lord went on display, the Lord made known, and the baby in the manger was Christ, the Lord.

God prefers to use the weak things of this world because Jesus is the glorious Lord, not man. And as we ask and answer the question, "Why the shepherds?" we find at the same time the answer to the question, "Why me?" Why me? — because God is glorified by using the weak things of this world.

Why were we given so much? Why do we live in the country we do? Why do we know the blessings and the provision of the Lord in our lives? Why have we known the saving grace of the Lord? The answer is not found in our natural abilities or our useful talents, but in God's desire to glorify Himself by using the weak things of the world.

We do not need to be mighty men of skill and renown to be used of God. We do not need to be a multitude like the heavenly host to be used of God. We do not even need to be unafraid. We need only to be like the shepherds. When they

heard the angels proclaimed “Glory to God in the highest,” they knew that they were hearing the reason for their weak existence. It was that realization, and not their fear, that controlled their response to the angels.

Which is stronger in our lives – the idea that we weak things should cower in fear, or the promise that God uses weak things like us for His glory? Fear or faith, which will it be?

II. The shepherds welcome the King with enthusiasm (vv. 15-16).

Illustration: One of the goals I have as a basketball coach is to help these first-time players love the game. I have found that if a player really loves to play the game in his heart, his body is going to practice and get better at the game. A mother shared with me last week that her son plays a lot on his own. He does that because he loves the game, and he is making great progress as an enthusiastic player.

Application: As the angels depart from the shepherds, we find them making great progress as those chosen to welcome the King. Notice that the angels do not really command the shepherds to go to Bethlehem at the news of the Messiah’s birth. Perhaps the angels saw that the shepherds already had the desire on their own to see the King, and so they simply give the shepherds directions on how to find Him.

The shepherds felt enthusiasm for this assignment from the angels. They came with haste. They sensed the privilege of their opportunity. They could not wait to see the Lord. There were likely other things they might have found to do that evening, but instead they obeyed from the heart. Paul commended the Roman Christians for this kind of obedience (Rom. 6:17, “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of

doctrine which was delivered you"). What kind of obedience does our heart render for the Lord?

Illustration: When I tell a player to sit back down on the bench, he often obeys with the body, not from the heart. When I send one into the game, he obeys from the heart.

We can be like that when it comes to the directives the Lord gives to us. Some assignments will be more enjoyable than others, but we need to obey from the heart no matter how difficult the task may be. May the Lord give us the enthusiasm these shepherds felt in their haste to Bethlehem.

III. The shepherds welcome the King with proclamation (vv. 17-20).

Illustration: In Gen. 18:14, God asked Abraham a rhetorical question: "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" He had told Abraham that his wife Sarah, who was past child-bearing years, would soon become pregnant and give birth to a son. Abraham found out, of course, that the answer is certainly "No, nothing is too hard for the Lord."

Application: The word translated *thing* in that question is the Hebrew word *dabar*, which can mean either *thing* or *word*. The question from the Lord to Abraham was actually, "Is there any *word* too difficult for the Lord?" The Lord was assuring Abraham, not really that He could do anything — that He is omnipotent, but rather that He could do any word that He promised to do — that He is faithful, and never overcommitted when it comes to His promises.

Application: There is a Greek word in our New Testaments that is similar to this Old Testament word *dabar*. It is the word *rhema*. Sometimes *rhema* means *thing*, but it normally means *word* or *saying*. *Rhema* appears once in v. 15, "Let us

now go even unto Bethlehem and see this *thing* [word/saying/promise] which the Lord has made known unto us"; once in v. 17, "When they had seen it, they made known abroad *the saying* which was told them concerning this child"; and once in v. 19, "But Mary kept all these *things* [words/sayings/promises], and pondered them in her heart."

Had the angel come back and asked the shepherds and Mary that evening, "Is there any word that is too difficult for the Lord?" or "Is there any promise from the Lord that is too good to be true?", they would have emphatically answered, "Absolutely not!" The word of the Lord is faithful and true, and the shepherds were witnesses to the fulfillment of the most important word in all the Bible, the coming of the Messiah, the Savior who is Christ the Lord (v. 11).

The power of that word loosened the tongues of these shepherds. They went abroad and shared the gospel, and those who heard them wondered at them. I would have hoped for a better response than this. But in spite of this tepid reception, the shepherds glorified and praise the Lord that they were privileged to hear the good news of great joy for all people and see that it was true. As those privileged to welcome the Messiah into their lives, they told others what they had seen, irrespective of the welcome their message received.

Conclusion: The last verse of my favorite Christmas song meditates on how difficult the pregnancy and the trip to Bethlehem must have been for Mary and Joseph:

"How did the King come?
On a star-filled night into Bethlehem
Rode a weary woman and a worried man.
And the only sound on the cobblestone street

Was the shuffle and the ring of their donkey's feet.
And they came to the inn and finding no room
They settled for the barn, not a moment too soon.
Everyone should know that's the way it was done.
That's the way the King has come."

Then soon after Mary gave birth, the shepherds happened by with their welcome. They came explaining their fear at hearing the angel of the Lord and the seeing the Lord's glory. They came with their enthusiasm to see the one they believed to be Christ, the Lord. They came ready and willing to make known abroad all that they had seen and heard as it was told to them. And God used them to encourage Mary's heart.

This morning, we have seen and heard in the Scriptures what the shepherds saw and heard. May we respond as they did, useful to the Lord with weakness, enthusiasm, and proclamation of this good news of great joy.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching