



good | shepherd
presbyterian church

God Speaks to You

Luke 2:8-20

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The appearing of the angels to the shepherds was a supernatural, once-in-an-eternity kind of amazing event! But there was also a sense in which it maps out how God still speaks today, even to “ordinary” folks like you and me. I’d like to explain through six parts of this story...

“There were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.” (v.8)

The shepherds weren’t at the Temple or the synagogue or a holy mountain. They were at work, doing what shepherds do. They were watching over their flock. I understand the idea that God shows up in special places. I’ve always loved going to church. And I do believe God speaks in church, but it’s not because it’s a special building, but probably because we often are intentional about listening when we come here. I also love special places like Young Life’s Windy Gap camp or Montreat Conference Center because I’ve had significant spiritual experiences there. But again, it’s not that God shows up there in a different way, but probably because people listen and look for God. I appreciate that this story of the announcement of Christ’s birth happens to some blue-collar guys while they are working the night shift. God can and does show up anywhere.

“An angel suddenly stood before them... the glory of the Lord shone... and they were terribly frightened.” (v.9)

I understand that this is the kind of thing you can’t ignore. But short of a “turned up to 10” glowing angel in the room how easily do we miss what’s going on right in front of us? I remember that other Bible story in 1 Kings 19 of God speaking to Elijah. Elijah was on Mt. Horeb, the “mountain of the Lord”

and a mighty wind, and earthquake, and a fire passed by. But God was not in those, but in a gentle breeze... a “still, small voice” that followed. God still speaks; but are you prepared for a “holy interruption” to everyday life? Are you listening?

“Do not be afraid... I bring you good news of a great joy... [today] has been born... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (vv.10-11)

While that message was for the Shepherds, it contains three timeless messages that God still speaks today. And I think we still need to hear all three. Did you catch them? 1) Do not be afraid; 2) I bring you good news of great joy; 3) Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord! Now when I ask about hearing God speak you may have something more specific in mind, but think how much those three things cover. Think about them in the context of 2020: do not be afraid; God brings good news and joy; Jesus is Savior and Lord! Can you hear that?

“This will be a sign... heavenly host praising God” (vv.12-14)

This story contains the two things we often say we want with hearing from God. We want an audible voice and we want proof! The shepherds got an angel messenger and “signs!” Of course they listened! But I’d suggest that we have access to these same signs, though in a modified form. First, they would see a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Is that really a sign? It seems so ordinary! The angel was the sign, right? Jesus himself was quite ordinary looking... a family with a newborn in humble circumstances. Is that really what God wanted to show me? What exactly am I looking for with a sign from God? Perhaps the ordinary thing that God wants me to see is enough if I look with eyes of faith, with belief. Secondly, the original angel is joined by a huge multitude of other angels. That’s a clear sign, right? Here’s the part of that we can experience. The angels didn’t appear to say “Look at us and believe!” Rather, they appeared to worship God, to give glory to God. And that’s what we gather and do every week. Worship itself is a sign of God’s presence. We can be encouraged by the worship of those around us. Our faith can be strengthened and validated by those around us giving praise and glory to God. And we can encourage others through our own worship. How very ordinary and how very extraordinary! I’ve always told people who are struggling in faith to come to worship. Don’t wait until you have your life together or feel “holy enough” to be in God’s house. It’s the other way

around. Come to God's house so that you can be encouraged by the worship of God and hear God's gracious invitation to come, believe, and follow.

"Let us go straight to Bethlehem and see..." (vv.15-16)

Here's where we see the faith of the shepherds in action. They didn't just see and hear the supernatural display and then go back to work. They responded in faith and said, "Let's go check it out!" This is such an important step if you are wrestling with faith. It's easy to just say that we won't believe until God proves Himself. But God's invitation – and Jesus' invitation – is to "come and see." If we really want to hear from God, we need to check out what God says and does. We need to read the scripture, pray to God, be in the midst of worship. Jesus said, "Seek and you will find." If we aren't looking and listening, it is unlikely we will see or hear God.

"The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen..." (vv.17-20)

The shepherds shared all they had heard and seen with the holy family. Then, having seen the baby, they went back "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." They had become worshipers. This is what I believe happens when we are around other worshipers and we look and listen in faith. We will see and hear and experience God and become worshipers ourselves. And then others will be drawn to God through us.

Am I talking about God giving you stock advice? No... nor am I implying that you will hear an audible voice or receive a secret message on parchment paper. But I do believe that God moves and speaks and leads those who seek Him, listen to Him, and trust Him. We can find reinforcement and encouragement through other worshipers and through God's own Words in scripture. And I am encouraged that God shows up in ordinary places to ordinary people like you and me.

This Christmas, be reminded that God still moves and speaks, that the Savior born 2000 years ago is still Savior today, and that God loves you very much. Have a merry and blessed Christmas. Amen.