

## CORE COMPETENCIES

### Core Beliefs

- Trinity
- Salvation by Grace
- Authority of Bible
- Personal God
- Identity in Christ
- Church
- Humanity
- Compassion
- Eternity
- Stewardship

### Core Practices

- Worship
- Prayer
- Bible Study
- Single-Mindedness
- Biblical Community
- Spiritual Gifts
- Giving Away My Time
- Giving Away My Money
- Giving Away My Faith
- Giving Away My Life

### Core Virtues

- Love
- Joy

**"I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances."**

- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness/Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-Control
- Hope
- Humility

**L**ike so much of the story of Christ's birth, I find myself amazed at God's choice of participants. It would be hard to find a more unlikely group to be appointed as ambassadors for the best news the world has ever been given. And yet I can say the same for my own life. I look in the mirror and find a most unlikely candidate for an ambassador of Good News. But I have been chosen for such a role — as have you. As you look at these men this week in the Scripture, let their ordinariness inspire you. Let them remind you that you, too, have been entrusted with a message. It's a message that still needs to be told—by you and me. So let's go tell it... "over the hills and everywhere!"

In His Love,

**Richard Gotthardt**, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

## Christmas Series: Week 4

Imagine that you are God (Yes, try to imagine that!) and you want to announce the most amazing, incredible, joyous news ever. It is an event which will literally change the course of history—the birth of your only Son, Jesus Christ. The birth of the One who will be the Savior of the whole world—the promised Messiah. The One for whom the nation of Israel has been waiting and hoping and praying for thousands of years. Finally, He has come! To whom do you announce it? Whom do you tell? Whom do you invite to come and see?

Here was God's choice: a ragtag collection of shepherders! There is only one announcement of Christ's birth recorded in the Scriptures, only one invitation from God to anyone to go visit Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus. And that one invitation goes to a bunch of uneducated, smelly, low-class, social and religious outcasts- a bunch of shepherds.

The shepherds inhabited one of the least likely cross-sections of society to receive advance notice of Christ's birth. They had a relatively small circle of relationships to which they could spread the message and they had no political or societal influence to sway opinion. However, soon after Jesus' birth, God sends a throng of angels to these men to tell them the good news. They responded by springing into action to verify this news for themselves and then they went out and spread the news. As we focus in this week on the shepherds' visitation by angels, ask God to give you wisdom and understanding regarding how to apply His Word to your life.

### Day 1: Message Delivered

Read Luke 2:1-20

The shepherds were out in the fields going about their business as usual. It is dark. In darkness, they alertly listen for noises that could signal danger for the sheep. Suddenly, the black sky lights up like day with the radiance of an angel!

Reread Luke 2:8-20.

What might have been some of the shepherds' thoughts or reactions to the angel? What information does the angel give to the shepherds?

How do the shepherds respond to the angel's announcement?

Think of a time when you have received good news and were compelled to share it with everyone around you. What was it about this "news" that compelled you to share?

## **Day 2: Receive the Message**

Put yourself in the shepherds' shoes for a moment. Do you think you would have experienced any disbelief or skepticism about the validity of the angel's message? The shepherds had to believe what the angel had said was true and then act on this belief.

Read Luke 2:1-20

The angel says that he is bringing good news of great joy that will be for all the people. The good news is that Jesus Christ has been born. Why is this good news for all people?

The shepherds received a unique and personal visitation from an angel to tell them about the good news of Jesus. Today we have the written Word of God to tell us the good news of Jesus. How would you compare your response to the Bible to the response of the shepherds?

When did you give your life to Christ and accept His offer of salvation for your sins? (If you have not, it is time to investigate this good news. There are people who would love to meet with you over coffee to talk about this good news. Please call Lois at x214 and ask for more information about meeting with someone.)

Have you realized that the message of Christ is just what the angels said, "good news of great joy"? How could you allow the good news of Christ bring you joy today?

End your time by praying and asking God to show you the intensity of the joy that is found in the good news of Jesus.

### **Day 3: Know the Message**

A unique aspect of this angelic encounter is that the angel gives the shepherds no "next steps." By contrast, the angel that visited Zechariah gave him specific instructions regarding how they should raise John. Mary's angel told her about her pregnancy and directs her what to name Him—Jesus. Joseph is instructed to take Mary as his wife even though she is pregnant. The angels that visit the shepherds simply tell them the news and then leave. Let's focus in today on the shepherds' first response to the good news.

Read Luke 2:1-20.

What was the shepherds' first response to the angel's news?

How were the shepherds able to find Mary, Joseph and Jesus?

Remember Bethlehem was so crowded that Mary and Joseph could not find a place to stay. It was effortful for the shepherds to find Jesus, yet they were intent on verifying that the good news of Jesus' birth was true.

How have you intently pursued an ongoing knowledge of the truth of Jesus just as the shepherds acted to verify the truth of Jesus' birth?

What steps do you need to take to continue to deepen your understanding of the good news of Jesus?

### **Day 4: Share the Message**

After going and seeing Jesus for themselves, the shepherds take another step of unprompted obedience to God. Reread Luke 2:1-20 and look for the shepherds' next steps after seeing Jesus.

What did the shepherds do immediately after seeing Jesus?

What did the shepherds tell the people?

How did people respond to the shepherds' news?

Although the shepherds had no political or social clout, God, through His angels, gave them the opportunity to spread the message of Jesus' birth to the general public. They took this opportunity eagerly and it appears that they could not keep silent about the news they had received.

What do you think compelled the shepherds to so eagerly share the news of Christ's birth?

Do you find yourselves, like the shepherds, eager to share the good news of Jesus?

If yes, what is compelling you to share the good news and how can you continue to cultivate this desire to share?

If no, what is keeping you from eagerly sharing the good news of Christ? If this is the one piece of good news the world needs, how will you cultivate a stronger desire to share this news?

### **Day 5: Live the Message**

In this account of an angel visitation, we see ordinary shepherds met by God in the midst of their ordinary lives. They readily listened and received the news that God had for them. Next, they went and saw for themselves the work of the Lord. Then, they shared with others what God had done. Finally, they returned to worship and give praise to God.

As you reread Luke 2:1-20 today, ask God to show you how to respond in worship to His good news.

What caused the shepherds to return and praise God?

The shepherds had lived in and truly encountered the supernatural movement of God through the events of Jesus' birth. In the space below, write down several specific details of Jesus' birth that cause you to be in awe of God.

Spend time praying—praising God for each of these details of Jesus' birth. Worship God today for the message of good news that He gave us in His son.

During this fast-paced Christmas season, how will you make worship of God central in your life?

What might serve to remind you of the amazing work of God in the birth of Jesus throughout the next few weeks?