



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“SHEPHERDS IN THE FIELDS”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Text: Luke 2:8
Date: December 22, 1953

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on December 22, 1953.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (Luke 2:8).

Next, review the outline of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would “fill in” the remainder of the message from the chosen passage.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

I. The Story

A. While shepherds watched their flocks.

1. No more common scene in Israel than this
 - a) *Abraham's flocks had grazed on these hills 2,000 years before*
 - b) *Shepherds, in the same dress, graze their flocks there today*
2. Hallowed fields
 - a) *David had tended sheep upon these hills*
 - (1) Here he had killed the wildcat and the bear in defense of his flocks
 - (2) Here he had learned to speak with God
 - (3) The memories of these scenes had inspired the King to write "The Lord is my shepherd . . ."
 - b) *While Ruth was a gleaner in these fields, she fell in love with Boaz -- and the great Hebrew love story*
 - c) *A shepherd here contemplated upon the excesses of his people, and Amos became the prophet of God.*

B. The "Tower of the Flock"

1. Legend had it that when Messiah should come, it would be announced from the "Tower of the Flock", a mile out of Bethlehem on the Jerusalem road

C. The shepherds

1. Perhaps these were the tales being retold about the fire, as the shepherds kept their watch
2. As night darkened, they wearied, decided upon their respective watches, and all but one dropped off to sleep
3. There could be no napping on the watch
 - a) *The fire had to be kept blazing to keep the wolves away*

b) A vigilant eye must be kept for robbers -- for many were hungry, and a flock of sheep was an invitation to thievery

II. Implications

A. God's invitation comes to common people

1. Good news for us who are common
2. There were so many more important people to whom it might have first been revealed
 - a) The wisemen did not come for many days. We celebrate their coming on Epiphany, not Christmas*
3. We are common people -- who of us can lay claim to unusual learning or profound spirituality
4. We so easily get inferiority complexes concerning things spiritual
5. Christ's work was carried out primarily by common people.

B. God's invitation came to people who were minding their business

1. I have a distrust for do-gooders
2. Your place of work is hallowed ground
 - a) Christ did not go to the public library, or even to the synagogue to choose his disciples -- but down to the fish wharfs where men were mending their nets*

C. The shepherds said, "Let us go and see"

1. The shepherd on watch might have said: "This is an interesting development. I must remember to tell the boys when they wake tomorrow morning."
2. They made it a matter of personal experience
3. Some say, "Religion is a good thing -- the kids can't get enough of it."
 - a) *Laziness, fear of being peculiar keep many from taking advantage of the experience of living close to God*

D. Having seen it, they told others

1. They told folks at the inn -- the merchants opening their shops -- the priests at the temple when they took the next herd of sheep in
2. A faith worth having is worth sharing
 - a) *As an appliance salesman, I learned of a special in Thor ironers -- and couldn't ring door bells fast enough*
 - b) *The experience of the shepherds can be ours*
 - c) *No ordinary sheep, these. They were the flocks used for temple sacrifice*
 - (1) They must be without blemish
3. Only the best shepherds could tend these flocks
 - a) *A fight among the rams -- or a lamb caught in the thorns or upon jagged rocks could leave scars that would render the animals useless for the temple*
 - b) *Most shepherds had poor reputations*
 - (1) They did not obey the religious customers
 - (2) They were frequently roustabouts, without roots, wanderers

E. The Angel appears

1. "And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were filled with fear. And the angel said unto them, 'Be not afraid, for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign unto you -- you will find the babe wrapt in swaddling clothes, and lying in the manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace among men with whom he is pleased.' And when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe, lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them."

Study Questions -- Part I

Bible Reading: Luke 2:8

Luke 2:8 says: "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night."

- Take a few moments to picture what the life of a shepherd would have been like. What kinds of things could have drawn them away from their flock?
- How old do you picture the shepherds to be?
- What might they have done to keep themselves awake while in the fields?
- How might they have felt about their work?

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon :

I.A.1.b. This sermon was preached in 1953. Do you think it would hold true that shepherds dressed in the same way still watch over their flocks today as they did even in the 1950's?

I.A.2.3. What do you take from the fact that some of the earliest witnesses called to Bethlehem recall the 23rd Psalm?

I.C. Think again about these shepherds. Why do you think God chose shepherds to call to the manger?

II.A. If Jesus had been born in 2011 instead, what kinds of people do you think God would have called to Bethlehem?

II.A.2.a It is very clear that it was some days before the wisemen appeared. What do you think had been happening since the shepherds arrived?

II.A.5. Do you think Christ's work has always been carried out primarily by common people? Have there been times in history when you think that hasn't been true?

II.B.2.a. What can we learn about where we ought to be doing Christ's work from the places that Jesus went?

II.C.3.a. Do you think it is true today that people hold back from sharing their faith because they fear being viewed as peculiar? Do you think that is more or less true than in 1953? Do you think that differs for people of different generations?

II.D. In our day of mass media, how do you think people would be sharing the news if Jesus had been born today?

II.D.2.c. Why would the story reflect that these were sacrificial lambs being tended?

II.D.3. Does it change your view of the story about "ordinary" people to know that these were the best shepherds? Or is it a way of showing that Jesus already deserved the best?

II.D.3.b. What impact does this reputation have on why you think God chose to have shepherds come to the inn?

II.E.1. Knowing about the place shepherds held in society at the time, how do you think people reacted to hearing this story from shepherds? How would it have differed if they heard it first from the wisemen?