

Let's Go See

Luke 2:8-15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Let us go and see. Let us go and see.

As the shepherds say that phrase to one another in this account, it's something that gives me hope. And it gives me hope because of exactly how often we haven't been saying anything along the lines of "let's go see," lately. It seems the phrase of the last twenty-one months has been "let's wait and see." Let's wait and see if there's a shortage of this. Let's wait and

see if that flight gets canceled. Let's wait and see what the latest update from the health department is. Let's wait and see if the supply chain is affected. We've all been waiting to see for so long we are ready for a change, we are ready for some joy, we are ready to go and see maybe just as much as those anxious shepherds.

"Let's go see" is a phrase I associate a lot with Christmas time. Just last week in staff meeting Christi was telling us about WRAL's list of best Christmas lights in Raleigh and everyone around the table said "Oooo, send me that! I want to go see." Now I'm the youngest person on staff at Soapstone. I hold that record now by just a matter of days, thanks to Jon, but I am proud of that record nonetheless. So everyone on our staff has experienced at least 36 Christmases. Some have experienced a few more, and we don't need to get into that. But with 30+ Christmases behind us, we know what Christmas lights look like. We know what the decorations look like. We even know what big displays of Christmas lights look like, and what Christmas lights set to music are like. And yet none of us went cynical and said "Been there, done that." We all said "I want to go see."

But the person I most associate with this phrase, especially at Christmas, is my little brother. Like a lot of brothers, the two of us could not be more different. And one of the ways we are very different is how we start our days. Even when we were kids, we both had alarm clocks. And mine would be set to go off in the morning at the latest possible time for me to be able to get up and physically make it to school, or church, or whatever I was headed to that day.

My brother had an alarm clock and he was not allowed to leave his room until it went off. Otherwise he would be awake at 4:30 in the morning and cooking himself breakfast on the stove. At six years old. He has just always been ready to face the day and excited to *go! go! go!* and had no regard for the other people in the house he'd wake up in that very noisy process.

And this was especially true on Christmas Day. From the time my brother was old enough to talk until... I don't know, we were probably in our twenties... I can remember every year being awakened on Christmas morning by my brother, who felt like if it was late enough that I was awake, he wouldn't be in trouble for being downstairs. He'd poke his head into my room and say "Dan, it's Christmas! Get up! Santa's been here! Let's go see!"

Walking down the stairs I think we'd go through all the emotions that we see in the shepherds in that story. Because we'd go slowly, my brother trying not to make lots of noise, me just stumbling around because I hadn't discovered coffee at that point in my life, and we'd be just a little bit afraid. What if we were up too early in the morning? What if Santa hadn't been yet? What if he was still there and we scared him away and blew the whole thing? And we'd be a little bit afraid and nervous until one of us would flick on the lights in the family room and for just a moment we'd be amazed and excited and we'd run back upstairs and wake up Mom and Dad and this time we'd both be saying it: "It's Christmas! Get up! Santa's been here! Let's go see!"

The Shepherds were the original kids on Christmas. They're terrified at first. And who wouldn't be? Bang! There's angels around them and all this light and this crazy message. And when it's all over they don't say "okay, let's get the sheep," Right? Because they've got to have scattered. The Bible leaves that part out but I mean my cat goes flying out of the room when the TV gets too loud. After a multitude of angels show up, those sheep have gotta be *gone*. But that's suddenly not the shepherds' concern. They look at one another and they just say "Let's go see." And if we keep reading we see that when the shepherds go there, they were amazed, and then they returned and praised God and told everyone they knew. They spread the word about this amazing message of a savior being born.

I love that those are their jobs. To see, to be amazed, and to tell about it.

One of my favorite songs is by a band named Caedmon's Call. And they wrote a song called Two Weeks in Africa, this song about the emotional ups and downs of short-term missions. And there's a line in the bridge that says "God doesn't need us, but he lets us put our hands in."

The other characters in this story get a lot of credit for the things they contributed. Mary says "yes" to God and becomes Jesus' mother. Joseph stays with her and takes care of them both. The wise men travel vast distances and bring precious gifts. The shepherds are just sort of there. They don't have any long-term relationships here. They don't have precious things to bring. They can't even say "oh, we've got someplace better than a stable to stay," they've been outside with their flocks. They're just there. They get to put their hands in. They're invited by the angel. They're

included. They're gathered in, for no other reason than to just see what God is doing. They just go see.

If you were here for the Drive-Through Nativity on Monday night, the Angels and the Shepherds were one of the scenes we depicted. And that scene in particular had the most enthused actors of the whole production. I was standing at the end waving to people as they pulled out of the parking lot, but at one point I looked over at all the actions being done by our Shepherds and Angels - led by our illustrious senior pastor I might add - and there were hands waving and arms going and some kind of boy band move from the shepherds... and I said to the person standing next to me "Why do the Angels and the Shepherds look like the Village People?" But when it actually came time for me to drive through and watch while listening to the scripture story, I realized they were acting out "Glory to God in the highest," and miming that there was a baby, and the Shepherds were at first terrified, and then excited to go see. May we be as excited as those actors but also as the actual shepherds.

The Shepherds went and saw a baby. And I can't imagine he did a whole lot right then that night. If you've ever been around a newborn you know that they only do a couple of things.. and yet we're excited for them anyway. As were the shepherds. Not only were they the first kids on Christmas, amazed at what they saw, they were really the first Christian missionaries. They went and told everyone they knew about it. They shared the good news. The hope, the beauty, the wonder, the prophecy fulfilled, it was all too good to keep to themselves.

Sometimes it's our job to bring something of value to the Lord. Sometimes it's our job to tell God's people about the wonderful things he's been doing. Sometimes, times like tonight when we are invited and included and gathered in to hear this story, and see this story in just a couple minutes, it's our job to stop and be amazed. God doesn't need us, but he lets us put our hands in. We've got lots of young people who are going to put their hands in and tell God's great good news tonight. Let's be amazed by that. Let's recognize the hope and the love expressed in Jesus, in God with us. Let's go see.