

The Joy of the Shepherds

Then shepherds, be joyful, salute your liege King, let hills and dales ring with the song that ye sing. Blest be the hour, welcome the morn, for Christ our dear Savior on earth now is born! These words are from a familiar children's Christmas song (SHZ 54:3). Who were the shepherds? Why were they joyful? What were they singing?

The Shepherds' Important Job

The Bible tells us the story of Jesus' birth (Luke 2). Long ago on the night Jesus was born, near Bethlehem of Judea, shepherds were in a field watching over their flock. Shepherds had to watch over their flock even at night so wild animals wouldn't attack the sheep. In those days being a shepherd was a lowly job. Shepherds were not even allowed to be witnesses in a court of law. Yet, just think, God chose these lowly shepherds for a special duty. God chose shepherds to be the messengers of Jesus' birth!

As the shepherds were watching over their flock that night, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and "the glory of the Lord shone round about them." The shepherds were filled with fear. But the angel said: Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all people! A Savior is born this day in the City of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord! The angel then told the shepherds, "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Suddenly the sky was filled with angels, "a multitude of the heavenly host" was praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men." The shepherds must have been amazed at the heavenly sight!

Happy to Tell the News

After the angels had gone away from the shepherds into heaven, the shepherds said to each other: Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that the Lord has told us about. They knew that this Child that was born was the promised Savior. The shepherds quickly went to Bethlehem. There they found Mary and Joseph and found the Baby Jesus lying in a manger. Imagine the shepherds' joy when they saw and realized that what the angel had said was true!

The shepherds could not keep the good news to themselves. They joyfully told others about what they had heard and seen! The Bible tells us that the people "wondered" at the things the shepherds told them. God did not choose the kings and rulers and powerful men of the land at that time to be His messengers. God chose lowly shepherds to be messengers and witnesses of Jesus' birth.

We Share Good News, Too

We are also lowly messengers of the good news of Jesus. Like the shepherds, we can also be joyful. We can, like the shepherds, share this good news of the Savior and the good news of the gospel with others: Jesus is born! Jesus has come to save sinners from their sins! Our sins are forgiven, we have peace with God, and we have the hope of heaven. What joyful news!

The end of the story tells us that the shepherds then went back to their fields, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as the angel had told them. Imagine the sound of the shepherds singing and rejoicing in the fields that night: *Let hills and dales ring with the song that ye sing! Blest be the hour, welcome the morn, for Christ our dear Savior on earth now is born!* (SHZ 54:3).