

Oh, What a Night!
Night?...Light! – Luke 2:8-20

Intro

As I shared with you last week, the people had been waiting for ages for the birth of the Savior.

- the words of the prophets had been waiting hundreds of years to be fulfilled.
- and here, on this night, Mary gives birth to the baby Jesus...the long awaited hour had arrived

The shepherds were called to be witnesses to this most holy, historic event.

- angels were sent from the heavenly realms to a nearby hillside to announce the birth of Christ
- Shepherds were invited to this lowly manger in Bethlehem to see the newborn Savior

Where did the angels find these shepherds, these witnesses?

- not at Starbucks or Scooters
- not at Barnes and Noble
- certainly not down in Old Town in Wichita...or Buffalo Wild Wings catching the latest game on the big screen...

They weren't found at home...2300 sq. ft. with 4 bedrooms and 3 baths...the size of the average home in our country

Scripture says they were "living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night."

- night is often associated with darkness as I will show you here in a minute and one of our greatest needs in the dark is light!
- our grandkids, maybe your kids or grandkids like to have a night light because they are afraid of the dark...

I want to use the word DARK to see what we can learn about these shepherds keeping watching at night and their reaction to the events of the night...a night different than any other night they ever experienced...

D – difficult lives of the shepherds

Flocks were kept outside in the fields from spring until late fall, and, sometimes during the winter.

- they would have to move the flocks around from place to place to find suitable pasture land.
- this often meant months away from home...in some very isolated places.
- it was often a lonely job...socially isolated from even family and friends.

The shepherd would lead the sheep across several miles of wild grassland, choosing the safe path, making sure each sheep could keep up.

- Towards mid-day he found the watering place, and selected a good area for the sheep to rest
- as the evening drew near, he would lead them to a little more grass and then to a safe place for the night.
 - may or may not have been a sheepfold.
 - an enclosure with walls like one of these... one gate...only one way in and out
 - as the sheep are going in and out, the shepherd was checking them for injuries, sickness, state of being
- in the morning, the routine would start all over

Shepherds were not able to take great quantities of food out to the fields with them

- they often had to supplement their diet with whatever they could find growing wild
- maybe fruit from trees, figs, dates, and even locusts and honey when available

Shepherds were most often portrayed positively in the bible but were often looked down upon from a religious standpoint.

- they often were unable to attend worship services because of their duties
- while others were heading off to feasts and festivals, the shepherds were in the fields with their flocks...

Shepherds were constantly with their flocks trying to keep them from trouble and harm.

- there was always danger from thieves and wild beasts
- David spoke of his shepherding days and having to fight off bears and lions trying to carry off the sheep...

Such was the life of the faithful shepherd...

- couldn't have been an easy lifestyle, especially if the shepherd was a hired hand rather than an owner....
- keeping watch over their flocks by night....

Some similarities to some of you...have had a difficult life...maybe not bears, wild beasts, thieves

- your difficulties have come in the loss of a loved one to an untimely death, a lost job, financial struggles, relationship issues...you've experienced the heartbreak of divorce or maybe a loved one has had to go through it and you were greatly affected
- maybe it is health issues that are your trouble...yours or a spouse, one or both of your parents, possibly even a child

V9 says that an angel of the Lord appeared to them...

- the angel didn't appear to people who had it made...up in the gated communities
- didn't appear in the palace or even to the Sanhedrin or to the Pharisees
- appeared to everyday joes...like me and you...
- Wow! How awesome that the presence of the prince of peace, king of kings, and Lord of Lords was announced to these shepherds keeping watch in the night

A – anxiety, worries

Night time...a time when we look to the comfort and peace of our beds...

- the shepherd had spent the day leading and looking after his sheep
- maybe walking miles...and miles to provide green pastures and still waters
- a time set for rest was often still a time of work for the shepherd though

keeping **watch** - **forbearance** of **sleep**

- means somebody was still watching over the sleep
- being a shepherd was not a 40 hour a week job...
- it was a long hard week...month....year....life

Night time ...a time of worry, especially if you are tired and it is dark

Darkness can mean a couple of things...

- darkness can mean a physical darkness as seen in Genesis 1:2

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep,

Night time is associated with danger and evil...which is not a good thing...

- over 2/3 of sexual assaults occur at night

- over 70% of motor vehicle thefts occur at night
- in a lesson for a wellness class I came across a 2010 Gallup poll on safety and it said that 4 in 10 Americans were afraid to walk outside after dark...even within a mile of their home!

Dark can be scary as it totally envelopes us...(cruise)

- blocks our major sensory system...the sense of sight...
- we feel more vulnerable in the dark...criminals, animals and other potential dangers can be concealed by the dark

I think in many ways it goes back to our basic instinct of hunters-gatherers...

- at night, animals would come out that could kill us in our sleep
- we couldn't see the threat whereas in the daytime we could identify the threat
- King David, a shepherd at heart, knew the danger the night time brought.

*You send the **darkness**, and it becomes **night**, when all the forest animals prowl about. (Psalm 104:20)*

It was a time of great worry for the shepherd, especially more risky without a sheepfold.

Night also brought uncertainty to the lives of the shepherd...

- what would tomorrow bring....
- didn't have the luxury of KWCH or KAKE or KSN weather forecast
- where would they graze and water the next day...
- would they find good grass close by...how about clean water..
- would all the sheep make it through the night...
- would the night bring thieves? Predators...?
- what if they lost a couple of sheep to sickness, predators, thieves?
 - what would that do to their profits?
- when would they return home if they were away?

There is uncertainty in our world as well...

- our economy is still in a state of great flux
- there is a great deal of uncertainty in Europe
- the middle east is most definitely in a state of uncertainty...
- what in the world is Russia up to?
- the safety and security of our own homeland is threatened like never before
- like the shepherds, we face uncertainty every day....

we can all relate in some way to the shepherds we find here in Scripture...

Our lives have not been all rosy or peachy keen...a walk in the park

- we have experienced loss, hurt, isolation, struggles...
- we have been down and disheartened...
- we too have uncertainties in our life...

R - reaction

Despite all of what we have talked about, the shepherds reacted in a way that we all should react.

Let's look at the shepherds here in Luke's account of the birth of the Christ child...

V15-16...*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.*

The shepherds, despite life's difficulties...the burdens of shepherding....

- their weariness, their worry, and their uncertainty....
- seek out the baby that has been announced to them as the Savior, the Messiah
- and not only did they seek him out but they hurried off...
- they didn't waste any time trying to find Jesus the Christ...
- millions of bulls, goats, sheep had been sacrificed as a symbol of the Messiah and his sacrifice that would free them from their enemies and mark their sin debt as paid
- they were going to find this Messiah even if it meant leaving their flocks!

Look everyone....you and I have the same opportunity....to seek after the Christ child....

- despite our difficult lives and difficult times...despite our burdens...
- despite our worries, our weariness, our uncertainty
- some of it is already behind us and some of it still yet to come in our life....

But this baby...the Savior, the Messiah...grew up to say these very words...

Jesus said: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"
(Matthew 11:28)

Even in his infancy, Christ must have relieved the weariness, worry and uncertainty of the shepherds... Their troubles, worries, uncertainty set aside, they go off telling everybody about their encounter with the Messiah, the Savior...

- something in their countenance must have changed....
- they went about their encounter with the Lord

This time of year is an excellent time for us to recommit ourselves to having regular encounters with the Lord...

- it will mean seeking him like the shepherds...
- more than that it will mean having a burning desire to seek him....the shepherds hurried...
- I urge each of you this morning to have a sense of urgency in seeking the Lord...
- begin by looking for the Christ in the mundane things of life...God Winks
- the shepherds were just going about their everyday life!
- weren't in worship service, at the temple, in a small group...they were at work!

They set aside their burdens to take care of a very important need of others...

- let me explain...earlier the psalmist said that darkness brings the night
- In the bible, darkness was not only associated with physical darkness, but it also associated with ignorance and spiritual blindness...
- in I John 2:8...

*Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the **darkness** is passing and the true light is already shining. (NIV)*

Strong's Concordance says darkness is used to describe the ignorance of spiritual things, and its associated wickedness

- people in those days thought that things like black magic, mysticism were linked to this figurative darkness

It is hard to see the Messiah when we may be under the spell of a different type of darkness...
-that of spiritual ignorance....
-in this kind of darkness, we are unable to see clearly....

In the birth of the Christ child, we see not only the Messiah but the light of the world...

Jesus himself said "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*"

On that miraculous night ...we gained access to the greatest source of true light known to mankind...
this night light was none other than Jesus, the long awaited Messiah
-but light isn't any good if we don't know where it is or how to get it...

K – knowing The light

On this night, it appears that the light overtook the darkness and signified God's presence and favor.

What else could account for the change in the countenance of the shepherds and their actions following their encounter?

-they must have had this sense that the light of the world was now with them and they would never walk in spiritual darkness again....they would have the light of life within them...

Could it be that the OT passages they may have heard growing up had come to life?

*The LORD is my **light** and my salvation— whom shall I fear? (Psalm 27:1)*

*The people walking in **darkness** have seen a great **light**; (Isaiah 9:2)*

*...for the LORD your God will be your everlasting **light**, (Isaiah 60:19-20, NLT)*

This light was probably talked about at home, when the family traveled, when they went to bed at night and then again first thing in the morning when they arose. **This is what Scripture commanded of the father...the parents...Deuteronomy 6:6-8**

-in addition, these commandments...these words were to be with the children and in the home always!

-PARENTS?

Why the light? What was it about this light that broke up the darkness that night?

Light and Jesus the Christ, the Messiah are very similar in nature...

Light helps us see things....Jesus helps us to see the truth about God and about life, our origin, and our destiny. -

-Light shows us the way as we travel....Jesus guides us as we travel through this temporary life

-Light is essential to growth and life.... Jesus brings us everlasting life, abundant life.

-Light warms and comforts....just as Jesus comforts us.

-Light protects...prevents crime and deters evil...Jesus is goodness itself.

-Light dispels darkness, which stands for evil.....Jesus pierces the darkness of sin and death and conquers them.

Chris Tomlin wrote a song that perfectly explains what happened that night in Bethlehem...there in the manger...here are the opening words to "Here I Am To Worship"

Light of the world, You step down into darkness....Opened my eyes let me see.

Though we may go through tough times, periods of isolation...weariness, worry, uncertainty...
I pray that you would ask the Light of the World to open your eyes, let you see...

Let you see the need for the Light in your life...

- let you see the needs of others, not only their physical needs but their spiritual needs...
- the need for the Light of the World to overcome the darkness in their lives

Conclusion

As we wrap up our look at the coming of the Light of the world...

Verse 9 in our account in Luke says...

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

The light of the Lord is shining brightly.

Now, A bright light can be overwhelming, cause us to step back into the darkness

- or it will draw us into its full radiance
- if we have nothing to hide, there is no need to shrink back into the darkness
- but if we are looking to conceal or hide something....the darkness becomes an ally

Jesus wants us to choose the light.

- just as the shepherds sought out the light of the world, so too must we!
- this morning as we close...if there is something in your life you are hiding, seek out the Light this morning here at the altar...lay whatever it is at the feet of the cross
- bring yourself fully into the presence of the wonderful light...

If you have fully embraced the glorious light of the Jesus Christ, do you radiate it to others?

- there must have been a radiance beyond all imagination to lead the shepherds to the baby Jesus...
- are you a reflection of His light or are you a dimmer switch, trying to tone down the radiance to be more comfortable in this world that loves to be comfortable?

Today, you have a choice.

- fully live in the presence of the Light
- or linger around the shadows where you can hide those things that may be displeasing to the Lord and to others...your family, your church family, your friends or co-workers

It is the season of celebrating the birth of the Savior of the World...the light of the Christmas star broke into the darkness of the night for the shepherds..

_Jesus Christ...the Light of the World longs to break the darkness of life for you...

What will you do with the Light?