

Osaka International Church

December 9th, 2007, by Daniel Ellrick

Title: Waiting for Wonder

Scripture: Luke 2:8-11

Key Verse: Luke 2:8



I. Introduction

Good morning! Today our worship service will be a little shorter than usual so that we can enjoy the Austrian Ballet Company performance of, “*Joseph and Mary*,” at 11:00. This will be a beautiful retelling of the Christmas story in dance, and I am hoping that it will help us to open our hearts to the wonder of Christmas. This month, we are all waiting for Christmas. We know that something wonderful is coming.

Two thousand years ago, the people of Israel were also waiting for the first Christmas, although they would not have used that word. They were waiting for the long-promised Messiah who would save the people of Israel. A few of them, those who had read the prophecies carefully, understood that the Messiah to come would be a Savior not only for Israel, but also for the whole world. They didn’t know when, but there was a rising sense of anticipation that the Messiah was coming soon.

Some of the people who were waiting were shepherds. The work of a shepherd is not very well known here in Japan. But in Israel there have been many shepherds since ancient times, including famous people who were shepherds for at least part of their lives. For example, Moses and David were both shepherds of sheep before they became shepherds of Israel, watching over the nation. It seems as if the job of watching over sheep is good preparation for learning to watch over people.



Let’s turn our attention to some shepherds who were watching over their sheep on that first Christmas, 2,000 years ago. The shepherds were in the fields near Jerusalem when something wonderful happened. Let’s read the story in Luke 2:8-11.

II. Scripture Reading Luke 2:8-11

[8] And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. [9] An angel of the Lord appeared to 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. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

III. Teaching

Can you imagine being there on that night? It is a dark and cold night and you are watching over the sheep. Perhaps talking some with the other shepherds, but also listening for the sound of any wild animals who might threaten the flock. You have spent many long, nights exactly like this. And perhaps on some of those nights your thoughts might have turned to the coming of the Messiah, the Savior of Israel who had been spoken by the prophets since ancient times. Perhaps your mind turns to the words of some of the ancient prophecies.



Prophecies like **Isaiah 9:6**, which speaks of glory of the Messiah, “**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**”

Mysterious prophecies that compare the people of Israel to lost sheep and that speak of a suffering Messiah. **Isaiah 53:5-6** “**But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**”



And prophecies that say the Messiah will appear very near to the place where you are tending sheep, near the town of Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2, “**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.**”



If you were one of the shepherds watching over sheep on the rocky hillsides of the fields of Bethlehem, you might have been thinking of such things on that night. Or perhaps you were just thinking of a hot meal that you hoped to have in the morning to take away the chill of the night. But suddenly, **(Luke 2:9)** “**An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.**” In popular culture, angels are often drawn to look like cute little children with wings. But in the Bible, when an angel appears, people are often terrified by his awesome presence. Many artists have painted the scene of the angel and the shepherds. I like this oil painting by Leona Lal-Singh.



(Luke 2:10) “**But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." "Good news of great joy,"** and this news is not just for Israel, but, “**for all the people.**” The Good News of Jesus is for all the people, the people of your own nation, and for the people of every nation. The Good News is for us.

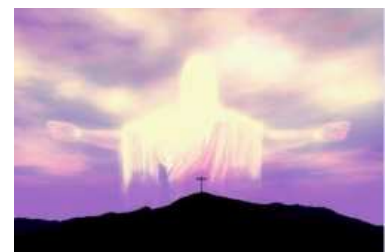


What is the Good News? It is the coming of a Savior, the coming of Jesus Christ. A Savior who truly has the power to save us all from our sins, because He is God come in the flesh, God the Son. In the fields near Bethlehem, the angel announced the coming of the Savior with these words. **(Luke 2:11)** “**Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.**” And the shepherds hurried off to Bethlehem, the town of David, to see and to worship the newborn child, Jesus. And in **Luke 2:17**, we are told that, “**When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.**”



IV. Conclusion

Today, we are still spreading the word about Jesus. It is the same message that the angel brought to the shepherds 2,000 years ago. Good News of great joy for all people, Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ Child, has come. At that time, Jesus came into this world as a little baby. It was the first step on the long and lonely road to the cross. Today, Jesus comes into our hearts when we believe in Him as our Lord and Savior. And we know that, as Isaiah said in ancient times, Jesus is, “**Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**”



V. Prayer