

Session 3

December 20, 2020

EMBRACING JOY

Psalm 95:1-3; Luke 2:4-14

It has always fascinated me how many of the Bible's great men started out as shepherds. Abel, Moses, Amos, and Zechariah, to name some, all had "pastoral" experience. Jesus is portrayed as the Good Shepherd in John 10.

Although no author is named, Psalm 95 is likely a Psalm of David (see v. 7-8; Heb. 4:7). David, the Shepherd King from Bethlehem, expressed the great joy of salvation 1000 years before another group of shepherds (also from Bethlehem) welcomed salvation with equal joy.

The Savior is proclaimed (Ps. 95:1-3). Here, salvation is met with unbridled exuberance. The author/worshipper begins with the invitation to join in corporate celebration of the Lord. The atmosphere is particularly festive. The first word for *shout* (v. 1) means "to ring out in song," while the second and third occurrence (v. 2) is more of a "shout of victory." In these verses, the Lord is the rock of salvation (v. 1), a great God (v. 3), and an exalted King (v. 3). The setting is a throne room; thus we enter into His presence with thanksgiving and song. For reflection: *Compare the atmosphere here with that of your church. Is there unbridled joy in your worship? At what point do you think joy must give way to awe and humility?*

The Savior is presented (Lk. 2:4-7). In the preceding psalm, believers enter into the Lord's presence. In this text, the Lord enters into man's presence, and does so as a human. We call this His *incarnation*. That is, the second person of the Godhead took on flesh (see John 1:14). This was necessary so that He could pay for human sins (see Gal. 4:4-5). The incarnation of Christ is such an important event that Luke's narrative leaves no detail out. Where? From Nazareth to the province of Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. That's pretty specific! Why? To be registered in the city of his family. Who? Joseph and Mary, his espoused, who happened to be pregnant with the Lord Jesus. What? The birth of the Savior, who was wrapped in *swaddling clothes* and placed in a manger, because the city was full and there was no place for them to stay. For reflection: *Since Jesus is the King of Kings, why do you think He was born in such humble conditions? Why do you think God did not parade Him out in royal fashion?*

The Savior is praised (vv. 8-14). It is both ironic and yet fitting that the announcement of Christ's birth would first be announced to shepherds. It is ironic that the King of Kings would associate Himself with these humble fieldhands. Yet it is somehow fitting that the Lamb of God would be presented to shepherds. Think about it: some of the sheep these men cared for may have been raised to use as sacrifices in the temple one day! I once knew a man from Nazareth. He was quite familiar with the holy sites of Israel. He assured me that shepherds still stay out on the hillsides in the balmy weather of spring and occasionally in the fall. (Sorry to burst any bubbles...but while it is certainly possible, Jesus was not likely born on December 25; rather we *celebrate His birth* on that day). The spectacular announcement was made in a spectacular way. An angel surrounded by the glory of the Lord appeared first. The shepherd's initial terror was met by surprising words of encouragement and exuberance. The birth of Christ was also

accompanied by signs: He was born in Bethlehem (as prophesied in Micah 5:2); and He could be identified by the details of His birth; the swaddling clothes and the manger bed would be hard to mistake! The announcement was concluded by a multitude of rejoicing angels. The shepherd's story concludes with the shepherds visiting the baby and leaving to share their story with all who would listen (see vv. 15-18). For reflection: *The angels' joy is quite surprising since they themselves do not experience salvation (see 1 Peter 1:12). What do you think is the reason for their rejoicing?*