

## Willerup "Spiritually Close" 2020 Advent Devotions – Week Two

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### Are You Ready for Christmas?

Malachi 4:2 *But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like the calves released from the stall.*

Luke 2:8-14. <sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

<sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests."

### ARE YOU READY FOR CHRISTMAS?



Were you surprised by this portrayal of scripture? A couple of boys in modern winter gear, with their trusty dog, keeping watch over their flock of... chickens.

When Jesus was born, scripture clearly explains that the angels appeared to shepherds who were

watching for predators that wanted some fresh lamb or mutton chops. But what if you had never been around sheep and the isolation of being with them outside in the fields protecting them all night? How could you relate to what happened the night that Jesus was born?

Jesus came to save the whole world, not just Israel. So, God has made the story of Jesus' birth relatable to people in every culture.

Tending sheep was dangerous work when Jesus was born. Caring for chickens, now, can be dangerous, too. Hawks by day and coyotes by night (and sometimes by day, as well). From the corn fields, coyotes can 'throw' their barks and growls and make it sound like they are right behind you in your yard. The hairs on the back of your neck stand up. If you have experienced that or something similar, you can understand what the shepherds were going through routinely.

Therefore, to surprise the shepherds took some doing, and the appearance of angels with the light of God surrounding them was a **big** surprise. In fact, the shepherds were terrified....at first. But then the announcement of the birth of the Savior took over their senses and emotions, and they became intrigued by the wonder of it all.

In the culture of these Covid times, so many familiar parts of our daily lives have been altered, and our usual routines of Christmas have been interrupted. But we know that, just as at Jesus' birth, God is in control and is doing something new. So, like the shepherds, let's be surprised and then intrigued by new things we see and hear- and above all, by the wonder of the birth of the Savior.

Are you ready for Christmas? Let's see what others from Willerup have to share that can help us get ready...

Judy Vasby, with Ben and Brian Hottman and their dog, Justice

### Can God Get Us Out of Our Comfort Zones?

Malachi 4:2- "*But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings and you will leap like calves released from the stall.*"

God often has to lead us where we would never go ourselves because most of us don't like change. Can you imagine the shepherds? "We like what we're doing!" "Lord, don't you dare push us into big changes!" "I'm comfortable living what I know."

But God had more in mind for his shepherds. He was going to establish them as level one witnesses to the birth of his Son. He wanted to move them from being sheep herders to a new place in their faith. They were used to dealing with predators like lions. But seeing angels, no way! The scariness that coursed through their bodies as they defended their flocks was nothing compared to what the angel encounter would be. That was going to peak their fear to the "terrified" level.

Being in the middle of what God is doing shouldn't turn us white with fear -- so we think. But, sometimes, God wants every brain cell, every thought to comprehend His sending of Jesus. He wants our obeying, our going, our seeing and our believing to attain the level of becoming spectacles. He wants us to become His witnesses who can't and won't be quieted, who have to tell others about Jesus.



So we can't celebrate Christmas from some contented place where we live now. Christmas is for those who want to be jerked from their ruts and patterns by Jesus. CS Lewis wrote: "I don't want my image of God; I want God." He knew if he settled for God as his mind perceived Him, he would end up with a lesser/false God.

Let's be challenged this Christmas to let God take us to the actual Jesus, not a Jesus of our own preferences or imaginations. Let's be ready to be terrified.

Contributed by Bob and Donna Kenas

## BREAKING REPORT: Out of the Darkness Comes GOOD NEWS!

*I sit in front of the TV watching reports of full hospitals, political shenanigans, natural disasters and wondering is there any GOOD NEWS?*

The folks of first century Judea were used to getting bad news too. A foreign king ruled their land, tax money flowed to Rome, and tough guy soldiers enforced Roman laws. Caesar reminded all who lived in his realm, that he was not only king, but divine! He brought the Roman "Peace" that allowed the powerful, loyal, and connected to become very wealthy and the regular folk to suffer. News of his power and exploits (whether real or fake) were chiseled into stone monoliths in city centers and his likeness was even on Roman coins! No wonder God's children were despondent, and they hadn't had a message from Him in over 400 years. They needed some GOOD NEWS! Maybe we need some too...

*(A reporter's voice is heard above the intro music and the sound of typing)* "BREAKING REPORT! The shepherds on the night shift received a message directly from an angel of God!



**"I bring you GOOD NEWS that will cause great joy for all the people! Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord!"**

*(Action shifts back to Wisconsin) It is a beautiful starry night and I'm feeding my own flock of sheep, trying to imagine what it was like for the shepherds to hear GOOD NEWS during their "dark night."*

It was an experience like no other. The earth quaked, strong winds blew, heavenly choirs sang, a powerful angel appeared, God's glory burst out of a dark night, scattering sheep in all directions, shepherds diving for cover behind rocks and bushes, terrified. Could the shepherds actually believe what they were hearing? The announcement of a birth: The Messiah, the anointed One, the One who would save them! It certainly was GOOD NEWS, this was the "cure" they had been waiting for to sweep the plague of Rome away from their homeland and to restore God's Kingdom on Earth!

*In 2020, Jesus is still the BEST NEWS in history! His Kingdom has come! A kingdom for the poor, hungry, weeping, rejected (Luke 6:20-21). Jesus dealt with the root cause of all the bad news, our sin. This advent season, let's join the shepherds and "Praise God!" for His GOOD NEWS!*

Contributed by Peggy Boshart



### **Three Wonder-Full Words**



Hark! The herald angels sing...  
"Peace on earth, and mercy mild.  
God and sinners reconciled!"

"Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies!"



"Light and life to all He brings,  
Risen with healing in His wings...  
Born to raise us from the earth,  
Born to give us second birth!"



**Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"**

Contributed by Becky Grasso

#### **Hark! the Herald Angels Sing**

- 1- Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!  
Joyful, all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies;  
With the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"  
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"
- 2- Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings.  
Mild He lays His glory by, born that we no more may die,  
Born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.  
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"