

Shepherd Reflections

Luke 2:1-20

December 27, 2020

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Since Thursday, when we celebrated Christmas Eve under the stars, I've been thinking a lot about what it must have been like for the shepherds that night. I should tell you, I've always been fascinated by the night sky; counting stars, gazing at the full moon, finding just the right spot to watch a meteor shower. There really is nothing quite like the night sky to make you feel small, but in the best way. It has a way of reminding us that there is something much bigger than us going on in the world.

Let's go back in time. To that night. Everything was quiet in the fields that night. Earlier in the day a couple of lambs had wandered off and gotten stuck in a creek, but they were back with their mothers now. It had just gotten dark. The fire was burning, and it was a beautiful clear night. The shepherds spent hours watching the sky at night. They had heard that when God was up to something, the sky knew.

One of the shepherds had just started to tell a story about his brother's ox with an attitude when they spotted a glow in the sky. It was different than a star, warmer, and much closer and getting closer all the time. Suddenly, there she was. The glow around her was so bright none of them got a good look. She told them not to be afraid, but they were definitely afraid. And then she told them about the baby born in Bethlehem. And she told them how to find him.

And then, something spectacular happened. I don't know how you imagine the appearance of a heavenly host of angels, but I imagine something like the Northern Lights. So, I like to think that is what the author of Luke had in mind too; something that takes your breath away it's so beautiful. The kind of thing, that when you are looking at it, you don't want to blink because you don't want to miss anything. The shepherds gazed up at them and they listened. Their voices were truly like angels.

When the glow from the angels was gone, the shepherds set out to find this baby they had been told about. They didn't have to walk too far. But it was a bit of a

hike. They had a lot to talk about on the way. I'm sure the first part of the journey was a rehashing of what they had just seen. I'm here to tell you, when I finally get to see the Northern Lights, I will not be talking about anything else for a long time.

But then, I think, they would begin to wonder about this baby. What does a savior baby look like? Will he have a little crown kind of half tilted off his head? Will he have kind of a special glow about him, like the angels? What will his parents be like? Will they be helicopter parents, freaked out about anyone coming near the baby? Will they even want a bunch of shepherds hanging around? They were used to people not wanting them around, which made them wonder why the angels even bothered to tell them about the baby. They were usually the last ones to know important news.

Before long, they were in Bethlehem. They walked to the place the angels had told them about. When they went in...there he was. It was not at all what they expected. There was no glow, no crown. In fact, he was really quite ordinary...just a baby. He was all wrapped up, like every other baby they had ever seen. His parents seemed normal enough. Honestly, this baby didn't look like he was going to save anyone. He was small, vulnerable...a bit of a mama's boy when it came right down to it.

There was nothing extraordinary about anything, but for some reason, none of the shepherds wanted to leave. They wanted to stay and watch him sleep in his mom's arms. They wanted to talk to his dad. He told them about his dream. They told him about their own angelic encounter. And when the baby's mother woke up, she heard them talking about angels and shared her own story. One of the shepherds joked, "I guess there are angels everywhere."

Finally, when most of the night was gone, the shepherds left the stable. I imagine on their way back to the field they talked about what they had seen, what they had felt. One of the shepherds said he had never felt that way. They all agreed it felt as if they were in the presence of pure love. They wondered if they would ever be the same. They felt hopeful. They felt joy and their hearts were at peace. Maybe they were wrong. Maybe that baby would save them after all. Amen.