

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Advent's Adverbs, No. 4*

Silently

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Luke 2:8-20 (NIV)

There were shepherds living out in the fields near Bethlehem, 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, "Don't be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

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

¹⁵ After the angels left, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that's happened...that the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ Then they spread the word...telling others what had been told them about the child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said.

Here's what I want to know: why *shepherds*? Why did the angels pick shepherds?

Why did the angels – but since angels exist to do as God asks, we could ask why did *God* – choose the shepherds to receive this news about Jesus, when nearly anyone else would have been a better choice?

How could shepherds have helped here? And Jesus needed help: He needed all the help He could get for His mission to save the world from sin, because He had plenty working against Him already.

First of all, He was born to this *obscure couple* to whom no one on earth would have been paying any attention.

Lives as common as theirs: they would never have any followers on Instagram or TikTok or YouTube or wherever, so how would word of Jesus' mission ever get out? Joseph and Mary were Mr. and Mrs. Anonymity. Who would ever notice *them*?

Jesus was born to an obscure couple, and he was born in a completely *anonymous place*.

There's a reason the magi would go to Jerusalem to find the king, you know. Kings come from big, important, sophisticated places.

Bethlehem was none of that, which means Jesus came from nowhere particularly important.

And beyond that, His actual birth happened in *the same place where the animals stayed*. As super-sterilized as we are, it's hard for us to imagine conditions like that, but suffice it to say, there were no impressive photo ops or selfies to be had in the stable.

So, no important *parents*, no important *city*, no important *venue* for the King of the Jews! As far as publicity goes, it would seem that God is batting zero for three so far.

Jesus' own brothers commented on this years later, when they confronted Him and asked, "*Why are you staying in Galilee – out in the country? Why don't you go on to Judea so people can see the miracles you do? Nobody who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Go show yourself – to the world!*" ¹

You see, even Jesus' brothers knew that in order to get attention, you have to put yourself out there – you have to make yourself known.

You'd think God would realize that.

So, if you already have unimportant *parents*, and you come from an unimportant *city* and were born in an unimportant *place*, you'd think that God might choose an *important audience* for the big reveal, right?

You'd think God would make the announcement to someone, you know, who could really get the information out there: someone who could call a press conference, someone with a public, someone with a voice, someone who already has a following.

Jesus needed a publicist: a publicity manager, a marketing strategist. You'd think God would choose someone like that. If you or I had been doing this, we would have chosen someone like that.

But whom did God choose?

Who was it that got the big pitch that verse 13 there describes: a "*vast host, the armies of Heaven, appearing with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to those on earth with whom God is pleased.'*"

Whom did God choose to be His audience for His greatest announcement?

A group of shepherds.

Shepherds!

Now, don't misunderstand: there's nothing at all wrong with shepherds. Being a shepherd was a totally respectable, honest vocation.

But it was not glamorous. The hours were long, and so the work was tiring, and, frankly, it was often frustrating because sheep aren't the smartest animals. You have to tell them the same thing, over and over.

Kind of like children, you know?

¹ John 7:3-5

And the *smell*: well, again, it was a lot like children.

So, shepherds were not the “it” people of their day.

The paparazzi and media did not follow them around.

Those who were looking to advance their own social standing: they did not try to rub shoulders with shepherds. In fact, they did just the opposite.

So, again, why them? Why did God choose *shepherds* to receive His grand announcement about Jesus there in the night sky?

Through the ages, lots of different reasons have been suggested, and one day we’ll be able to ask God and know for sure.

But I think God chose to tell the shepherds about Jesus primarily because they *were willing to listen* as they sat there silently in the calm of the night.

Oh, there was probably the faint crackle of a tiny fire or the occasional rustle of a branch in the breeze.

But that was about it, you know?

There were no distractions – no preoccupations.

I think God chose the Shepherds simply because their lives were quiet enough to hear His voice.

And I think that because over and over again history shows us that that’s how God works.

Think about it: from Abraham to Moses to Samuel to David, and then all through the prophets, and right on down to Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth – even Simeon and Anna there at the temple.

God chooses people who are already waiting silently for Him. All through His history with humanity, we see this pattern of God choosing people who will hear Him.

People with more than a three-second attention span.

People with open hearts who are willing to believe that God might want to do something amazing – even if they can’t really understand it totally.

God looks for people like that.

But you know, God’s search for like-minded, like-hearted people always seems to start with those who allow some quiet – some margin for silence – into their lives, because generally speaking, God doesn’t yell and shout and jump up and down to get people’s attention.

Now, He does make the occasional exception. He worked pretty hard to get the attention of people like Jacob and Jonah and the apostle Paul.

God actually silenced Zechariah – He took away his voice to get his attention. So, I’ll admit there are exceptions.

But far, far more frequently, what we find is, God will speak to those who are both *ready* and *able* to listen.

And if the shepherds had anything going for them, it was that: they were willing to listen. They had a healthy comfort with quietness, as they lived silently there in the hills at night.

I wonder who all missed out on God’s big announcement? I wonder how many other people God would have told about Jesus that night – if they’d simply been quiet enough to hear Him?

I wonder what God wants to say, even tonight, to anyone who would wait on Him – silently?

That’s such a hard thing for us to do, it seems. So many in our culture won’t do anything silently.

Silence, quiet, is threatening to so many it seems, and maybe for just that reason: we know God speaks in silence, and we’re not sure if we want to hear what He has to say.

So, while we go about with our music and sports and news and noise of all different kinds always blaring, God watches and waits in silence Himself, until He finds someone whose world is quiet enough to hear His voice.

God has a lot to say, but only to those who can hear Him, to those who give Him that room, to those who are willing to wait silently for Him – like the shepherds.

Are you?

Are you open to that sort of “shepherd experience” with God?

Are you willing to embrace the silence that the “shepherd experience” requires?

God hopes we are, because He has some things He’d like to say.

If you’re open to hearing from Him, join your hearts to this prayer as I pray it:

Lord, in the crazy busyness of life, and especially that which Christmas always seems to bring, would you help me – would You help us – take the time to *silently* wait upon You?

Help us give You the space to say whatever You want to say – to tell us whatever we need to hear about Jesus, just as You told those shepherds on this night so long ago. Amen.