

Shepherds in the Field

Hymns from "Christian Christmas Carols."

Greeting and Opening Prayer

Hymns of Worship

O Little Town of Bethlehem p. 5

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Shepherds in the Field (Luke 2:8-20 KJV)

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

You would expect shepherds to be in the field watching over their flock, keeping an eye out for thieves and beasts of prey, wolves and bears and lions. Sheep are innocent creatures, very much harmless, and very vulnerable to greedy robbers and hungry, hunting animals. To compound the problem, sheep are not known for their intelligence. They will wander off from the flock to their own destruction. When they get separated from the flock they do not know how to find their way back to the fold. They do not know how to find good grazing for food or safe water to drink. They can run, but they are not smart enough to hide. To put it simply, sheep are docile, yes, but they are very dumb animals. So someone stronger and wiser than they must watch over them to protect them, hence the shepherds.

It is most symbolic that God would choose sheep as one of the primary animals for use in the sacrificial system of worship in the temple in Jerusalem. Everyone knew how innocent, and harmless and docile sheep were. When someone sinned, when someone broke one of the commandments of Moses, they would bring a gentle little lamb to the temple for sacrifice.

Before their family, before the priests, before all who were there to see, that person would lay one hand on the head of the innocent, sinless sheep and, with the other hand, slay the sheep with a knife, with their hand still on its head as it died. This act symbolized the guilt and the punishment of the sinner being transferred onto the head of the sinless sheep and the innocence and purity of the lamb being transferred to the one offering the sacrifice. In other words, the innocent died for the guilty.

Now, you could not bring just any lamb to the temple for sacrifice. The lamb had to be spotless and perfectly healthy. Because so many had to travel a long way to get to the temple for festivals and for proper sacrifice for their sins, the priests kept flocks of sheep raised just for that purpose. According to some scholars, these flocks, marked for slaughter in the temple, were kept around the little town of Bethlehem. The fields around the town were good for grazing and it was just a short distance to Jerusalem.

Therefore, it is possible that the heralding angels came to the shepherds watching over these sheep destined for sacrifice to announce the coming of the Lamb of God. In the manger lay a little Lamb, perfect and innocent before God, the perfect sacrifice to end all sacrifices. The only One pure enough, righteous enough, holy enough to pay the price for the sins of mankind was wrapped in rags of poverty, resting in the animals' feeding trough in the stable by the inn. The heavens rang out with the song of praise from angels' lips. The shepherds shook with fear at the majesty and the mystery of the message in their ears and the sights before their eyes.

The Sacrifice to end all sacrifices was born, a gift from the Father for the lost and dying world! The Only Begotten Son of God, the Messiah, was here to take the place of the symbols of sacrifice represented by the flocks of Bethlehem and give His perfect life as a ransom before the Universe for the lives of fallen men and women - Jesus, the only sinless life, given in exchange for the salvation of sinners like you and me.

The message of John 3:16 - God loved the world in this manner - He gave His only begotten Son - that whosoever simply, really believes and keeps on believing in Who Jesus Christ is and what He did for them - shall not perish, shall never die an eternal death, but have everlasting LIFE.

The Innocent had come to die for the guilty - **AMAZING GRACE**...how sweet the sound of angles singing praise to God over the flocks in the fields of Bethlehem!

Closing Hymn

The First Noel p. 8

Prayer Requests and Corporate Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Recessional

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