

Sermon by Pastor Bob Brown on 12/14/03 Sun AM
Entitled: "An Unlovely Group" from Scripture: Luke 2: 8-20

I have often said that in our walk with the Lord it is not your way, or my way, it is God's way! An observation that I have made is: during the time we celebrate the birth of our Savior, we do things our way. The outside of our houses is decorated to call attention to the fact that we are truly in the spirit of the season. But some seem confused; right next to the baby Jesus, with his mother and father and a group of wise men, is Frosty and Santa! Is that just in case one of them is real?

The inside of our homes are usually trimmed immaculately! There are trees with stars or angels at the top, and many ornaments with a lot of sentimental value. Garland and bows are wrapped delicately around furnishings, small manger scenes to display the real meaning of Christmas, and stockings hung with care in hopes that... No wonder people are confused!

But PTL, God is not confused! When He comes into our lives He does it in a way that does away with all the thrills and chills. He comes in a warm loving way, to embrace our lives with His absolute amazing grace.

Yet to us, it seems unusual of God to send an angel to announce the birth of His Son to shepherds. We often make the shepherds in our Christmas programs to look like Hollywood actors. In reality, they would look more like old western cowboys who had been living on the trail for a few weeks. In other words, there wasn't a lot of distinction between the sheep and their shepherds, in appearance or smell! They would have been an unlikely, very unlovely group to whom to announce the birth of a King!

Shepherds, because of their jobs were not allowed to be near the Temple, they were mostly unclean, ceremonially as well. So, they were considered a low, despised class of people. And yet, one cool, crisp night in a field near Bethlehem, God stepped into the lives of an unlikely, unlovely group of shepherds to announce the greatest birth on earth!

As we read the story, here's how it plays out. Shepherds were living in the fields. This is not the 2nd or 3rd shift here; this is where they lived, with the sheep. Probably by a small campfire, almost lulled to sleep by the food they've eaten and the silence of the tired sheep. In a bright light of the glory of God, an angel appears to them. I believe that I personally would have found this to be a bit unsettling!

The glory was shining because God was near. Wherever God is there are angels in the presence of His radiant glory. From this bright light comes the voice of the angel saying, "Do not be afraid". This is almost an understatement, since Scripture makes it very clear that they were well past being afraid, "they were terrified"! That's taking afraid up a couple of notches.

The reason that these shepherds, and you and I for that matter are not to be afraid is because God chose to come to those who were able to believe His message: the message of the birth of His Son, the Savior of all the people.

With absolutely no time for this to sink in, suddenly a huge army of excited angels join the announcing angel, because they can no longer contain themselves, and they begin to praise God saying "Glory to God....."

Do you realize that kind of worship is hardly accepted in many churches? When Handel wrote that part it was only for the Sopranos, (not Tony & his family). Spontaneous worship is done unto God and blesses those who are a part of it and it blesses God.

This is God's nature, He appears suddenly. He did it here, He did it to Moses and the bush that burned but needed no fuel. He appeared suddenly at Pentecost, to Saul on the road to Damascus, and He even promises to come back again, suddenly. (Read: 1 Thessalonians. 5:3)

When the angels left and had gone into heaven – the shepherds took action:

1. They went to see this thing (rhema) that the angel told them had happened. I imagine this unlovely group walking into town at night trying to explain why they were there. Doesn't God do things in the most unusual way? (When the lights go down, God shows up) When we hear from God, we too should act on what He says.
2. They observed the baby, just as it had been told to them. They were so impressed with Jesus that they spent as much time with Him as they could. So should we. The more time we spend with Him, the more likely we are to hear from Him.
3. They told everyone the "good news" that they had learned. These shepherds literally became the first to practice evangelism. When we have "good news" we should be bold in telling others what it is.

4. They returned to work. They were different; anyone who has been in the presence of Jesus is different. Now these shepherds, have the glory of God on them and it is evident.

Here is where we, who are sometimes considered unlikely and unlovely, are a lot like the characters in this story. Everyone is amazed at the story these shepherds tell. They are amazed that they were chosen at all.

Mary, still reeling from what is happening, just ponders how different it all is from what she has always been told will happen. Why her, why shepherds, why now?

Because God chose this virgin (Isa. 7: 14), and this city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and these shepherds, because they could be trusted, and this time because it was His time.

Likewise, God chooses you and me and He uses us because we can be trusted. Now is the time for us to be about the Father's business.

God did all of this, not to confuse us but to use us. Even though it seems like Jesus is rejected, because He is born in a barn; He is the special object of his Father's tender care. He was not neglected by his mother, by God, by the angels or any who are informed. There was even a special star to announce His birth. That night God redirected His creation toward His Son. He is still doing that today, and we are the direct recipients of that attention. You and I are not unlikely or unlovely. We are His loved children.