

**Shepherd—Joy**  
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*Luke 2:8-18;*

I was tired. Tired of walking as my flocks grazed. Weary of being away from home. So done with relentless sun during the day, and stinging windstorms. Tired of sleeping on the ground in the cold evening and early-morning chill.

Tired of chasing reckless sheep and goats all day when they strayed into dangerous rock crevices, got stuck on thorn bushes and generally kept me in a constant state of awareness—even when I was “supposed” to be “resting” at night.

I was tired, too, of assumptions and insinuations. I mean, I was resigned to my second-class citizenship by those who considered themselves better than me. I get it—they think of us shepherds as dirty and worthless because we can’t always keep Jewish cleanliness standards, nor properly observe the Sabbath day of rest, simply because of the constant, daily needs of our flocks. But I was tired of being accused of letting my flocks roam on land that belonged to others. Tired of the assumptions that we were stealing produce from nearby farms.

Why, did you know that shepherds were often so ill thought-of, as liars as thieves, that we weren’t even allowed to serve as witnesses in court? And that the religious leaders cautioned people not to buy wool, milk or kids from our flocks because they assumed we were selling stolen property? So, yes—on many levels, I was tired.

So I don’t know if you can imagine my terror when, in the dark of night, on a blackened plain, a blindingly bright light appeared in front of me and my friends. Through that light, we saw a figure, and we heard a voice say, *“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”*

“Do not be afraid!” Are you kiddin’ me?? Then, just as suddenly, the sky became filled with other creatures who joined the first voice, all of them saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Well, after these angels left and the sky returned to normal, we said to one another, *“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”* Wouldn’t you?

So we quickly drove our flocks into Bethlehem and searched for the two signs the angel had told us about—a baby wrapped in cloth bands (instead of a blanket) and lying in a manger (something that would be *\*most\** unusual). And we *found* him!! So we told his parents about what we’d experienced which led us to find them and their baby. And while they seemed a *\*bit\** surprised to hear our story—they believed us—almost as if they’d expected it.

After a time, we headed back home with our flocks. Everyone we told our story to seemed amazed.

And, you know what? I’m amazed, too. Not just by the sudden visit by the angels—but because they visited us. The overlooked. The scorned. The dirty shepherds—we who occupied the lowest spot in our society. And I wondered why the angels didn’t visit the Jewish leaders? Or the kings and politicians who ruled over us. Or the temple priests.

And I began to realize that it's because the angel's "good news of great joy" about a Messiah—our Lord coming to be with us—*isn't* just for society's leaders—it truly is for "all the people". Even the invisible...the ignored...the scorned...the homeless...the sick...the poor...the damaged...the broken. It's for blue collars and blue-bloods.

I don't know about you, but that knowledge fills me with joy. And that's why, today, we will light the third candle in our Advent wreath—the candle of joy—as we celebrate Christ's arrival into our world as a baby, and as we await his coming again.

*(Light the three blue or purple candles in the Advent wreath.)*