

Word of Life Lutheran Brethren Church  
Community Group Bible Study – week of Dec. 8  
The Shepherds – Friends in low places.

*Open with prayer as you begin. Pray specifically for the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind in order to understand God's Word.*

Who is the most famous person that you have ever met or seen in person? Did you get to meet them or see them from a distance? Did you have a conversation or just say Hi? Did you “enhance” the encounter when describing it to your friends so that they’d be impressed? **I think we all find some odd sense of self importance when we come into contact with people who we consider to be important. I’ve always thought it was funny to hear people “name drop” the famous people they know or have met, and felt embarrassed when I have caught myself doing the same kind of thing!**

Garth Brooks had a hit song called “I’ve Got Friends in Low Places”. It was an anthem for the everyman, a kind of theme song for people who weren’t connected to the right people and weren’t powerful or influential. Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever been jealous of people who were “connected”? Why? **We all like special treatment and the given the choice most of us prefer to walk down a hill rather than up one.**

At the time of Jesus’ birth there were many herds of sheep and goats all over Palestine, and where there were herds there needed to be shepherds. Their jobs were not the “9 to 5” type and they spent most of their time away from the towns living in the hills with their flocks. They were typically dirty because of their work and had little time for the ritual cleanliness that the Pharisees valued so highly (see Luke 11:37-41). The Sabbath would typically be ignored because their animals had needs regardless of which day of the week it was. The letter of the Law condemned the shepherds.

According to some sources, shepherds were under a Rabbinic ban because their occupation and lifestyle made it nearly impossible to keep the religious regulations of the temple. Like the lepers and sinners that Jesus loved so much, the shepherds were truly unconnected people.

Read Luke 2:8-20

When a child is born, other than the parents who typically sees the baby first? Who are the honored guests?

Who do you think would come to see the birth of a king? Diplomats? Other kings and royalty? Important people? What would the identity of the “honored guests” say about the importance of the child born? **The more prominent the visitors the more important the child. Like a funeral for a foreign leader, you can tell how important he or she is by the people who attend the funeral. Often the government will send a high ranking official, maybe even the Vice-President. But if the President goes to the funeral, you know that the person who died was a big deal.**

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Who were the first visitors to see the newborn King Jesus? They were shepherds from the outskirts of Bethlehem.

Why is this important? According to human wisdom it would indicate that the baby born was completely insignificant. But in God's eyes it shows how important Jesus was and is. The "lowest" were accepted by the "highest", and those considered to dirty to enter the temple were given a special invitation to come to the perfect Lamb of God.

One of the key themes throughout the Gospel of Luke is "reversal". Look at the following verses in Luke: 1:52-53; 9:46-49; 14:11; 23:20-25

Along with these verses, Luke also records stories about a "sinful woman" who anoints Jesus' feet, a "good" Samaritan, a wedding banquet where the guests don't show up and strangers are invited in, and a parable about a poor man named Lazarus and a rich man. In this parable when the two men die, their positions are reversed and the rich man is in hell while Lazarus is welcomed into heaven. So point do you think Luke is trying to make? God is not impressed or swayed by what we consider to be powerful or wise in this world. God turns our expectations upside down by exalting the humble and treating the powerful as if they were insignificant.

Do you think it was a big deal for these men to leave their sheep to go to Bethlehem and see the baby Jesus? I doubt they had ever left the sheep alone for any length of time and leaving them shows just how significant the visit of the angels had been. They left the imperfect sheep behind so they could see the Lamb of God.

Other than wool, meat and milk, what were sheep used for by the people of Israel? They were used in the temple for sacrifice.

Read Hebrews 10:1-12 and 1 Peter 1:18-19.

We no longer need "imperfect" sacrifices because Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to take away the sins of the world. The shepherds who went to see Jesus may well have been watching sheep that were destined to be sacrificed at the Temple in Jerusalem. If that is the case, it seems very fitting that they left those sheep behind to worship Jesus, who would one day lay down his life as the perfect sacrifice for all of mankind.

*As you close in prayer remember that behind the celebration of Christmas is the horror of the cross. This perfect baby, the Son of God came to lay down His life on Good Friday.*