

A Flock of Shepherds

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*And there were
shepherds living out
in the fields nearby,
keeping watch over
their flocks at night.*

LUKE 2:8

When my wife, Karin, was in preschool, she played a miniature Mary in a living Nativity scene. While it was an adorable idea, the reality of having live animals stand next to a three-year-old proved terrifying for her. She cried hysterically, wanting no part of the whole thing. To console her, her father stepped into the scene and lay down on the ground between her and the beasts, forming a human barricade so that his daughter felt secure. He covered himself entirely with straw so visitors to the living Nativity were none the wiser.

It's a striking image of what shepherding is all about. In Luke 2, the shepherds are “keeping watch over their flocks at night”—highlighting the very real dangers of darkness. It was when thieves and predators posed the greatest threat. So the shepherds placed themselves in harm's way, protecting their sheep with their very lives.



But in Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth, the shepherds also turn out to be sheep. That first Christmas, the Lord revealed himself as the Good Shepherd in the story, caring for the shepherds themselves as part of his own flock.

Consider how much God’s attention to the shepherds resembles David’s description of God as a shepherd in Psalm 23. God supplied the shepherds’ need—a need they may not have even articulated. He quieted their souls through the angel’s words: “Do not be afraid.” He led them on paths of righteousness straight to the manger. He showed he was with them in the most humble and relatable of ways: as a baby in a manger. He restored their souls with a message of hope and belonging—a message that turned out exactly “as they had been told.” He filled their cup to overflowing with praise “for all the things they had heard and seen.” He not only met their need; he anointed their heads

with the oil of joy. He showed them goodness and mercy that would no doubt stay with them all the days of their life.

I need that kind of care. As a pastor, I’m grateful for this reminder that shepherds are also part of the flock. I’m thankful for a Savior who knows his skittish sheep well, who laid his life all the way down in the hay, placing himself between us and every danger.

And I’m grateful that when our anxious souls need tending, the Lord still speaks the word of peace on earth in the recognizable voice of our Good Shepherd. That is indeed good news of great joy for all the people.

Contemplate Luke 2:1–21.

Optional: Also read Psalm 23 and John 10:2–4, 11, 14.

How do you see God’s care—and God’s character—in the account of the shepherds? What does this emphasize for you about Jesus?