**12/15/19**

Luke 2:8-20 New International Version (NIV)

***8****And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.* ***9****An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.* ***10****But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.* ***11****Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.* ***12****This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

***13****Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

***14****“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
    and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

***15****When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”*

***16****So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.* ***17****When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,* ***18****and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.* ***19****But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.* ***20****The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

Story: A shepherd was looking after his sheep one day on the side of a deserted road, when suddenly a brand new Porsche screeches to a halt. The driver, a man dressed in an Armani suit, Rockport shoes, Oakleys sunglasses, Rolex watch, and a Versace tie, gets out and asks the shepherd:

"If I can tell you how many sheep you have, will you give me one of them?" The shepherd looks at the young man, and then looks at the large flock of grazing sheep and replies:” Okay." The young man parks the car, connects his laptop to his mobile, enters a NASA Webster, scans the ground using his GPS, opens a database with 60 Excel tables filled with logarithms and pivot tables, and then prints out a 150-page report on his high-tech mini-printer.

He turns to the shepherd and says, "You have exactly 1,586 sheep here." Rather surprised the shepherd replies, "That’s correct, you can have your sheep." The young man takes an animal and puts it in the back of his Porsche. Just as the man is about to drive off, the shepherd asks him:

"If I guess your profession, will you return my animal to me?" The young man answers, "Yes, why not?" The shepherd says, "You are an IT consultant." "How did you know?" asks the young man. "Very simple," answers the shepherd.

"Firstly, you came here without being called. Secondly, you charged me a fee to tell me something I already knew, and thirdly, you don’t understand anything about my business.

(PAUSE)

Now please can I have my dog back?"

No offense intended to our IT people. They are much needed in our technological world. In fact, my computer crashed this week while working on my sermon!

But what caught my eye in this story, aside from the humor, was the word “called.” He came without being “called.” But we are called every day. We are in our sermon series CHRISTmas is Calling….Christ is calling. We have seen how Mary and Joseph were called…called to hope and called to peace; called to be parents. And today we are taking a look at the calling of the shepherds…a call to joy; a call to witness! Sometimes calls come as a gentle nudge: A couple of years ago, I was in a doctor’s office. It was a big medical building with lots of different offices and as I was on my way to my appointment, I noticed a man sitting by himself in the lobby and realized he looked familiar. I started walking past him, as I was running late for my appointment. But God was nudging me to go say something. He didn’t recognize me, as I was in sweats and glasses. But once I introduced myself, he introduced himself and stated that he and his wife attend PHUMC. He was there with his wife who was undergoing cancer treatment. A bond was created in that moment. That was a call that I almost missed. Sometimes calls come as a brick or a wake up call. I think of Joseph last week. He needed a wake up call as he was planning to divorce Mary. I was speaking with someone this week who answered God’s call to serve as a prayer warrior for the Joy FM after a year of nudges. Finally, God got her attention when she landed in the hospital. As she prayed, she heard God say to her, “now will you listen to me?” And sometimes God’s call comes as a multitude of the heavenly host.

Imagine the shepherds just laying out there in the fields. They had counted their sheep and were ready to call it a night. Suddenly, they are visited by not one angel, but a multitude of the heavenly host! You can’t miss this call! So once the angels left, how did they respond to the call? Did they say “I’m tired, I think I’ll just lay back down.” “Yea, we could go tomorrow.” “Someone’s got to stay with the sheep, so I’ll just stay here.” NO! They said “let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the angel told us about.”

So off they go to Bethlehem. They see Mary, Joseph, and the baby in the manger. And then they go back to their sheep in the field and continue with their lives unchanged, right? NO! They spread the word and everyone was amazed! There’s a few things we need to know about the shepherds. Shepherds were considered unclean. They were not allowed to attend worship in the temple without proper purification. That took 7 days. They couldn’t leave their sheep for 7 days. So they did not go. However, their work was important to the worship because they provided the lambs for sacrifice. Shepherds were also thought to be thieves. They were not allowed to be witnesses in a Court of Law because they were untrustworthy. Interesting choice of the first witnesses to the birth of Jesus.

The angel said “I bring you good news of great joy!” Then the shepherds went and spread the word. And people listened! They listened to these “untrustworthy” witnesses and were amazed. Why? Because the people saw something different in the shepherds. They’re lives were transformed as they encountered Jesus. The Good news is that God had come; Emmaunel, God with us. That brings Great Joy! And the shepherds could not keep quiet about it. They spread the good news; they spread the joy!

(Video)

We are called to share Good News of Great Joy!

Fun fact: “Joy” appears in the Bible 242 times. “Shout for joy” 33 times. And “rejoice” 154 times. Rejoice means to show great joy and delight! Philippians 4:4 says to *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!* (HizKids verse) This joy is not dependent on our circumstances. This joy comes from God. *The joy of the Lord is my strength.* (Nehemiah 8:10). In John 15:10 Jesus told his disciples to remain in him and to keep his commandments: to love God and to love one another. *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.* (John 15:11). “My joy may be in you.” That’s the Good News! That Jesus’ joy is down in our heart…WHERE? Down in our heart to stay. Nothing can take away that joy. And that is a story that needs to be told.

But why is it so difficult for us to share good news? I think partly because bad news is more fun! That is what the media thrives on. That is why gossip columns and magazines exist – someone is buying them. Gossip was certainly a problem in the early church and it is still a problem today. *The words of a gossip are like choice morsels ;they go down to the inmost parts* (Proverbs 26:22). *Do let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building one another up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen* (Ephesians 4:25). And oh how quickly we believe bad news. Another reason is because we often think that our story, our relationship with Christ, our God experiences are not interesting enough. We don’t get a multitude of angels singing to us! We just get a nudge to pray or make a phone call only to find out the person God placed on our hearts was in great need. Those are amazing stories that must be told! People have heard the Christmas story, and we need to keep telling it…but what they haven’t heard is YOUR story. They haven’t heard how this baby from Bethlehem has changed your life. How has your relationship with Jesus impacted you? That’s a story that needs to be told!

There is a reason the shepherds were the first witnesses. They were common people. The angels didn’t go to the religious leaders or the rulers. When Pastor Dave and I stand up here and preach, you expect us to talk about how awesome God is. That is our “job.” The powerful stories are the ones that come from you. Your life, like the shepherds, has been changed somehow, big or small, by Jesus. The shepherds returned praising and glorifying God. They were filled with joy and more than likely continued to tell anyone who would listen about this experience. Who have you told about your experience with God?

Part of our vision is to create a culture of calling, and one of the things we have learned is that calling is not about a job or a call to ministry. It is about how we live into our calling to be disciples of Jesus Christ: *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.* (Ephesians 4:1). Our PHUMC vision is All Ages, All In, Loving God, Loving All. The definition of that is “we are an intergenerational community **called** to a life changing relationship with Jesus Christ and committed to loving God and loving others. We are called to follow Christ. You all answered the call to be here in worship this morning. Those of you who are serving as ushers, greeters, liturgists, choir, band, etc. are answering a call. Many of you have answered God’s call for you to be parents, grandparents. God calls you in your job, in your school, in your retirement. How have you answered God’s call? How has your life changed because you know Jesus?
I would love to hear your story. As part of our creating a culture of calling, we want to collect stories; stories of how lives have been changed. Stories of how God nudged you, called you, used you. If you would like to share your story, please email me at chart@phumc.net.

We need to rejoice – to show our great joy and delight! We need to tell the Good News and to tell it in a way that shows the world God is with us! There is a song by Big Daddy Weave:

If I told you my story
You would hear Hope that wouldn't let go
And if I told you my story
You would hear Love that never gave up
And if I told you my story
You would hear Life, but it wasn't mine
If I should speak then let it be
Of the grace that is greater than all my sin
Of when justice was served and where mercy wins
Of the kindness of Jesus that draws me in
Oh to tell you my story is to tell of Him

Go tell it on the mountain! Tell your story because your story is His story.