

Good News of Great Joy

Laura Urista

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12 emphasis added).

Isn't it ironic that God chose to send the birth announcement about his Son to lowly shepherds? Luke doesn't tell us much about these shepherds. Luke 2:8 only says "...there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night." Although shepherding was once considered a noble profession, by the time we come to the first century shepherds were considered the lowest class of people—coming in just ahead of the lepers. They were deemed ceremonially unclean and considered untrustworthy, brash and rude.

Here's a quote about the Bethlehem shepherds from Max Lucado's book *God Came Near*.

God tapped humanity on its collective shoulder. "Pardon me," he said, and eternity interrupted time, divinity interrupted carnality, and heaven interrupted the earth in the form of a baby. Christianity was born in one big heavenly interruption. Just ask the Bethlehem shepherds. We know so little about these men.... But this much we can safely assume: they

had no expectations of excitement... Nor did they want any. Any excitement was bad excitement—wolves, mountain lions, poachers. Shepherds treasured the predictable. They coveted the calm. Their aim was to be able to tell their wives, "Nothing happened last night." Just because they wanted a calm night, however, didn't mean they would get it.

"Then an angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they became very frightened." (Luke 2:9 NCV) Change always brings fear before it brings faith.



Scripture repeatedly shows that Jesus came to the lowly, the despised and the neglected in order to show his great compassion. The Bethlehem shepherds help us see that God has a message for even those considered the least, the lost and the last—**everyone matters to God.**

At first the shepherds were terrified at their close encounter with God, but eventually they experienced great joy so that they didn't just accept the message they received, they quickly acted upon it. Shepherds were used to meandering through the fields while their flocks grazed. They weren't typically known for hurrying to do anything. But due to the shepherds' great joy and excitement "...they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger" (Luke 2:16).

Love Versus Fear

Think of something that brings you **GREAT JOY**. Maybe art, music or other hobbies have brought you great joy since you were a child—but in the hectic life of an adult you've lost interest.

I have always enjoyed singing from an early age. One of my earliest joyful memories is of swinging as high as I could at a park near Grandma's house, singing my favorite song at the top of my lungs, "Joy to the world, all the boys and girls, joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea, joy to you and me!"

Now think of something that sucks all the joy out of your life. The main one I think of is **FEAR**. FEAR of doing the wrong thing and getting ridiculed, FEAR of trying new things, FEAR of failure, FEAR of punishment.

Has your relationship with God been derailed or destroyed because of fear? Maybe you've heard that God is just waiting for you to mess up so he can fry you for all eternity.

But Jesus came to show us in person that **God IS love**. God is not a cosmic corrections officer. His core identity is that of a loving, caring Daddy whom Jesus called "Abba."

"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

Christ's perfect love in us overcomes the fear that sucks the joy out of life. And as we allow his perfect love to flow out through us to others, we can experience joy in sharing the good news of eternal life made available to all.

That's good news of great joy for all the people! Joy to the world—joy to you and me! □

Laura Urista still finds great joy in singing—as a worship leader, choir member and part of a female quartet called "Joyful Voices."