

## **Luke 2:8-20: Simon the Shepherd visits Argyle Community Church**

### Notes for life group leaders

I have suggested reading the Bible passage after two questions that introduce the theme and context. Feel free to read it earlier if you prefer.

Below I have included some guidelines as to the answers I am expecting to some of the questions.

1. What is a 'first-person sermon' and what might be some advantages and drawbacks of this approach? What were your thoughts and feelings about it?
  - a. This is an opportunity for people to get their personal reactions 'off their backs'. No doubt plenty of people will have things they want to say, however, these are not the most important things to deal with, so avoid spending too long on this!
  
2. What was life like for a Jewish shepherd around the time of Jesus? What modern equivalents can you think of?
  - a. Life was hard! Ref. oppression under the Romans; taxation; shepherds near the bottom of the social ladder.
  - b. Modern equivalent: Man doing night shifts as a security guard, in addition to his regular job. Or Deliveroo?
  
3. What was the shepherds' first reaction to the angel (v9)? What about later on (v20)?
  - a. Great fear! (As always in the Bible. This challenges our culture's preconceived ideas about angels.)
  - b. Later on: Great joy (ref. v10)!
  
4. Luke has already written about how the coming of Jesus represented the fulfilment of God's ancient promises. Look back to see why the angels' message was such good news for the shepherds. (See especially Luke 1 verses 51-55 and 68-75.)
  - a. Proud oppressors brought low, humble exalted!
  - b. Redemption for Israel; salvation from enemies; future of peace and holiness.
  - c. Bear in mind also that the Roman emperor was often referred to as 'Saviour' and 'Lord', and that the Romans were proud of bringing their brand of 'peace' to the world (through their total military dominance). Luke alludes to this Roman dominance in 2:1-3. In this context it is ironic that lowly shepherds are the ones who receive the angelic visit!
  
5. The whole event is extraordinary. Why might people have disdained the shepherds for believing the angels' message?
  - a. NB. 'Simon' came from AD24, when Jesus hadn't yet begun his public ministry! (John the Baptist would begin his public ministry about 3-4 years later)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In AD24 Valerius Gratus would have been governor of Judea (Pontius Pilate took over from him in about AD26), and Tiberius would have been Roman Emperor (cf. Lk 3:1). NB. Most of these dates are not precise.

- b. Note also that Jesus was probably born between 4 and 6 BC! (The calendar we use is based on the work of a 6<sup>th</sup>-century monk named Dionysius, who sought to number the years of history from the birth of Christ; modern scholars believe he got the year of Jesus' birth wrong by about 5 years.)
- 6. Why did 'Simon' nevertheless consider the angels' message trustworthy? (See v12, 16, 20)
  - a. Ref. the sign about the manger. (A manger is an animal feeding trough, a strange place to put a newborn baby!)
- 7. We only need to open our news apps to see that the world is still waiting for true peace. What reasons do we have for believing that Jesus is going to bring that peace?
  - a. We have more reasons than the shepherds had, because more of God's promises have been fulfilled!
- 10. In what ways would you like to become more like 'Simon'? How can we help each other do that?
  - a. This is a personal question designed to get people reflecting on the challenge of Sunday's sermon in a more subjective way. Encourage participants to consider what 'Simon' said about the difference it made having this hope in his heart.
  - b. Hebrews 10:24-25 might help!
- 8. Pray together, giving thanks to God for the birth of Jesus the Saviour and asking Him to mould our outlook on life around the sure hope of his coming kingdom.
  - a. The central message of the passage is that the birth of Jesus is good news of great joy to all people, because He is the promised Saviour who brings peace. Therefore, we should praise God with joy, trusting that His promises of Salvation are being fulfilled through Jesus.

Further notes:

In the sermon 'Simon' mentioned 'relatives' coming down from 'upstairs'. The Greek word normally translated 'inn' in Luke 2:7 is better translated 'guest room'. (The same word appears in Lk 22:11.) Archaeological evidence suggests that most homes in Judea had a downstairs room and an upstairs room. The upstairs room was the more presentable one, and would be used for receiving guests. The downstairs room was used for all kinds of day-to-day purposes, and animals would be brought into it at night.