

The American version of Christmas includes a strong focus on gift giving. People often give gifts to express love and appreciation to others in hopes of warming the hearts of those receiving the gifts. Luke records an angelic announcement of God's greatest gift to humanity.

The setting could not have been more surprising. The angels showed up in the hours of darkness and spoke to shepherds watching over their sheep through the night. *Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.* Luke 2:8-10
Let's explore what happened after the angelic announcement.

1. Explore the Promise

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." Luke 2:15

How did the shepherds know to go to Bethlehem?

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times. Micah 5:2

Bethlehem fields fed many of the sheep. Some of those fields had birthing places with mangers. Did the shepherds go to the city to look for the baby or to one of the birthing areas the shepherds used? Tradition takes us to the city. Bethlehem asks a question of us.

Is it possible there is a Bethlehem in our souls...a place where God wants to enter our lives, inspire our decisions and direct our paths? God's promises meet us where we are as we seek to discover where God is in what is happening in our lives.

2. Experience the Gift

So, they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. Luke 2:16

How does one find Jesus in the Christmas story?

We picture a tiny baby with his mother nearby. Animals may be present. Babbling shepherds told quite a story to Mary and Joseph about their encounter with angels. Mary had her encounter with an angel and her life was forever changed (Luke 1:28-37). Joseph had his encounter with an angel and he was still trying to get his mind around what he heard (Matthew 1:20, 21). The shepherds experience with the angels led them straight to the baby. What's so special about this baby?

What difference can this baby possibly make in their lives?

What difference can Jesus possibly make in my life?

The only way we can experience the gift is to open ourselves to whom and what Jesus wants to be in our lives.

3. Express Your Joy

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. Luke 2:17-18

Have you ever experienced something so wonderful that you could not keep from telling everyone about it?

The minds of the shepherds overflowed with their encounter with the angels, the promise of a Savior and the sight of the baby just as they had been told. They were overwhelmed with that had happened to them and the hope they had seen wrapped in swaddling cloths. As joy bubbled up from the well-springs of their hearts, jubilant words danced from their lips.

Isaiah's promise awakens us to the promise animating the shepherd's hearts.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

Later, Paul would wrap these metaphors as a gift saying,

My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

