

*Sacred: Life Infused with Holiness*  
*Sacred Knowing – Why the Shepherds?*  
Luke 2:8-15

I read a story in “Christian Magazine” few weeks ago in my doctors’ office about a woman who was shamed and brought closer to God by someone the world would overlook.

She wrote: “We were the only family with children in the restaurant. I sat Erik, my son, in a high chair and noticed everyone was quietly eating and talking. Suddenly, Erik squealed with glee and said “Hi there.” He wiggled and giggled with merriment at a man with a tattered rag of a coat, dirty, greasy, and worn. His pants were baggy, with a zipper at half-mast and his toes poked out of would-be shoes. His shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed and unwashed. He was too far away to smell him but I am sure he smelled too.

His hands waved at my baby, “Hi there, baby; hi there big boy. I see ya, buster,” the man said to Erik. My husband and I did not know what to do. Erik continued to laugh and answer, “Hi, Hi there.”

Our meal finally came, and the drunken man started shouting across the room talking to my baby. “Do you know patty cake? Do you know peek-a-boo?” My husband and I were too embarrassed. Erik on the other hand was running through his repertoire of tricks, which were admired by the bum.

We finally got through the meal. My husband went to pay, and Erik and I headed for the door. The old man was poised between me and the door. I uttered a prayer “Lord just let me out of here before he speaks to me or my baby.”

As I drew closed to the man, I turned my back trying to side step him and avoid any air he might be breathing. As I did, Erik leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby’s pick-me-up position. Before I could stop him, my son had propelled himself from my arms to the man’s. My son, in an act of total trust, love and submission laid his tiny head upon the man’s ragged shoulder. The man’s eyes closed and I saw tears hover beneath his lashes. His aged hands, full of grime, pain and hard labor, gently cradled my baby’s bottom and stroked his back. He said to me, “take care of this baby.” Somehow I managed to say “I will.” I received my baby and walked to the car crying. My husband was wondering why I was crying. I said, “My God, my God, forgive me.”

The ragged old man, unwittingly had reminded me “To enter the Kingdom of God we must become as little children.” This is one of the promises of God according

to Isaiah that “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” The little child, the Messiah, the Christ will shepherd the sheep of the world.

Can you relate to the shepherds? They smelled like sheep. They slept on the ground. They came from the lower class of society. So why was heaven’s glory revealed to a bunch of unwanted and forgotten shepherds? Of all the people to whom God could have revealed this startling birth, why choose shepherds? With all the power brokers in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome, why choose the countryside outside of the insignificant and tiny village of Bethlehem? What a way to announce the birth of a King!

The birth of a King’s son is generally made an occasion of public reveling and rejoicing. What would have happened if CNN was there when the angel appeared to the shepherds? It would have been Special Edition news. But the announcement of the birth of the prince of Peace was made privately, at midnight.

Let us mark to whom the message first came that Christ was born. They were “Shepherds abiding in the field near Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flocks by night.” It was not announced to priests and rulers, but to shepherds, proclaiming, “Unto you is born this day a savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Why were these shepherds given this sacred news?

- These were the Bethlehem shepherds, the shepherds who raised the sheep offered as sacrifice at Passover. So even in Jesus’ birth, we are reminded of Jesus sacrificial death.
- Abraham, Moses, and David were all shepherds and in the same tradition, the master Shepherd of the sheep had just been born. The shepherd of shepherds. There is a connection between shepherding and the life ministry of Jesus. Moses was called while shepherding the flock of his father Jethro, when he experience the presence of God in the burning bush. David was a shepherd boy when he was anointed by Samuel as King of Israel. He rose from shepherding sheep, to shepherding the people of Israel.
- The image of a shepherd is the image Jesus chooses to use for his example of a leader, one who pastors, who shepherds his sheep and even willing to lay down his life for his sheep.

The Prophet Isaiah foretold that the coming Savior of Israel would be a shepherd to the God’s people. He described the messiah as one who shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the Lambs with his arm, carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with the young. God is frequently identified as the

loving tender shepherd of his people. Jesus identifies himself as the Good shepherd to know that he knows us and cares for us and will never abandon us. Jesus embraced the description as a shepherd calling himself the good shepherd. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep; I know my own sheep and they know me.”

He longs to bless us and make our lives full. He wants us in his presence and will deal with us lovingly. So when the glory of Jesus birth was announced, it was announced to the shepherds.

When the angels appeared to the shepherds in their fields so long ago, the shepherds had a frightening moment of disbelief that turned into deep knowing, a knowing that they must make a journey to see the newborn Jesus. It is believed that these shepherds were just ordinary people doing their ordinary work like they were doing every day. Like those ordinary shepherd long time ago, we too can listen for the sacred knowing within us to change our plans, change our very lives, and seek what matters most in the lives of our community, the lives of our country and above all, the lives of our church. When we honor our own wisdom, our own deep knowing, we acknowledge the work of the sacred within us.

Do you have hard time relating to people like the shepherds? Do you relate more to those who do the overlooking, than with those who are overlooked? Do you relate more with the social elite, or the upper middle class professionals? Are you like the woman in the restaurant that did not want her son to get closer to the old raggedy man? God wants us to remember that we are all equal in God’s eyes, no social levels? And God is calling you to honor the overlooked. Look for ways to reach out to those the world ignores as the shepherds were ignored those days but God choose them to bring the birth of the messiah to the world.

Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth, peace!

Amen.