

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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Sermon Title: Surprise! Surprise! The Story of the Shepherds, Luke 2:8-20

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**INTRODUCTION:** This morning, we are going to take a look at the experience of the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks the night Jesus was born. You've probably never thought about this night from their perspective, but this morning, we're going to examine this from three points:

1. Be prepared for God to interrupt your life.
2. Experiences are better than material things.
3. The shepherds returned to their dull jobs with a new perspective.

**First, BE PREPARED FOR GOD TO INTERRUPT YOUR LIFE.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2:8-14 <sup>8</sup>*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.* <sup>9</sup>*An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.* <sup>10</sup>*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.* <sup>11</sup>*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.* <sup>12</sup>*This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

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

<sup>14</sup>*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

**BACKGROUND:** In this passage, we have shepherds doing what shepherds do—watching over their flocks. A shepherd's job in this day was guiding sheep through a routine in order to keep them healthy and safe. They took them to fresh grazing pastures, they guided them to water, and if there were no bodies of water, they watered the animals from a well. In the evening, they moved them to the fold, if they had one. And, each sheep would enter the gate of the fold under the staff of the

shepherd, who counted each one, one-by-one, to make sure they all were accounted for.

Shepherds had to be prepared to fight off a lion or a bear. We know these predators lived in the area at least during the time of David, according to 1 Samuel.

And, then one night, their routine was interrupted.

The last time your routine was interrupted did you stop to wonder if God might be involved in the interruption? Did you stop to wonder whether the interruption might be more of a blessing than if you went about your daily routine?

- Abraham was a man minding his own business, and God interrupted his life at age 75 and told him to leave his country.
- Mary was a young, pure woman, and God interrupted her life. Her response: “May it be according to your Word.”
- The men known as the twelve disciples were all busy, going about their daily lives and occupations, and Jesus interrupted them.
- And, then in the Book of Acts, when the new church formed, believers prepared for interruptions. Interruptions became a way of life for them. They never had time to settle in a routine.

**APPLICATION:** Now, what’s the application here? It’s pretty obvious: Look for God in your interruptions. I’ve had travel plans interrupted, which caused frustration, and then later, I found out the interruption gave me an opportunity to share with someone I would have never met had I stayed on schedule.

And, there is application for the church as well. Folks, we need to be prepared for interruptions.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A long time ago, I worked as a youth pastor at a church, which was experiencing a lot of growth and excitement. People joined nearly every Sunday, and lives were changed all the time. A few times, testimonies, prayers, and music went longer than planned. I saw these times as the Lord moving among people. But, the pastor, of all people, got angry if he didn’t get to the pulpit at a

certain time. I could see him get angry. Hey, if the Lord moves us in another direction during a service, I want to be flexible enough to let go of my plans.

As you know, less than two weeks ago, we had an unexpected interruption. Pastor Raouf died. I received a call on Tuesday from one of the ministers who works for the Tennessee Baptist Convention. He said something I had been thinking: Pastor Raouf's death seemed to be ill timed. If there is anyone we need right now in Middle Tennessee, it is him. We both affirmed, however, that a righteous God can do no wrong, and even though we don't see what it is, God is up to something. Then I received the most precious, encouraging card from Joanne Rogers. One of the things she wrote was, "We know that our God reasons everything and makes no mistakes."

Now, I'll be watching as we see what God wants to do in Pastor Raouf's absence. This part of the book has blank pages yet to be written!

The next thing I see in the shepherd story is this—

## **Second, EXPERIENCES ARE BETTER THAN MATERIAL THINGS.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2:15-19 <sup>15</sup>*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."*

<sup>16</sup>*So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.* <sup>17</sup>*When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,* <sup>18</sup>*and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.* <sup>19</sup>*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

**ILLUSTRATION:** This week, I read an article which summarized some of the findings of Dr. Thomas Gilovich, a psychology professor at Cornell University.

The basic conclusion was, "People tend to get less happy with material purchases over time, and more happy with experiences. They speculate this is because we adapt to physical things, so even the nicest car or newest phone becomes commonplace after enough time, while memories tend to get fonder over time."

“Our experiences are a bigger part of ourselves than our material goods,” says Gilovich. “You can really like your material stuff. You can even think part of your identity is connected to those things, but nonetheless they remain separate from you. In contrast, your experiences really are part of you. We are the sum total of our experiences.”

The article went on to say, “The anticipation leading up to a trip, event, or experience even has the potential to provide happiness itself, making it the gift that truly keeps on giving! Happiness in the anticipation, happiness during the experience and happiness in the memories.”

**EXPLANATION:** Think about it. The King of Kings showed up to the poorest of the poor. And, he didn’t take them material things. Nor did they take him anything material. He brought them an experience they’d never forget. And, like the article said, they were happy in the anticipation, happy during the experience, and happy with the memories. Their lives had been completely changed by the experience.

I wonder what it would be like at your home if Jesus were coming to visit this afternoon. Would you go crazy cleaning, decorating, and cooking? Really, what would you cook Jesus for lunch? Two loaves of bread and a few fishes? I wonder if you’d have gifts to give him. I mean, think about it. What would you buy Jesus? A new watch? And, when he arrived, would you take a selfie of you and Jesus so you could post it on Facebook? And, while he was at your home, would you be so worked up about everything being just right that you’d miss the totality of the experience altogether? Sure, sure, we should give Jesus our best all the time, but hey, the great thing about Jesus is he takes us at our worst! Jesus wants us to *experience him*.

My point is: The story of the shepherds focuses on the experience—the here and now. They didn’t plan in advance. They had nothing to give and went as they were.

What else do we see in the shepherd story?

**Third**, We see **THE SHEPHERDS RETURNED TO THEIR DULL JOBS WITH A NEW PERSPECTIVE.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2:20<sup>20</sup> *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

**ILLUSTRATION:** Dullness is all a matter of perspective isn't it? I talked with a person who was trying to get his pilot's license. He failed the flight test, and to him, it seemed his world had ended. Since the age of 12, he had dreamed every day of being a pilot. He was looking for direction when he came to see me and was shocked at my response: Being a pilot sounded to me like the most boring job a person could have.

**ILLUSTRATION:** In early college, I trained to fly Cessna airplanes. About 50 hours into it, I decided it was probably best for me to not be in a plane alone. Somewhere north of Portland (Tennessee), I lost my bearings and had no idea where I was. I went until I saw an interstate and flew low enough to read the interstate sign, which said *Glasgow next exit*. (Kentucky) ☺

Anyway, I told the young man working with people is much more exciting than sitting still in a plane for hours. I would not make a good airline pilot because I'd ask the copilot to fly the plane while I visited with passengers.

The young man was fascinated with my perspective. What seemed like the most exciting career in the world seemed like the most boring career to someone else.

To me, the life of a pastor is about the most exciting job a person can have—doing life with others, hearing their concerns, praying with people, seeing a newborn child, hearing choirs sing, leading a great staff. I guess I am where I am supposed to be. But, there are times, let me tell you, there are times when the repetition of certain things brings about a dullness which seems inescapable. At times like this, I need to have a “shepherd experience.” And God always comes through and gives me a new perspective.

**APPLICATION:** Listen to me: The dullest life has new meaning after an encounter with the Savior. A few minutes ago, I talked about the importance of experiences over material things. Now, the shepherds could spend the rest of their lives talking not only about the one night when those angels appeared to them and they went to Bethlehem and saw the Savior, but how their perspective on life had changed since the experience.

If we could have heard them speak, what would they have said? Would they have said things such as:

- *On nights like tonight, I recall those angels and our trip to Bethlehem. I've never been the same since.*
- *Or maybe: Guys, remember the night we left all the sheep behind? The sheep could have been killed. We could have been fired! But, I am so glad we went anyway!*
- *Or maybe: The only night anyone has ever listened to me was the night I went around telling people the Messiah had been born!*
- *Or maybe: How wonderful the angels came to us first! I was a nobody, but now I am a somebody! Ha! Ha!*

We don't know what they said to each other the rest of their lives, but we know they had a shared experience. We know they went back changed men. From then on, when they looked at the black, night sky they had a different perspective. From then on, when they saw a bright star, they had a different perspective. From then on, when they talked about their shared experiences, they had something more meaningful to talk about than sheep.

Those poor shepherds left those sheep alone and returned as the richest shepherds on earth because they now had a new perspective on life. The Messiah they'd heard about all their lives, the one which would save them, the one who would change the course of history, had appeared to them first.

**CONCLUSION:** Today I've told you:

**BE PREPARED FOR GOD TO INTERRUPT YOUR LIFE.**

**EXPERIENCES ARE BETTER THAN MATERIAL THINGS.**

**THE SHEPHERDS RETURNED TO THEIR DULL JOBS WITH A NEW PERSPECTIVE**

Life is good for those who believe!

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Thanks to Judy Andrews and Nancy Claire Smith for their editing assistance.

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