

CHRISTMAS PRESENCE | Present to Lowly People | Week 3 | December 16, 2018

Luke 2:8-21, John 10, John 3:16-18, Ps. 139: 4-6

Opening: “Christmas Presence”, Immanuel—God with us, is a presence of this season that deserves our attention. God’s promise of His presence with us to guide, direct and reassure is certainly one of the hallmarks of our faith as disciples. Join us as we explore the mystery of entering that presence, the presence of Immanuel.

Context: This season is filled with questions and wonder. Why did God re-enter Israel’s reality after 450 years of silence as a babe in arms? Why was the miracle in the backstreets instead of in the courts of power? This week we ask these questions: “Why a manger? Why the Shepherds?”

Selected to Report: Pastor Meyer draws our attention to the honor just conveyed to a group of reporters, Time Magazine’s “Person of the Year” awards. These folks were about sacrificing themselves to learn and report difficult truths to our world and we would not have known otherwise. In our 24 hour news-cycle world it’s hard to imagine not knowing but it still exists. *Who do you know that does not know the GOOD NEWS of the Christmas story? How could you invite them to learn it? Talk about what comes to mind.*

The Good Shepherd: Read John 10. Here is a powerful description of the good shepherd. Pastor Meyer describes a much different general “rep” for a shepherd: lazy, filthy and dishonest. This highlights Jesus’ teaching about himself in a new light. *If shepherds were regarded as “low life scoundrels” how does your reading of John 10 change?*

A Coming Redemption: Read Luke 2:8-11. *Given the above definition of “shepherd” who does it appear God is coming back to redeem? Compare John 3: 16-18.*

Shepherd’s Terror: These guys spend every night under the stars. They know what’s normal and they’ve seen many different night skies. They know this is from a different world—angelic beings, bright glory in the sky..... It may be that the shepherds identified this fear with all the judgements they have felt. They knew what people thought of them. They could not recognize this as blessing because they weren’t wired that way, that was not their normal experience. *As you consider your awareness of God’s presence in your life, how often do you interpret it as criticism? Why do you think that might be so?*

God speaks to our fear: “Do not be afraid”. The angels knew what the shepherds were feeling. *Do you give God credit for knowing how you feel in your encounters with His PRESENCE? Read Ps 139 (vs. 4-6) and describe how you feel?*

The shepherds were chosen: The message gets more personal: “good news of great joy, a Savior has been born to YOU”. *How lifechanging is that message? How and when have you experienced good news of great joy?*

The crescendo builds: YOU will find a baby (vs 12) a great company of heavenly hosts (vs.13) praising God and saying “Glory to God...” (vs.14). The shepherds went from a strange sky to heavens full of worshipping Angels. *When have you experienced a growing awareness of the PRESENCE? Describe it to the group?*

Who NEEDS the Savior? Here’s the hard part of this message. Pastor Meyer compares seven traits of “brought low” from the work of Monika Hellwig:

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| • accept dependence | worship independence |
| • humility | sense of importance |
| • relationships | things |
| • necessities | luxuries |
| • realistic fear | neurotic fear |
| • NEED good news | need ?? |
| • little to let go of | much to let go of |

Talk about these comparisons. Which one most pierces you? What could God be saying?

Practice of the Week: Fighting the “complacency of success”

In C.S.Lewis’ classic work “Screwtape Letters” Screwtape advocates strategies to hamper Christians. One strategy is to encourage complacency through bad or incomplete definitions. Success is not bad but perhaps our definition of it is incomplete. Consider your definition of success this week in prayer. Be open to any need to be “brought low”. Give thanks for His PRESENCE to lead you.

Family Formation: Like a Shepherd in the field.....

Revisit prayers..... Read the Luke passage of the angels and the shepherds. Play a game of a “strange night sky”. Go outside in the backyard and look at the sky. Imagine the angel. “Where did that come from” you ask as a Shepherd. Then ask Alexa to play Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus as the heavens open with worshipping angels. Make it WOW!

Additional Resources:

Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan, 2001)

We’d love to hear from you!

If you have thoughts questions, comments, ideas on how to make these study guides more meaningful for you and your group, please let us know.

We also enjoy hearing how God is using these scriptures and study guides in your lives.

Roger Peer: [contact through Eric](#) * Eric Haskins: ehaskins@christchurch.us