The Eleventh Day of Christmas: Angels and Shepherds

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 January 2019

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0:00] Welcome back to this, the 11th of my studies in echoes and symmetries within the stories of the nativity and the infancy of Christ in the Gospels.

Today I'm going to be looking at the characters of the shepherds again in Luke's Gospel. One of the parallels that I didn't explore before is the parallel between the call of Moses and the appearance of the angels to the shepherds.
In both cases we have people looking after sheep. There's a glory appearance. In the case of Moses it's the angel of the Lord in the burning bush and there is fear as a response to that.
And then we see a sign that is given. The sign that is given to Moses is that he will return to that place with the children of Israel and he will worship God at that site.
The sign that's given to the shepherds is that they will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And the significance of the parallel between these things I don't think should be missed.
[0:58] There is a hearkening back to the story of the Old Testament, to a story of the calling of Moses, to the story of the Exodus and all that surrounds that. And we've had this in a number of different ways within the story of Matthew and in Luke, particularly in Matthew.

Matthew does a lot with the story of the Exodus. Luke does slightly less. But here we do see it, that there is a connection between the calling of Moses and then the appearance of the angels to the shepherds.
We see a further connection with the appearance to the shepherds as we go to the end of the book. There again, there are angels that appear to persons and there is coming with haste.
There's the appearance of the seeing the sign of the empty tomb. And then there's the message being spread by the shepherds to people round about.
So in both cases, we see some significant parallels. At the end of the book, the shepherds are the apostles. They're the leaders of the church. And there's also the role of the women at that point, which is significant.
[2:01] Mary has an important role within the start of this too. If you read the story, you'll see that she treasures these things, that she ponders these things in her heart. Now, in part because this is a sign to her.

It's an important event that tells her something more about what her son will be. We mentioned later on within the story of Luke. You see this event when they go Passover time to the city of Jerusalem. And then Christ is lost for three days and then later appears in the temple, which he calls his father's house and talks about his father's business. Now, that's a significant event. And as she pondered that in her heart, when those things came to pass later on, she would know what that meant.
Christ, that his life was taken at Passover time and then all that that entailed. Now, we've already seen connections between shepherds and the calling of and the Messiah in Bethlehem in the book of Micah.
In Micah chapter five, the one who's going to be raised to be a true shepherd of the flock is someone who's going to come from Bethlehem. Bethlehem is also associated with Migdalida, with a tower of the flock.
[3:16] Then we also see it as a site where the Passover lambs were prepared. And so the fact that Christ comes into this context is again significant.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

That Christ is met by shepherds, shepherds who are quite possibly looking after sacrificial lambs. That this is another further aspect of the sign. So there's the connection between Christ's sacrifice and the shepherds and the fact that Christ is going to be the shepherd of his people, the ruler of his people.
And then finally, that connection between Moses and his call and the appearance to the shepherds and the giving of a sign to them. Now, in the story of the Old Testament, the sign is that they'll return and they'll worship God at that place and that they'll see this great glory theophany and the filling Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai.
And it's a remarkable appearance. In the story of Luke, the sign is a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And the juxtaposition is stark.
In the first case, you see this dramatic glory phenomena. And then in the second, you see a far more miraculous and glorious event. But without any of this vast display of glory, you have the glory prior to it.
[4:35] You have the glory and the appearance of the angels. But the true sign, the true thing that really matters is not the angels and their song and this appearance of something that, to our knowledge, no one had ever seen before in quite the same way.

This appearance of angels in the earthly context, singing and glorifying God, this is not something that people typically see. Angels appear to people, bring messages.
But here we see a vision of the angels in song. Even Jacob, who saw angels ascending and descending on the ladder, didn't see that. And so there's something remarkable that takes place here.
They have a window into the world of heaven itself. And yet, the more glorious sign is found in a manger, in a forgotten place within a city that is a fairly minor city compared to Jerusalem.
And it gives us some sense of Christ coming and the way that Christ comes. Christ comes in the form of a servant. Christ comes incognito. Not with this in the centre of the fanfare.
[5:37] The fanfare actually announces the true significance of what's taking place. And this is something I think we see in Luke more generally. That there are events that clarify the significance of the larger course of events.

By placing them within the context of heavenly realities. So for instance, there are two stages in Christ's ministry. The first begins with his baptism in the Jordan.
And the second begins with his transfiguration on the mount. And these two phases. What first begins with the testimony of John the Baptist. And ends with the death of John the Baptist.
And the questions about whether Christ is John the Baptist raised from the dead. And then the second begins with Peter's witness. And ends with Christ's death and resurrection. Now, the significance of all of this, I think, is that the transfiguration.
And then also the glory appearance in association. The appearances in association with the baptism. They give a sense of what the Galilean ministry and the ministry that begins with that. And then the ministry moving towards Jerusalem.
[6:41] What those things mean. That Christ's ministry, although it may seem to earthly eyes to be something of merely human importance. Merely human brilliance and activity.

When we actually see it in the context of the revelations. That Christ is the beloved son. That Christ is the one who is in the glory cloud and the transfiguration.
We begin to have an understanding of what these things actually mean. And in the same way, the glory appearance of the angels in the context of the incarnation.
Gives us a sense of who Christ really is. And it connects back to the story of the Exodus. It connects back to the prophecies of the shepherd that's going to come forth. And it gives us a glimpse into what's going to happen later.
As the angels bring their message of the resurrected Christ. As they see the resurrected Christ. And as with joy they marvel. And they tell the message to all round about.
[7:43] Thank you very much for listening. Lord willing, you are having a good day. And I'll be back again tomorrow with the final installment of these series. Thank you very much for listening.

God bless.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host