

HEART-TO-HEART

We are reminded that Christ is in our hearts and we are in His and that love connects us all in unity.



Merry Christmas

It's December - the month that smells like gingerbread, pine trees, hot cocoa, and all that is good. December is also a time for reflection about the past year, and contemplating what's in store for the coming year.

As we head into the holiday season, we need to remember the real reason that we celebrate Christmas. The song "How Many Kings" by Downhere summarizes it best:

*"Follow the star to a place
unexpected
Would you believe after all we've
projected*

*A child in a manger?
Lowly and small, the weakest of all
Unlikeliest hero, wrapped in his
mother's shawl
Just a child
Is this who we've waited for?
'Cause how many kings stepped
down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned
their homes?
How many greats have become the
least for me?
And how many Gods have poured
out their hearts
To romance a world that is torn all
apart?
How many Fathers gave up their
Sons for me?"*

Let us continue to remember the
"reason for the season."

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The Shepherds in the Fields

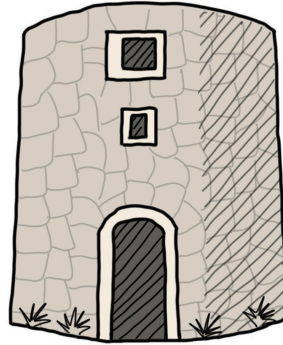
by Pastor Gary Lau

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night” (Luke 2:8).

When you look at Nativity scenes, it typically includes Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus, with Jesus lying in a wooden frame filled with hay; the three magi from the east; some animals; and a shepherd or two. But many people don't realize the significance of the shepherds. Yes, you could say God would use unlikely, humble people to spread the wonderful news of Jesus to others for the shepherds were “...glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told” (Luke 2:20).

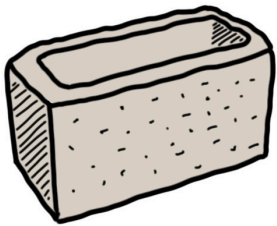
It goes deeper. So let's start with the question: why were there shepherds in the fields?

Six miles south of the capital city of Jerusalem (where the temple was located and sacrifices were conducted) was the town of Bethlehem where nearby there was a two-story structure known as Migdal Eder, or Tower of the Flock...a watchtower...located in the pasturelands of the town. The Bible even mentions this tower: “As for you, watchtower of the flock, stronghold of Daughter Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem” (Micah 4:8).



Some of the shepherds in the fields were also priests from the temple who assisted in the birthing of the lambs. These lambs would be used for sacrifices at the temple a year after their birth. While shepherds kept watch over the flock on the top floor, shepherd-priests would bring the pregnant ewes in from the field to the bottom floor, where the ewes would give birth to lambs. When a lamb was born, the priest would wrap it up with strips of cloths made from priestly undergarments. This was done to keep the lamb from getting blemished.

Why did the lamb need to be unblemished?



Because back in the Old Testament, the Lord said, “The animals you choose [for the sacrifices] must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats” (Exodus 12:5). The priest would then place the lamb in a manger, a slightly elevated stone trough, to make sure it wouldn't get trampled.

So when the shepherd-priests were told by the angels to go to Bethlehem, they saw baby Jesus wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger, and they would have thought, “This is the Lamb of God, prepared for sacrifice, without defect!” Only the shepherd-priests would have understood this.

So when you read this verse during the Christmas season:

“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger,” (Luke 2:12)

...understand that these shepherds knew so much more than we realize.



It was shepherds who were the first to recognize a king that the rest of the world refused to acknowledge.”
Paul Coelho

Manger Throne

by Alli Oshiro

This article was inspired by Phil Wickham's song, Manger Throne.

Imagine you are an Israelite. You are under captivity by a powerful, violent, nation known to the rest of your world for warfare and bloodshed. And along comes a prophet who says, there will be an end to this because one day God will shine His light on the darkness. He will send a Messiah. Hope is coming. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

How would YOU envision this Messiah? A mighty warrior or a powerful King?

Our savior came as a newborn baby, through a young Mary, riding to Bethlehem, the smallest clan, on a humble donkey. In the most unexpected form, through the most unexpected way.

The Christmas season is personally a very sacred time for me. My oldest son Skyler was born on December 3rd. I had quite a bit of anxiety after he was born and I couldn't fall sleep for almost 3 days straight. My room at Kapiolani had a view of the freeway so I'd hold Skyler all night long and stare out the window watching the darkness, waiting and longing for the glow of the morning.

I was terrified of how vulnerable he was and how seemingly fragile. I was so afraid while changing his diaper, thinking he was so skinny I'd break his legs. I asked God many times, how can you trust me with this baby? I thought a lot about Mary and Jesus. I wondered, why would God risk sending the Messiah into our world in such a tiny and vulnerable form? Why would He trust a young girl like Mary to care for His son?!

His answer to me was simple? Because His hope and love are FOR ALL.
It's for those who feel as unworthy as Mary.
It's for those who are as vulnerable and helpless as a newborn baby.
It's for those who while they have everything still feel an emptiness.
It's for those who are broken and hurting.
It's for those who struggle to find joy.
It's for those who are emotionally or mentally captive.
It's for those who are fearful.
It's for ALL.

This season that we call Christmas, at its core, is about HOPE, mercifully given to humankind in its raw, unfiltered, flawed, and sinful state. The manger throne is the greatest gift that will ever be extended to us. Our savior came wrapped in the most unlikely of packages, hope provided in the most unlikely of places.



"What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping,
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary!"

- by William Chatterton Dix
"What Child Is This"

Accepting Gifts

by Jeanne Nagatani

Whenever I did something, my friend, Tena, would ask me, “Is what you’re doing, Biblical or cultural? It took me a while to figure out what was cultural and what was Biblical.

Those of us from the Asian culture learned from our mothers that when we receive gifts from family and friends, we should give something back in return. You were probably also taught that you should return a gift that is equivalent to or more than what you received. That’s the Asian way, but is it Biblical?

Why can’t we just accept a gift and say thank you without feeling guilty and without having to give something in return? I don’t think that the giver expects something in return. A gift is usually given without strings attached, so we should just be grateful and accept the gift without feeling guilty about not giving something back. Isn’t that more Biblical? Anyway, a gift is something someone wants to give you because you are special to him/her.

Think of the gift that Jesus gave to you. He paid for our gift of salvation by dying on the cross. He offers it as a free gift to all who accept Him. He didn’t expect anything in return because He loves us.

Just accept His gift - it’s Biblical.



“When we give cheerfully, and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.”

Maya Angelou



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