



The Shepherd's Peace

*"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2:14 (ESV)**

Open with prayer: *Good Shepherd, open our eyes to see Your blessing. Open our ears to hear Your voice. Open our hearts that we may love You. Amen. (Lutheran Study Bible, Psalm 23, page 866.)*

Shepherds of Jesus' day herded flocks of as many as 1,000 sheep. Their job was to hunt for good food for the flock, keep a watchful eye for poisonous plants, and deter predators who wanted them for dinner. They were on call 24/7, caring for animals whose instinct was to follow each other and stick together. Some think sheep aren't clueless. Sheep know their shepherd's voice, know who feeds them and finds grazing ground for them, and know who cares for them when they're sick. They're meek — usually quiet and gentle — holding themselves aloof from the world. They listen to the leaders ... obediently. (Reading this makes me think I/we need to work on our sheep skills.)

But ... what of those who tended the flocks? What was the status of a shepherd throughout the ages of the Old Testament??

Genesis 13:2–6 _____ **Abraham was very rich.**

²Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. ³ And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD. ⁵ And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, ⁶ so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together,

Genesis 24:34–36 _____ **Abraham was great and blessed.**

³⁴ So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. ³⁵ The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys. ³⁶ And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has.

Genesis 26:12–14 _____ **Isaac was rich and envied.**

¹² And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, ¹³ and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴ He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him.

Genesis 30:37–43 _____ **Jacob became great because God blessed his flocks.**

³⁷ Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. ³⁸ He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, ³⁹ the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. ⁴⁰ And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks

toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock. ⁴¹ Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, ⁴² but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. ⁴³ Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Genesis 46:33–34 _____ **Shepherds were abhorred by the Egyptians.**

³³ When Pharaoh calls you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ ³⁴ you shall say, ‘Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,’ in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.”

What other examples in history can you think of that show how hundreds of years of prejudice change status and behavior? _____

Answers will vary, but may include:

Farmers in the US (from the first settlers until present day).

Slavery of Africans and/or treatment of Native American in the US (from first settlers till today).

Views on abortion and euthanasia from the mid-1900s until now.

Had things changed during the time of David? **1 Samuel 16:11; 17:13–15** _____ **Yes.**
Being a shepherd seemed to be a job for a youth or one unworthy to do a man's job. Being young and a shepherd made David unworthy of even being seen by Samuel.

16 ¹¹ Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” **17** ¹³ The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the first-born, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. ¹⁴ David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵ but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

How did King David change the status of a shepherd? **1 Samuel 17:34–37a.** _____
Reciting the blessings of being a shepherd — strength, accuracy in battle, humility and trust in the Lord.

³⁴ But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶ Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷ And David said, “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Psalms 23 _____ **Speaking of God as our Shepherd.**

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the

presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Some Google sites say the change in status was caused by the fact the Israelites were no longer nomadic. By the time Jesus was born, shepherds had fallen to the bottom rung of the social ladder. They were equated with tax collectors, thieves, and dung sweepers. They could not hold public office, and shepherding became a job for the laboring class. Some shepherds earned their bad reputations, but others were victims of stereotyping. Religious leaders maligned them, and flocks were exiled to desert areas. The Mishnah (Jewish Oral Law) refers to them in belittling terms: incompetent, ones from whom it was forbidden to purchase goods, and ones unworthy of being rescued when they fall.

So, in the messy lives of these broken herders, why choose *shepherds*, of all people? Why were they the first to hear, “It’s a boy! Go! See Him!”? _____
God’s love and salvation is for all. God’s timing is the best timing; He will have people hear His word when He wills it. God is not only for the educated, elevated, or religious hierarchy. God’s message is to bring peace to those whose lives are in pieces. Other answers will vary.

Read **Luke 2:1–20**.

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Compare the call of the shepherds to the call of Levi in **Mark 2:13–17**. _____
Both were despised by religious leaders. Our Shepherd would become a lamb.

¹³ He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. ¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. ¹⁵ And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ And the scribes of^[a] the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat^[b] with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Some might say the shepherds faded into obscurity after that Christmas night, but, did they? Do you remember the name of the high priest at the time of Jesus' birth? Who remembers the names of Herod's wise men? Or, *if* we think about them, for what are they remembered? _____
Either unnoteworthy or remembered for their unbelief in the signs of the Messiah.

The shepherds on that hillside had a hard life. How did God elevate their lowly status? _____
They were the first not only to hear the good news but given the opportunity to go and tell the good news.

What were their other gifts of Christmas? _____
Seeing angels; Hearing angels sing; Having the message of the angels come true in within hours of hearing the message; Joy; Peace; Knowing God cared for them when many others did not; Knowing the old prophecy was meant for them in their lifetime; Seeing the wonder on the faces of those to whom they told the story; Others may have additional answers.

How did God give peace to the shepherds? _____
He came to them, for them, and lived with them. He showed them the love a mercy that was far greater than any human affection, pity, or rescue they had ever known. He changed their lives from exclusion to inclusion. He chose them. He wanted them. He loved them.

What does God want us to remember about shepherds?

John 10:7-18 _____ We are sheep who belong to the Good Shepherd, a shepherd who freely sacrificed all for us — for me.

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it

down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

1 Peter 5:4 _____ My shepherd is a King, not to be despised, but to be praised and glorified. Through Him, by Him, I, too, receive glory for life everlasting.

⁴And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

If you could summarize in one phrase or sentence, what would you say God is teaching you today? _____ Answers will vary.

Pray this benediction together: *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20–21 ESV)*

Close with singing: “Go Tell It on the Mountain” (LSB #388; LW #504) or “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night” (LW #70; TLH #109).

*All Bible Passages ESV