

# Sermon Text for December 25, 2022

## Christmas Day

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

*I Samuel 16:6-13, Luke 2:8-20*

*“Wow! Christmas”*

If you think about the journey we have been on together over this period of time it should fill you, as we arrive to today, with a sense of awe and simply WOW, that God made flesh in Emmanuel, God with us, chose to be born and live and die for us while we were yet sinners. The Savior came to free us from sin. And, get this, did not hesitate to get messy in life. He had a messy family, a messy life and so he understands us fully and completely. It was for such a time as this that he came so that we, for such a time as this have been called for a purpose and a reason. Every single person here has been called now to do God’s will. Jesus, as the only light of the world came among us so that we would reflect and shine that same light upon the world we inhabit.

All of this should be Wow. It should create a sense of awe within us that is unmatched by anything else in our life. Anything. That first Christmas God chose to share the awesomeness of this reality with shepherds. Mary and Joseph never saw the angels on Christmas morning. Herod or Quirinius or Caesar Augustus, they never saw the angels on Christmas morning. Those three kings, they never saw the angels. Only the shepherds did. Why?

Both of our Scriptures this holy morning point to each of us being able to experience the WOW of Christmas if we would only be open to it. Both Scriptures describe a preparing of the heart for the coming of the Holy Spirit for the manifestation and the revealing of the WOW of the good news of the Gospel which was revealed on Christmas morning. WOW! Christmas.

### **READ**

I Samuel 16 might seem like a bit of an odd Scripture to choose for Christmas morning. But remember our protagonists for this morning in Luke are the shepherds so I hope you see at least some point of connection between the two Scriptures. But whenever we read I Samuel 16 the first verse, and rightly so, that comes to mind should be vs.7. Let’s hear it again so that we can remember it: But the Lord said to Samuel: Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. And then we take this verse to its logical conclusion which is that God doesn’t judge people as we do, based on appearance, based

on what we think of them because of what they look like or their background or their family or whatever it may be. God looks at the hearts of all of us. That is what is most important to us and that played itself out as Samuel chose King David to take the throne, the youngest of the brothers.

David was chosen, as a shepherd himself, remember that, for no apparent reason that is stated in these verses. The only clue we have is that leading up to him being chosen we read that God only chooses based upon an examination of one's heart and apparently he considered David's heart worthy to be his anointed, the next king. We see some clues to this in other Scriptures. One leading up to this in I Samuel 13:14 where God gives up on Saul and says that he will now look for "someone after his own heart". We can assume he was found in David. Well, we don't just have to assume because the Apostle Paul when he gives a rundown of the Jewish faith says in Acts 13:22 that King David, the one that Samuel anoints here, was a man after his own heart. What a great phrase. How can we be men and women after God's own heart. I will tell you it has a lot to do with what Wows us.

As we finish this Scripture in Samuel we do read that the Holy Spirit, in vs.11 fills David. This is an important passage here. David is identified as someone who had a clean and pure heart, as he cries out to God to give him again after his sin with Bathsheba in Psalm 51, create in me a pure heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me. But here at least, as he starts out as a shepherd boy who is out with his sheep at night and with that heart and with the Holy Spirit that allows him to experience and identify God fully and completely.

The Lord look up on the heart and chooses based upon the heart. The more we align ourselves with the heart of God the more chance we have to be wowed.

This takes us to the shepherds of Luke. Like David, we don't know their hearts based upon the Scripture of their encounter with the Lord. But we do know a lot about shepherds in the first century. We do know, for example, that these shepherds, according to vs.8, were with their sheep overnight. It was that time of year when they could be out with them for months on end as they wandered from pastureland to pastureland so that the sheep would be fed. We see in vs.8 that they were on the night watch with their sheep which wasn't a one off, it was a way of life. How are you going to present yourself after a few days of sleeping with your sheep at night? How will you smell? How will you look? How clean would you be? What kind of company would you be able to keep as a result. Probably just other shepherds who looked, smelled, and were as clean as you were.

But in vs.2 we read that these same shepherds were chosen by God, not by chance did they appear and not by being in the right place at the right time did they benefit. No, they were chosen by God to be told of the Good News of the Gospel of the birth of Jesus on Christmas. They were chosen. WOW, just WOW. It gets even better, the message is that to you, oh shepherds. Not to Israel, or go and tell the really important people that to them this baby is born. No, shepherds, to you is born this baby. They were personally presented with the glory of God.

Now granted they were terrified, but they did not miss it. They were able to see it and understand and for me that means that their hearts were prepared for it. Is there any other explanation as to why God chose to send a host of angels to the shepherds in the field? Why not to all those in the market place, or in the temple, or in the royal palaces, or in the schools, or anywhere else rather than in the fields with these dirty, disrespected, lowly, backwards shepherds? Can we at least say that maybe, just maybe, they were open to the Holy Spirit inhabiting them as the Holy Spirit inhabited David because his heart was right? Maybe we can't go that far, but we can certainly say that they saw the angel of the Lord standing before them and God chose to reveal himself to them and they saw him. Not everyone to whom God chooses to reveal himself sees him or even notices him. Some of us keep walking on by.

By the time they get up and go after being serenaded not just by one angel but by a whole host of them, in vs. 18 we read that they tell the story of what they had seen and heard and in vs.18 we read that all those who were present, probably by then half the town of Bethlehem who was curious about that poor mom and dad who had to have their baby in the stall, and as a result of the story of the shepherds we read in vs.18 that the people were amazed, they all said together: WOW. Folks, when was the last time that you really said Wow when you were confronted with the story of Christmas. When was the last time that you were amazed at how Jesus was born and all the details that were a part of his story which are now a part of our story. And that is what concerns me.

God constantly reveals himself to us and obviously not in these contexts with shepherds and ox and ass. Now as we saw last week, God chooses to reveal himself to us. We have to put ourselves, like the shepherds, in a place, not a physical place like Bethlehem, but a relationship place where the Holy Spirit can inhabit and we actually become aware of the glory of God around us. The more our hearts are right before God the more we put ourselves in a position to be Wowed by God by the things that are happening around us. The less we are with God the less

the things of Go become amazing to us and the more they seem like just part of the world around us losing their shimmer and their novelty and their power and their miracle.

Wow Christmas actually come about as a result of believing and living in the glory of the Lord which is able to inhabit us. How have we lost the ability to be wowed and moved because we have so much presented to us that a baby born who will be the Messiah is probably going to move the needle or not that much more interesting than a set of reels that hold our attention.

These shepherds tie in to the story of David. David who was chosen as a shepherd. The one least expected to be chosen. Luke doesn't hesitate to have God reveal himself to the lowliest in society, the most humble, the ones least likely to be chosen. Luke ties the Wow of Christmas directly to those who are the outcast and the poor and the lowly as Mary states in her Magnificat also in Luke in 1:51-53 and then again in Luke when John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the one the answer is in Luke 7:22 – the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. Wow. Now that's Christmas.

Jesus calls us to renounce that which eliminates and minimizes the wow in our life.  
Amen.