Nine significant details concerning the announcement to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20)

Familiarity with the Christmas story should not cause us to overlook details which may have significance. The announcement to the shepherds concerning the birth of Jesus is a good example of this possibility.

1. ***The announcement was made to <u>shepherds</u>.***

Shepherds might seem an unlikely audience since there was no family relationship, no common occupation, and no good standing in society. But God is concerned about ordinary, even lowly people. We all are pictured as straying sheep (Isaiah 53:6), for whom Jesus came as Savior.

Due to their nearness to Jerusalem these shepherds may have provided sacrificial animals. It is appropriate that the birth of the Lamb of God be announced to shepherds. The shepherd is also the picture most frequently given of leadership and God's care for His people, including the role of the Messiah. King David was taken from shepherding (2 Samuel 7:8) to be king and from King David would come the Messiah, the Good Shepherd.

2. ***The glory of the Lord accompanied the angel.***

Many people miss certain details: the glory shown <u>around</u> the shepherds. It is the glory of the Lord, which in the Old Testament is frequently associated with the presence of God. The exact phrase is found only here in the NT, though angels appear elsewhere.

The significance may rest in the fact that God had become physically present on earth in the form of Jesus. The shepherds were given a look into the spiritual dimension in which the glory of the Lord, the very presence of God, had come to dwell among men.

3. ***The announcement was of good news of a great joy.***

The "good news", elsewhere translated "gospel", was that a Savior had been born. This was reason for great joy. Is the Christmas story for us "good news of great joy"? Rather than being overwhelmed by the hectic, dulled by traditions or distracted by other things, we should find great joy in the good news. The more we recognize our need for a Savior, the more we will view His coming with joy. The birth of Jesus meant rescue from the power and penalty of sin was coming.

4. ***The location of the birth is given as the city of David.***

Rather than Bethlehem, which we might expect, the town was called "the city of David." It alluded to the promise to King David that Messiah would come from him and reign on the throne of David.

God is as intent on fulfilling every detail of His promises for us in the future as He has been in fulfilling them in the birth of Jesus. He can bring together things that would normally not be together, like the right person at the right place at the right time.

5. ***Jesus, the Savior, is called Christ, the Lord***

This title is less overlooked, but we should remember that "Lord" is also the word used in the New Testament to translate references to God in the Old Testament, such as "Jehovah" or "Lord". This was no ordinary child that was born, but the appointed deliverer and the Lord Himself.

The shepherds were going to visit their King, their Savior, their Lord. We should treat Jesus with at least the same awareness and respectful awe.

6. ***The shepherds were expected to go and visit.***

This is supported by the giving of a sign when they saw the baby, and by the words, "you will find." The angel anticipated that the shepherds were among the few that would receive the message of Jesus positively.

It is possible that God was honoring Jesus in this way despite the humble circumstances of His birth.

7. ***The multitude of angels were praising God.***

The heavenly host was the angelic army of God who appeared in very great number. They were praising God probably for what He was doing and for what He was revealing about Himself. God had taken on flesh as part of His plan of salvation showing His love, mercy, grace and even humility. This amazing, marvelous work brought great praise, like a gigantic cheering section: "Glory to God in the highest."

Should that not be our response to the Christmas story? God, who is spirit, took on flesh. The infinite, eternal God entered history. The God, who is high and lifted up, who cannot endure evil, came to dwell among sinful man in order to rescue man from sin. That is something to cheer about.

8. ***Peace was pronounced upon men with whom God is pleased.***

Mankind wants peace on earth but often overlooks the type of peace God offers (peace with Him) and the condition (His favor must rest on them). God's favor is on the poor in spirit (Mt 5:3). He dwells with those who are contrite and lowly in spirit (Isaiah 57:15). He gives the right of childhood to those who believe on Jesus (John 1:12).

9. ***The shepherds responded in obvious belief.***

Though the word "believe" is not used in this passage, we see the emphasis on their obedience to go (v 15), their haste in doing so, and their readiness to proclaim this unbelievable story to others. Their hearts were full and overflowing with praise to God. This is an excitement we can nurture in ourselves by understanding what God has done and acting upon it.

The people who heard the report of the shepherds were amazed or marveled at what they heard. To avoid complacency lets pay close attention to the details of the Christmas story, thinking about what they mean, and thrill with the angels, "Glory to God." It is truly good news of great joy.

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