

December 21, 2014

Merry Christmas

Luke 2: 9 – *And the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.*

Roots

Can you imagine the fear that the shepherds must have felt on the verge of the very first Christmas and upon receiving their very first Christmas present? Me neither. There they were minding their own flocks when, BOOM! Glory of the Lord everywhere! And then as if that weren't enough to scare them to death, an angel appears. Luke probably could have described the shepherds' feelings a little stronger than, "they were filled with fear." Then the angel has the audacity to say, "Fear not." Yeah right! It was night, now the shepherds stood in glory brighter than any day. They were alone and now a herald from the armies of the Most High is standing in front of them. I have my suspicions that they were still afraid. Nevertheless, the angel proceeds with his message, of the first "Merry Christmas."

This account always makes me wonder if we've lost the awe that Christmas should bring. For example, we love the Nativity Scene. Now, before I go on, there is nothing wrong with loving the Nativity Scene, because it is a wondrous way to remember Jesus birth. But, I wonder if the peaceful, heartwarming way we portray it loses something of the impact that the birth of *God from a human virgin* would have had.

My football coach in high school told my team something that I think might apply to the shock of the first Christmas too.

He used to say, "Knock the other guy down and tell him 'Your welcome' as you help him back up." To me that's what the angel's message was like for the shepherds. During a nice peaceful, normal night of watching sheep, they get the wind knocked out of them as the Glory of the Lord blindsides them from nowhere, and then an angel proverbially helps them back up with a "Merry Christmas" in the form of, "Fear not! Your Messiah is born."

If that wasn't scary enough, again out of nowhere a whole battalion of the army of heaven (the word host is a military term referring to God's armies) appears singing, "Glory to God in the highest!" Somehow, I doubt that the shepherds jovially decided to go check out what the angels had told them about. I would think that they got out of there as fast as they could, picking up their hearts and stomachs on the way to Bethlehem, if they could move at all for a while.

So, this Christmas don't forget the awe and holy fear of that first "Merry Christmas." And, when you hear those words this year, try to think with a grin about that huge linebacker-of-an-angel picking the shepherds up with that first "Merry Christmas" message. Blessed Christmas.

Pastor Carl O. Johnson

