



[Luke 2:8-14](#)

(8) Now there were shepherds in the same country, who were dwelling in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night; (9) And suddenly an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shined round about them; and they were seized with great fear. (10) But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I am announcing to you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; (11) For today, in the city of David, a Savior was born to you, Who is Christ the Lord. (12) Now this is the sign for you: you shall find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (13) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of goodwill."

A Faithful Version

Jesus' birth occurred in September or perhaps early October. This could not have taken place in December because shepherds would not have been out in the fields at night then. In Palestine, the rainy season transpires between the end of October and early April, with the most inclement weather occurring between December and February. In fact, around Jerusalem, much of the region's 24 inches of annual rain falls during this winter period. Shepherds did not want to keep the sheep in the rain and cold anymore than they wanted to be there themselves.

Most translations tone verse 9 down a bit from its intended sudden majesty. It should read, "And BOOM! an angel of the Lord stood before them." The angel's appearance was instantaneous and shocking! One second they were peacefully minding their sheep, eyelids half-shut, and the next, right in their midst, perhaps hovering just over their heads, stood an angel in all the brilliance of angelic glory!

Luke writes that "they were greatly afraid." What understatement! Today, we might say they were terrified out of their skulls! Occasionally, we hear of a person's supposed abduction by aliens suddenly in the night. Television and movies have visualized this for us—but what if an angel actually did appear abruptly before our eyes, radiating light like a huge spotlight and looking directly at us? Most people would be on their faces in an instant, probably holding their heads, wondering if a thunderbolt was about to strike!

The angel says to them, "Do not be afraid" (verse 10), trying to shush their fears a bit, although it is hard to say what success he had. At least he was able to communicate to them what he needed to say. Evidently, they were calm enough to listen to his announcement, despite their terror.

What he says is quite interesting: "I bring you good tidings of great [joy](#)." The Greek word for "I bring good tidings" is *evangelízomai*, literally, "I evangelize you," and his good news is a matter "of great joy." In a way, this is the beginning of the preaching of [the gospel](#), as this is the sense of the Greek term. He is informing the shepherds that [God](#) had sent him as an evangelist to let them know that the way of salvation was beginning to open to *all* people. This was great news indeed for the common folk, as these shepherds were, who have rarely been considered among the worthies of society.

That God sent the first announcement of His Son's birth to shepherds among their sheep has an appealing, symbolic connotation. Recall that these shepherds were in the field watching over sheep at night when the angel, a messenger from God, illuminated them with the good news of salvation. Shepherds are biblical symbols of spiritual leaders or ministers, and sheep are well known to represent God's elect. Jesus' [parables](#) often employ the image of a field to signify [the world](#), and the darkness of night stands for the condition of being cut off from God. This scene is a beautiful foreshadowing of the pattern God uses to evangelize through the gospel message.

Another intriguing fact, hidden in the English translation, appears in the last phrase of verse 10: "to all people." In the Greek text, a definite article appears before "people," so it should read, "all *the* people." When the Bible reads "the people," it usually refers to the people of Israel. The birth of the

Savior was to be great joy for all people, of course, but especially for Israel. If we understand this spiritually, His coming has its greatest effect on the [Israel of God](#) ([Galatians 6:16](#)), the church. Certainly, the church, to which God has revealed His way most fully, has both the fullest appreciation as well as the deepest understanding of Christ's coming in the flesh.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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