

Dec 22. Angels Rejoice

I sometimes wonder about the shepherds. These unassuming men suddenly dropped into the middle of the most incredible story ever told. Much has been speculated about them. Songs have been written about them. Their role on the Nativity stage seldom disappoints. But then they are gone. The last we hear of them they are returning to the fields, “glorifying and praising God”. And then silence.

But what happened next? Did they continue shepherding? Did family and friends get tired of their tales of “that night”? Did they manage to keep track of this baby they visited as he grew? Years later, as older men, did they recognize the one who was healing, preaching and offering hope like no other had before as the one they had seen in the manger. Did they listen in as he told the parable of the lost sheep and hear his concluding words “there is rejoicing in heaven and in the presence of angels over one sinner who repents”?

If they were aware of those words, they must have struck a wonderful chord in their hearts. They were, after all, among the few eyewitnesses to see exactly what it meant for angels to rejoice! Could it possibly be, that those same angels who lit up the skies with their praise, who dazzled the Shepherds with their brilliance and declared the good news of great joy, would they really rejoice over a shepherd’s repentance? And not just in the sky above Bethlehem, but throughout the courts of heaven?

And what of ourselves? It’s easy to imagine angels rejoicing when a person comes to Christ for the first time. A life saved, a future transformed – what greater cause to celebrate. But would angels rejoice to see us return? Again. And again. As we stumble our way through life, struggling with the same issues and falling at the same hurdles, it’s often easier to picture the angels rolling their eyes, giving glances of “I told you so” and even our Saviour’s shoulders slumping as we slink back for forgiveness yet again. And so sometimes we just don’t go. We stay away, downcast and sad with the most false of pictures in our minds, achieving nothing but the stealing of some joy from heaven and from ourselves.

If this resonates at all with you (and even if it doesn’t), let me encourage you to take time to draw near to Christ this Christmas. Tell him what’s on your heart. Confess your sins, your failures, your pride, your indifference. And ask that he might work in your life to make you a little more like him. He certainly won’t turn you away. And he certainly won’t say no. Because it was for this joy that he came as the Saviour. It was for this joy that he endured the cross. And as we come to him, his joy will be intertwined with the angels joy as the unfolding impact of the good news of great joy is witnessed once again. And as heaven rejoices, don’t be surprised to hear some shepherds’ voices join in the chorus.