

## Smelly shepherds

### Luke 2:8-20 – Leader's version

**Check in** – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

### What does the passage say and mean?

30 minutes

Read Luke 2:1-20

1. What was happening in the fields around Bethlehem on the night that Jesus was born?  
(v8)

*Just look at v8 for now. Shepherds are watching over their flocks at night. Lead the group in thinking about what it was like to be a shepherd in a field at night around Bethlehem. Think of things like how cold it was, how lonely, how dark, how dangerous, how difficult to stay awake, etc. Shepherds were outcast from normal society – they were poor, uneducated people who worked for other people rather than for themselves, they spent all day around the sheep and carried them around so they smelt like sheep themselves, they were dirty, they were nomadic and suspected of stealing, they were not allowed to be legal witnesses because they were never in town and had a dodgy reputation, etc.*

2. What happens as the shepherds sit on the hillside? (v9)

*An angel of the Lord appears to them – this is terrifying. Even more terrifying, 'the glory of the Lord shone around them'. God is present to them in a very physical way – they are defenceless before God, no wonder they are terrified!*

3. What does the angel tell them? (v10-12)

*Pick up all the main points – Do not be afraid, good news, great joy, for all the people, in Bethlehem, a Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord, the sign = a baby wrapped in cloths lying in a manger.*

*Think about their reception to this – the news is getting better and better and suddenly it culminates in a baby in poverty. They must have been a bit surprised at the last line!*

4. Why do you think the angels give the shepherds the details about the baby being wrapped in cloths and put in a manger?

*Only a child of peasant parents would be wrapped in cloth and put in a manger. The shepherds realise from this information that they are not being told to go to a palace, but to a poor family who would allow them through the door! Without this information, they would have thought that there was no point going to visit, because they'd never get in. With it, they realise that the child is just like them.*

5. Just as they are trying to digest this information, something even more amazing happens! What is it and why does it happen? (v13-14)

*A great company of angels appears – meaning an uncountable multitude! Suddenly these smelly shepherds with bad reputations who are avoided in town are in the company of heaven and no-one is telling them to get out of the way!*

*One angel appearing was terrifying, now there the sky is full of them! They are praising God because of the birth of this child and they want the shepherds to see it. Their message includes peace to those on whom God's favour rests and that includes the shepherds.*

6. What do the shepherds do when the angels have left and why? (v15-16)

*They go to Bethlehem to see the thing that 'the Lord has told us about' – they recognise that it was God who visited them, not just the angels. They go to visit as an act of obedience to God, rather than out of curiosity. They could have sat there all night and talked about what they'd seen, but they haven't missed the message – they are to go and see the baby, not just to discuss what they've heard him!*

7. What do they do when they have seen the baby? (v17-18)

*They tell everyone else about the child, and presumably about the angels. Imagine the scene with the group – shepherds running around talking excitedly to everyone they meet about angels and a baby and the arrival of the Messiah! Remember, these are people who were not allowed to be legal witnesses (Q1 notes) and God sends them as his first witnesses!*

*How do you think people would have responded?*

8. Why do you think God gives this first news of his Son's birth to a bunch of shepherds, rather than to the Priests or someone else with a bit more influence?

*Let the group brainstorm – if they're stuck suggest that the shepherds had no political agenda and wouldn't endanger the child, the Priests may not have believed because they had other expectations of the Messiah but the shepherds accepted the simple message, the news is going to the people that the adult Jesus will spend his time with (societies' outcasts), etc.*

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What does this visit of God to the shepherds and the shepherds to God's Son tell you about how God feels about people who society rejects, ignores, forgets or steps away from?

*Bring the discussion around to God's love for each person in the group, whatever they've done, whatever anyone else might think of them.*

**Check out** – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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6. What do the shepherds do when the angels have left and why? (v15-16)
7. What do they do when they have seen the baby? (v17-18)

8. Why do you think God gives this first news of his Son's birth to a bunch of shepherds, rather than to the Priests or someone else with a bit more influence?

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