“Much as we have romanticized these shepherds... what is most remarkable about them is that they are exceedingly unremarkable. If anything, they are people on the fringe, at the edge of society, not mainstreamers, folks held in derision by others.”
- Jon Walton

1. MAMA, DON'T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE SHEPHERDS

❑ Old Testament Perspectives on Shepherds

When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, “What is your occupation?” you should answer, “Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.” Then you will be allowed to settle in the
region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians." Genesis 46.33-34

- New Testament Perspectives on Shepherds

“...most of the time they were dishonest and thieving; they led their herds onto other people’s land and pilfered the produce of the land.” - Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus

“Consequently, the pious were warned not to buy wool, milk, or kids from shepherds on the assumption that it was stolen property.” - Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus

Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. Numbers 14.33

2. THE MOST OVERLOOKED DETAIL IN THE SHEPHERD’S STORY

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field—Keeping watch over their flock by night. And
an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. Luke 2.8-9

God revealed His glory to Israel.

The work shekinah is from the Hebrew word “shekinot” which means the glory of the Divine Presence.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. God in His light and glory rested on that place. Exodus 40.34-36

God’s glory departs from Israel

And the Glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house... Ezekiel 10.18

“Ichabod” = “the glory is no more”
The Psalms of the Exile (Psalm 44, 74, 79, 80, 85, 89, 102, 106, 123, 137)

A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the Glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. Isaiah 40.3-5

God’s glory in the Christmas message

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. John 1.6-10

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.’” John 1.23
The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.  
John 1.14a

And the Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us. We beheld His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father. John 1.14

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field—Keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. Luke 2.8-9

3. WHY HE CAME AND WHO HE CAME FOR

- One of the best testaments to the truthfulness of this story

- God comes to those who need Him most and know it

“I take comfort in knowing that it was the shepherds to whom the angels appeared when they announced Christ’s birth. Invariably throughout the course of history, God has appeared to people on the fringes.” - Rich Mullins
“I think that by playing out this redemptive story on the fringe of things, just where you’d least expect God to be, God is telling us that the way things usually are just isn’t good enough.” - Pastor David Lose

For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will live in them and will walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”
2 Corinthians 6.16

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.) Both Old and New Testament perspectives on shepherds were negative. Shepherds were judged, stereotyped, and treated as if all of them were terrible sinners. Who else do we treat in this way? Of the people you think fall into this category today, have you ever had a personal relationship with one of them? How did that affect your perceptions? Given the horrible reputation shepherds had, share your thoughts and feelings about God choosing them as eyewitnesses to the birth of Christ.

2.) The Glory of God - the shekinah glory or presence glory of God - is often a neglected topic among Bible students today. What new understandings do you have now that you didn’t have prior to this message? At the heart of the topic of the glory of God is the idea of God wanting to dwell among His people. The heart
of the Christmas story is the return of the glory of God to live among His people in the person of Jesus Christ. The prophetic name given to Jesus is Emmanuel which means God with us. How is God with you today? How do you become more conscious of His presence? What would you say to someone who struggles with sensing the presence of God?

3.) Why is the presence of shepherds as the first witnesses to the birth of Christ one of the most compelling reasons as to why this story is true?

4.) God coming to the most despised, untrusted, unworthy and marginalized people in society makes a powerful statement about God joining us where we are and valuing us as we are. Luke's gospel places special emphasis on the poor and marginalized and how they are included in God's kingdom (even prioritizing them). In a similar vein, Pastor Keith often says, "If you go after the people nobody wants, you'll end up with the church everybody wants." Do most churches think this way? If not, why? If so, why? How do we as a church keep God's priorities as our own?

5.) God's desire to dwell among us is now fulfilled by living within us. We carry God into every situation where we go. Have you ever had someone meet you at a place of real need in your life with exactly what you needed in that moment (and you knew it was God
Who arranged it all? Have you ever stepped into a desperate situation, a crisis, a difficulty, and through what you did or said, you brought a godly solution or timely word? Describe what that was like for both you and the other person(s) involved.