



## The Shepherd's Story



A shepherd protects, feeds, and cares for the sheep. This is important work, right? But out here on the Palestinian hills, this isn't how it's viewed by most people. For example, the Pharisees say we don't follow religion. But think about it! We cannot leave our sheep and we are constantly looking for fresh new pastures. This schedule doesn't quite fit with Jewish faith practice—or any other religion's rhythm of worship. So they call us Gentiles, which really implies we are outsiders.

Living out here on the hills we have developed our own culture. We have no possessions and subsist on the barest necessities. We can be a bit rough around the edges. Protecting sheep from poachers makes us distrustful of strangers, so we tend to see the worst in people. Conversely, society doesn't have a very high view of us, so we are pushed aside, forgotten, and judged as inferior.

So imagine our surprise that night when we heard the sound of angel voices. Angels! Many of us didn't even believe in angels! Yet, here they were on the hillside telling us they had a message from God! Some town folks were scandalized that we were the first to hear

the news. Why wasn't the news brought to kings or Pharisees? Why was the news brought to the very people whom kings and Pharisees despised?

After being told the great news, the angels urged us to go to Bethlehem to find the child. Seriously? We tend sheep not children. We protect our stuff, our flocks, and now these angels expected us to risk our sheep being stolen while we went to find a baby. What was God thinking?

But what was really mind blowing was the fact that we went! It was just as the angels said. The child was ordinary and extraordinary all at once. There was such peace and joy in the air around the manger where the baby lay. I spoke to the boy's father, Joseph. He was a gracious host and treated us well. We didn't feel like lowly shepherds that night. When we told him about the angels, he believed us. He made us feel like we were the right people to receive the message from God.

Joseph encouraged us to share our story, his story, and the baby Jesus' story. So as we returned to the hills, we told anyone who would listen. And we never stopped sharing the news. Everywhere we went, we told the story of a miraculous birth and how God had chosen us—those who were once so lowly—to tell the story.

# Unwrapping the Shepherd's Story

Are there times when you feel devalued and unimportant? What might you do to remember that you are loved and cherished by God and others? What might you offer to God's ministry now knowing that God wants everyone to be included in God's circle of grace?

God knows your potential. Like the shepherds, you are more than worthy enough to hear the news and share the news, and most importantly, be a part of the greatest story ever.

Listen to the music website: "Libby Roderick sings 'How Could Anyone'" <https://youtu.be/P5EhMNpBAAQ>

## ACTIVITY 1: Noticing Our Impact

### Ages

All ages (especially 6+)

### Supplies

Large salad bowl, pebbles, paper

### Discuss

How did the shepherds' actions impact the Nativity story?

### Activity

- Half fill a large salad bowl with water.
- Drop a small pebble into the bowl and notice what happens.
- Create an origami boat (search for online instructions).
- Place the boat in the water.
- Notice what happens when a stone is dropped into the water now.
- Wonder about how your actions, both big and small, can have an impact on the world.

## ACTIVITY 2: The Path to Healing

### Ages

12+

### Supplies

Background and current information on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

"Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada" ([www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca))

The United Church of Canada  
([www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca))

### Discuss

- Who in our society has been placed on the margins by the judgments of others?
- How does learning about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission help you to understand how people are placed on the margins by the judgment of others?
- Having learned more about the plight of the First Peoples, how will you respond in helping the healing and reconciliation process?

### ACTIVITY 3: You Are Unique

**Ages**

Pre-school and kindergarten

**Supplies**

Paper, ink pads, markers

**Discuss**

What are stereotypes? What are some stereotypes about sheep?

**Activity**

- Using an ink pad, make thumb prints on a sheet of paper.
- Add sheeps' legs and faces to the thumb prints.
- Notice how each thumb-print sheep is unique.
- How do stereotypes impact a group?
- Explore how stereotypes don't allow for individuality.

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