

Rev. Dan Welch Christmas Morning Text: Luke 2:15–16 “A Party in the Barn”

This morning you are invited to attend a party. It’s a “Party in the Barn.” In wonder, awe, joy, and great thanksgiving, we journey in spirit with shepherds of old to a place where animals were kept, in Bethlehem to see what the Lord made known to them and all the world in the birth of Jesus.

This is no ordinary party. No formal invites were issued. And nobody, not even the angel of the Lord nor the great company of heaven **commanded** the shepherds to attend. In obedient faith, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us” (v.15). They went, not because they thought they better do a fact-check on what the angel had said. But rather they went because they **believed** the angel’s message. They were so excited to go and see what the Lord had revealed to the world.

Think about this: The first people to hear the news of the birth of the Savior were not priests, scribes, or Pharisees. They were shepherds. Which is actually pretty strange if you think about it. Shepherds were by no means the “elite” of ancient society. They were common, ordinary, hard-working, folk with little or no formal education. They were content to be shepherds nothing more, nothing less. They didn’t try to impress others or pretend to be something they weren’t.

Do you ever wish you could have been one of the shepherds that first Christmas night? Because they were responsible for the sheep’s safety, “watching their flocks by night,” they kept one eye open for predators and one eye open for thieves. They had to keep both eyes from closing in sleep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were scared to death! The angel told them ‘Do not be afraid,’ because he had news that would bring great joy! Before they could catch their breath, a multitude of the heavenly host appeared, putting on angelic concert right then and there!

As quickly as it started, it was over. The angels returned to heaven. Now what? Would they come back? Would there be another message?

The shepherds took the initiative. “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

They hurried off and with great excitement and anticipation these shepherds attended the “Party in the Barn.” I love farms and animals and barns. As a sign of His love for the poor and lowly of this world, God chose a barn as the place for His Son to be born. The Creator Lord took on the human, flesh-and-blood nature of His creation in a barn—not the nice sterile delivery room of a local hospital with doctors, nurses, and ‘high-tech’ equipment—but a barn, home of sheep, goats, and cattle. We see God’s grace revealed in that humble barn.

A barn? Yes, while some scholars believe it may have been a cave and not a wooden structure, the fact remains that the presence of a manger, certainly means this structure was used for housing of animals. In other words, a barn. Now, as many of you know, the aroma of a barn often leaves something... to be desired. But *that’s* the very place where all the promises of God came together in Christ. The Son of God called that barn “home.” God does not shrink from going to the “barn” of His world. Even through the stench of our sins, God loves us. He doesn’t pay any attention to the smell. Like the father whose prodigal son returned, God comes to us, puts His arms around us, and welcomes us. That’s what He does for us in Jesus, who was born in a barn in Bethlehem.

Paul writes, “When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3: 4–6).

To work in a barn requires love, care, and compassion. It takes a great deal of giving and self-sacrificing; the kind of giving and self-sacrificing Paul talks about as he writes about Jesus: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Phil 2:6–7). The new-born calf or kitten in a barn reminds us of the Creator’s promise of life and the future. Jesus, the Son of God, lovingly

condescends to come to this world and to be born in a barn to show us His love, care, and compassion.

A barn has no executive office, but there's plenty of work! In Jesus, God comes to our world to do the work—to start and finish the work of salvation. Jesus came, jumped in, and got involved. He says, "My Father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (Jn 5:17). Jesus was born, literally, to work Himself to death for us. His work was the sacrifice of His body and blood for the world's redemption.

In a barn you learn not to make quick, sudden moves or to do anything to scare the animals. A person has to be careful and cautious around machinery and equipment. Although God first gave the promise of a Savior from sin to Adam and Eve in Paradise, it took centuries before that promise was fulfilled. It wasn't because God was slow, but because He took great pains to ensure that His plan of salvation would be complete, and nothing would be missing.

The shepherds came, they saw, and they were conquered by the sight. They celebrated the event that brought them "good news of great joy." Their sense of celebration grew and grew. They rejoiced when they saw the child lying in the manger. Their joy was so great that it knew no limits or bounds. They would do as the psalm writer suggests, "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music . . . with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—shout for joy before the Lord, the King" (Ps 98:4). Let's celebrate the goodness and greatness of God in worship and witness.

The shepherds did both. They worshiped as they came to Bethlehem and also when they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby. Without a doubt, the shepherds told Mary and Joseph about the angels and their message. Mary and Joseph likely told the shepherds about the events leading to the birth of their son. The shepherds, Mary, and Joseph worshiped and praised God who gave His Son to the world. They witnessed as "they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child."

What about us? Are we, like the shepherds, involved in worship and witness as we celebrate Christ's birth? We worship as we come to church where the Lord makes known His salvation through His word and sacrament. In worship we hear the word of Christ, the word of the Gospel,

which tells anew the old, familiar story of the birth of Jesus. We celebrate His coming as we sing His praise.

Unlike most parties, the party in the barn doesn't stop—at least it shouldn't. It continues each day. We celebrate and witness to Christ's birth as we tell others of the great and wonderful things God has done, and continues to do, for us in Jesus. We come in excitement, anticipation, and joy to celebrate the gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ, your Savior, born for us. Come to this "Party in the Barn." Merry Christmas! Amen.