

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

*8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

How did it go for you this morning? Did you find under the tree exactly what you wanted? Were there any surprises there today? I sure hope so. But if you are like me, then I hope your surprises were not too big.

Too big, too much, too expensive, when gift is given me that is one of these, especially too expensive, it is as if the whole relationship between me and the giver is thrown out of balance. I spend a dollar on them, they spend fifty on me and receiving the gift is almost painful.

Are you like me in that? Are you a pay your own way, do your fair share kind of person? Or even a do more than your fair share kind of person? Then together we need to walk back in time to a place called Bethlehem.

We've taken this walk so many times with the shepherds. Year after year we see the bright light with them, hear the angel word, "Fear not" with them. Night has become day as the sky is filled with all the heavenly host and our ears are filled with their song.

And then we take the walk, over to Bethlehem to see the one the angels praised.

The stores are closed this night, and we have no money to spare. So we come to the manger empty handed. Later travelers from afar will bring expensive gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh, gifts fit for a king, but we come empty handed.

Seems like we should at least find some blanket to keep him warm, but our blankets are all dirty from our own use, as they are all that keeps the cold air out night after night.

We can give him no food, for he is ready only for the milk that is from his mother's breast.

Maybe a lamb? He's far too young to frolic with one of these.

Empty handed we will arrive. Here God gives his greatest gift, his only Son. Here God gives the long awaited Messiah, the Christ, for whom people have prayed and pleaded. Here God gives the Savior of the whole world, and we arrive at his manger bed, empty handed.

How uncomfortable we may feel coming before our Lord empty handed. Yet God chooses that we would come with the shepherds in this way.

The angels could have been sent over to the temple and priests might have journeyed to Bethlehem with holy gifts. The angels might have been sent to the palace and the king might have brought wealth and power. The angels might have been sent to carpenters who could have constructed that very night a place for Jesus to stay. But God chose shepherds who bring nothing.

God is doing all the giving in Jesus. And we do all the receiving. Adoption as God's children, forgiveness of sins, eternal life all of these God gives to us through Jesus, and we return only the gift of our thanks.

No balance here, for God is God, supplying all that we need both now and for all eternity, and we are his children, joying in what he gives. Loving Jesus - embracing this child of Mary - counting on him for every good.

Shepherds came empty handed. They told of what they had seen and heard, and they went back to their work glorifying and praising God for Jesus.

Now it is our time to do the same.